



MICE WINS

Olympic council picks Malaysia

The Olympic Council of Malaysia has won the bid to host the 127th International Olympic Council session in 2015. The event, to be held in Kuala Lumpur, will be attended by an estimated 1,500 delegates. It is expected to generate an economic impact of US\$5.9 million.

KL to welcome marketing gurus

Malaysia has trumped a five-cornered bid to win hosting rights to a global marketing event. The World Marketing Summit 2013 in Kuala Lumpur will draw 2,000 delegates and generate an estimated economic impact of US\$4.5 million.

More funding for Indonesia

By Shekhar Niyogi

THE Indonesian Ministry of Tourism and Creative Economy has been granted 25 per cent more to spend on its MICE promotions between now and the next financial year.

The heftier budget will be used to fund "special incentives for PCO/PEOs such as sponsorship of cultural programmes, gala dinners and souvenirs, provided they bring in a minimum of 300 Indian delegates who will stay for at least three nights", said I Gde Pitana, deputy minister for resources development.

The ministry will also share intelligence such as Indonesian economic indicators, political updates and developments planned for airports, MICE venues and hotels – which may not be immediately available to the public – with Indian bidders looking to bring future conventions to Indonesia.

Familiarisation trips specially designed for Indian MICE buyers will begin in October, and Pitana said this arrangement would likely be a regular feature.

Meanwhile, MICE promotions in India will bring greater focus to more Indonesian destinations such as Batam, Medan, Bintan, Jogjakarta, Bandung, Jakarta, Manado and Lombok, beyond the usual favourites such as Bali.

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

Russians are coming

By Gracia Chiang

RUSSIA and the CIS countries are emerging as hot markets for MICE into India even as the longhaul sources of the US and UK have slowed or stabilised.

Alpcord Network Travel and Conference Management Company managing director, Chander Mansharamani, said despite no promotional activity in Russia on the MICE front thus far, numbers had been on the rise.

"The Ministry of Tourism is conducting its regular roadshow in Russia in September and for the first time, there will be a MICE component. We're expecting 18 to 20 Indian participants.

"India is a new destination for the Russians and we're getting small meetings at the moment. These are from the pharmaceutical, power and IT sectors and they are spread out to Mumbai, Delhi and Kolkata," he said.

Mansharamani added that he had seen about five per cent growth from the market this

year and this could climb to 10-15 per cent next year.

Travelite (India) director-business development, Amrita Ahluwalia, said the DMC used to depend on the "wow market" of the US for incentives, but was now focusing on Russia and the CIS countries, as well as the Middle East and South America.

She surmised that the Russian market was growing by 20 per cent year-on-year.

"I have a feeling that the US will become a thing of the past," said Ahluwalia. "The value of the US market is decreasing; same for the UK. Clients used to commonly ask for palace hotels and villas, but are now exploring even three-star options."

Mansharamani said while he had not seen much of an impact on meetings from the West, budgets had been affected, with clients booking hotels that were one level lower such as a five-star instead of a five-star deluxe.

Also seeing strong potential in the Russian market is Minar Travels (India), which already

handles thousands of leisure travellers from Russia to India annually via charters.

"We're new to MICE and we're trying to get conferences in Goa because we've got special contracted rates with more than 75 hotels there from luxury to two-star," said Amitoj Singh, manager-sales & marketing.

He added that there was potential in the defence and medical industries.

Russian buyer Anna Semushkina, manager of business travel department, Travel4business, similarly noted a spike in demand for both meetings and incentives to India.

She said this was "driven in part by the need for new incentive destinations, as well as Russian businesses seeking to ensure a presence at events or conferences, particularly for the medical or IT sectors".

"Even though meetings are growing, incentives still form the bulk for us. India is attractive to the Russians because of its history and culture. Generally, we send about five to 10 groups each year, consisting of 10 to 50 pax," she said. – *Additional reporting by Linda Haden*



Ahluwalia: US market loses its charm

Busan CVB restructures

By Gracia Chiang

FROM November 1, the Greater Busan CVB will come under a new umbrella tourism body that will look at nurturing conventions, incentives and leisure groups for South Korea's second-largest city.

Speaking to the *Daily*, Greater Busan CVB manager, tourism marketing, June Kim, said the Busan Tourism Organization (its working name for now),

would act as a "control tower" for all things related to tourism including marketing and development.

"The mayor sees the MICE industry as a key driver of economic growth for Busan, and with this change, we will see a centralisation of efforts and less wastage of funds," she said, adding that suppliers and trade associations now held their own promotions.

Busan Metropolitan City exhibition and convention division deputy director, Ha Young Ho, pointed out that this would also mean Busan growing its presence at international trade-shows independent of the Korea Tourism Organization, such as its participation here in IT&CM India. While it only has a booth in this inaugural edition of the show, the intentions are for a standalone pavilion next year.

He said: "We see potential in the Indian market because it is so big. Both Busan and India are also strong in IT, so there is an opportunity to tap that area for meetings and incentives."



Faces of India's future MICE leaders

Some 49 eager students, drawn from various travel and hospitality colleges across the Delhi National Capital Region, including the Institute of Hotel Management, Catering Technology & Applied Nutrition (Dehradun), Amity Institute of Travel & Tourism (Noida), Amity School of Business (Noida), Ganpati Institute of Hotel Management (Bilaspur), Indian Institute of Travel & Tourism Management (New Delhi) and Indian Institute of Learning & Advanced Development (Gurgaon), were given the rare opportunity to network with association management firms, hotels, conference centres and corporate event planners. The forum, designed to attract the best and brightest young minds, comprised of a series of presentations by MICE experts as well as roundtable discussions.

SOUND BITES

"India is, in theory, a great destination for luxury incentives. However, it needs to run a tighter ship."

Jon Baines, managing director, Jon Baines Tours UK, pointing out that the destination's infrastructure and the lack of professionalism among the travel trade are undermining efforts in attracting luxury MICE



HOT LEADS

Air Tours on luxury hunt

Air Tours Cracow, Poland is looking for luxury MICE destinations and packages to cater to small meeting and incentive groups on hand. Contact Sylwia Bubula at sb@747.pl

US firm wants top-end supplies

Seattle-based Trips 4 Fundraising needs exclusive luxury experiences for small groups of clients who are sponsors for various charities. Contact Alyssa Johnson at trips4fundraising@gmail.com

Lu Dowell seeks new contacts

Lu Dowell Representations, South Africa is looking for inbound and outbound meeting planners and PEO/PCOs. Contact Hermina Senelo at hermina@ludowell.co.za

HOT DEALS

Bali hotel rocks with new deal

Hard Rock Bali's new half-day meeting package, priced at US\$50 nett per delegate, includes use of one of the hotel's eight meeting rooms for five hours, a gift certificate for two nights' stay in a deluxe room, access to kids club facilities for delegates' children, audiovisual equipment, lunch and one coffee break.

For an additional US\$5, organisers will be able to enjoy a full-day package, which comes with two coffee breaks, on top of the inclusions in the half-day deal. Terms apply.

Sellers toss in value-adds

By S Puvaneswary

TO counter the effects of the sliding Indian rupee in a price-sensitive Indian market, some sellers at IT&CM India are tossing in value-adds to stimulate MICE business from India.

Most of these value-adds will help to reduce the cost of pre- and post-show programmes. For instance, The Puteri Pacific Johor Bahru, Malaysia is promoting a US\$100 value-added package that twins Singapore with the southern Malaysian city. The deal, valid till mid-September, includes a night's stay with breakfast at the hotel, entrance tickets to Universal Studios Singapore and two-way transfers.

Indian delegates extending their stay in Hong Kong with their family can take advantage of a Sky100 Hong Kong Observation Deck promotion – valid till next month – which offers free entrance to a child for every two adult tickets purchased. The attraction's managing director, Josephine Lam, said she would be meeting with an Air India representative and Indian outbound specialists at this show to develop special packages.

In Indonesia, Samabe Bali Resort & Villas and Grand Mirage Resort Thalasso Bali are offering Indian clients a stay-three-pay-two promotion till October 2013. Ralf Luthe, general manager of Samabe Leisure Hospitality Group, which man-

ages the two hotels, hopes the promotion would attract more incentive groups from India. He noted that with weaker buying power, fewer Indian clients were buying optional programmes such as spa treatments. "Indians are also seeking savings by eating in restaurants outside the hotels," he added.

Indian MICE buyers told the *Daily* that most Asian sellers have been supportive, sweetening deals with complimentary VIP lounge access, late check-outs, room upgrades and flexible cancellation policies.

Travel Tours Group vice-president, Joseph K Jose, said Asian DMCs had been willing to renegotiate and offer value-adds such as shopping vouchers.

Abu Dhabi keen on meetings growth from India

ROOMNIGHTS from India are growing rapidly for Abu Dhabi, which is targeting some 2.3 million and 2.5 million hotel guests in 2012 and 2013 respectively.

India ranks as the emirate's second-largest overseas hotel guest source market. In the first six months, some 65,519 Indians stayed in Abu Dhabi's hotels

and hotel apartments, a rise of 31 per cent compared to the same period last year.

Abu Dhabi Tourism & Culture Authority international promotions manager, Mubarak Al Nuaimi, said in a release: "Such is the importance of the market that we are investigating the feasibility of establishing a

representative office in India."

Wanting to create further awareness of its meeting facilities, both the Abu Dhabi Tourism & Culture Authority and the Abu Dhabi National Exhibitions Company are exhibiting at this show. The former also participated in SATTE this year.

– S Puvaneswary

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Snapshots

Riding high on MICE business

The show is awash with buyers and sellers hard at work to score deals, **Patrick Tan** discovers



Crowne Plaza Hong Kong Kowloon East's Vincent Leung



Eventworld UK's Michael Packford, Parul Tours & Travels India's Mitesh Dani and Dove Travels India's Ashwani K Gupta



Marty Tours Switzerland's Marty Roger and KTC (India)'s Naveen Gulati



Hard Rock Bali's Rohaizad Puteh and Gili Lankanfushi, Maldives' Nuaas Mohamed



Leisure Travels India's Rajiv Gupta and Abu Dhabi Tourism Authority's Lindsay Fraser



Renaissance Kuala Lumpur Hotel's Ivana Foo and TMC Tourism Marketing Consulting Austria's Peter Hirschler



Shikhar Travels (India)'s Heena Kapoor and Prachi Mishra, and Shikhar MICE India's Navdeep Tyagi



Marina Mandarin Singapore's G K Vani and Carlson Wagonlit Travel China's Tony Zhang

HKTB works to speed up Indian MICE growth

By Shekhar Niyogi and S Puvaneswary

WITH Indian MICE arrivals on the rise, the Hong Kong Tourism Board (HKTB) is investing in more MICE promotions in India, with a keener eye on the corporate meeting and incentive segments.

A source from the tourism bureau told the *Daily* that the performance put forth by the Indian MICE market had been “encouraging” and arrivals to-date had registered a single-digit increment.

Initiatives such as specialised training programmes for the travel trade and roadshows with buyer-seller sessions will be ramped up at HKTB offices in New Delhi and Mumbai, with Bengaluru, Chennai and Kolkata as focus markets.

Meanwhile, the Meetings & Exhibitions Hong Kong (MEHK) – the MICE arm of HKTB – is continuing efforts to promote Lantau Island to Indian MICE visitors. Despite the weak Indian rupee, MEHK regarded India as an emerging MICE market with a long-term growth potential, a MEHK spokesperson said.

Building on Lantau Island’s varied attractions such as Hong Kong Disneyland and Ngong Ping 360, as well as the destination’s diverse 3,200-room inventory that caters to all travel budgets, the MEHK source hopes that the island’s appeal will tempt Indian MICE organisers to add an extra day to their itinerary, extending the average length of stay from three nights to four.

Sajan K Gupta, CEO of Vayu Seva Tours & Travel India, lauded MEHK’s move to target the Indian MICE segment, as land transportation and room rates at Lantau Island were at least US\$60 cheaper compared to Kowloon. Lantau Island also had sufficient hotels with conference facilities to meet the needs of MICE delegates from India, he added.

Ashwani K Gupta, managing partner of Dove Travels India, said MEHK’s promotions were timely as airfares between Delhi and Hong Kong had almost doubled since the beginning of the year, but

added that Lantau Island needed more MICE-friendly tourist attractions.

Rajesh Sethi, managing director, Carnation Travel Services, said: “Incentive groups to Macau have increased sub-

stantially in the last four years, and Hong Kong has the potential to attract more of this segment, (but) hotel rates must be kept at a reasonable level for the Indian MICE trade to plan longer (itineraries).”



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Globalindo looks at Hindu events

By Linda Haden

GLOBALINDO Holidays Indonesia is planning to create a series of religious conferences and events in Indonesia that will target India’s large Hindu population.

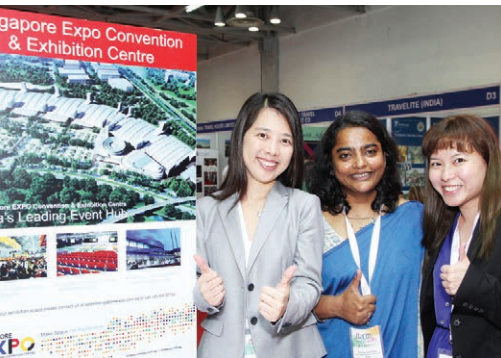
Speaking to the *Daily*, the company’s business development manager for India and Sri Lanka, Sanjay David, said the events would potentially draw an attendance of 3,000 to 4,000 Hindu followers.

“This is an untapped niche segment that few other MICE organisers are willing to take on. Naturally, due to the size of these events, there are a number of logistical challenges, including the need for a vast number of guestrooms to accommodate delegates, and the provision of food options which meet strict religious dietary requirements,” said David.

In addition to large-scale religious events, Globalindo Holidays is also looking at the feasibility of running incentive programmes with a Hindu theme for Indian companies. These programmes will incorporate visits to renowned Hindu landmarks around Indonesia, such as the ancient temples of Borobudur and Prambanan.

Much to roar about

Soaring spirits and business prospects cap off the successful conclusion of IT&CM India. Photos by **Patrick Tan**



Singex Singapore's Janice Yee, KW Conferences India's Rajani Nair Deb and Singex Singapore's Weilin Niah



The Indian Hotels Company's Suku Verghese and Shalini Sethi, and Taj Palace Hotel, New Delhi's Suparva Nandan and Nikhil Syal



Jaypee Greens Golf & Spa Resort India's Nishant Sharma, Intra Travel Turkey's Kaya Küllü, Jaypee Greens Golf & Spa Resort India's Ashwini Sharma and Aman Chawla



Travel House India's Gurinder Bawa and Asia Explorer Cambodia's Kim Chan Lekha



Creative Travel India's Priya Saighal and Plan It! Meetings and Conferences' Rajiv Pande, Neeraj Jaggi and Ashish Jagota



Eventuality Australia's Peter G Cox, Resorts World Sentosa Singapore's Shirley Toh and Kelvin Tan Kai Mun



International Conference & Exhibition Services India's Shyam Nagpal and Star Holiday Mart Singapore's Dennis Law



Alpcord Network India's Chetan Mansharamani, Westerboe Travel Norway's Anne-Marit Westerboe and Alpcord Network India's Chander Mansharamani



Meetings & Exhibitions Hong Kong's Selina Leung (front row, third from the left) and Esther Tang (centre)



Travel Smart Malaysia's Eric Lau and Hong Kong Disneyland's Martin Leung



Malaysia Convention & Exhibition Bureau's Kogie Loganathan, Tan Lay Teng and Ho Yoke Ping



J&T Concierge Czech Republic's Eva Klejmová and Cox & Kings India's Vikas Khanna and Carolina Fernandes



Conrad Bali's Harry Tandjung, Air Safety Equipment US' S Rajan, Indonesia's Ministry of Tourism and Creative Economy's I Gde Pitana and Gecko Incentives & Events Germany's Henry Waltz

No rest for the ambitious

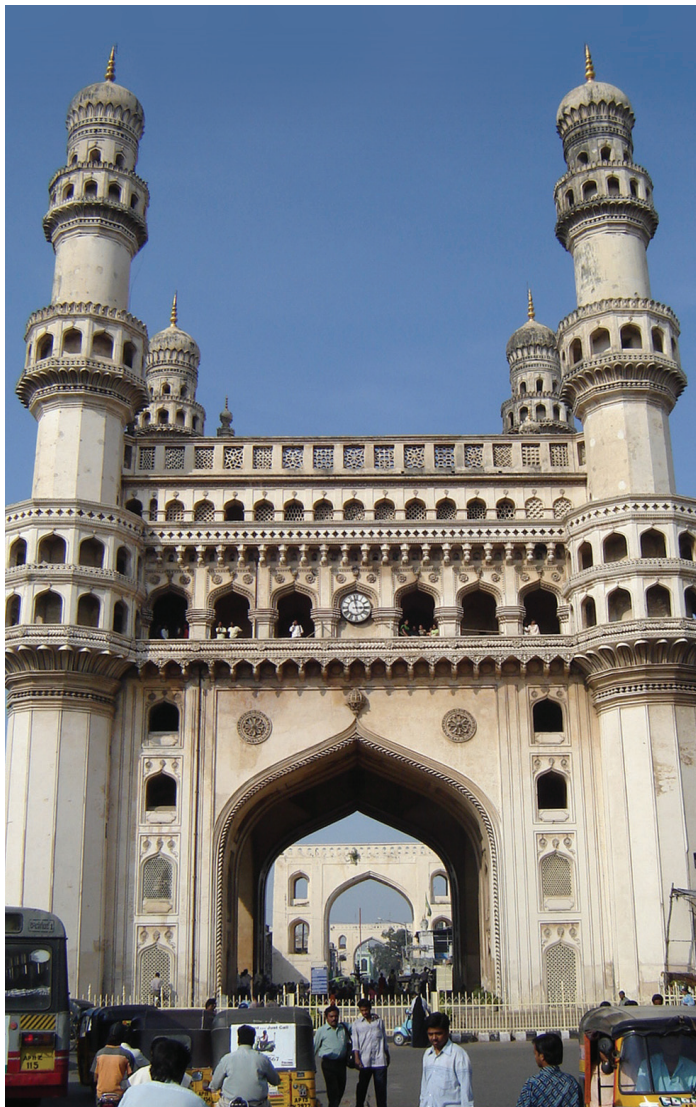
Hyderabad continues to turn heads in the MICE sector with ongoing hardware enhancement, says **Shekhar Niyogi**

The Andhra Pradesh state earned kudos from MICE players in and beyond India when it launched the country's first regional convention bureau in 2011.

Hyderabad Convention Visitors Bureau (HCVB), which acts as a one-stop-shop for MICE planners, is supported by proper MICE infrastructure and services such as the Hyderabad International Convention Centre, the world-class Rajiv Gandhi International Airport, hotels and professional event organisers.

Armed with these strengths, Hyderabad, the capital city of Andhra Pradesh, is attracting large-scale trade shows. The city will host the United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity from October 1 to 19, drawing 8,000 to 10,000 delegates from all over the world. In December, Hyderabad will welcome the 5,000-pax World Allergy Organization's International Scientific Conference.

But the state's tourism authority is not resting on its laurels. Chandana Khan, special chief secretary, Tourism of Andhra Pradesh, said: "Hyderabad boasts the best convention facilities in the country but that is not enough. We are creating new products and upgrading historical ones to give delegates an equally satisfying experience outside the



Hyderabad's Charminar adds a historical edge to pre- and post-show tours in the city

"After the United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity, Hyderabad will be on the global convention map like never before."

Munind Shah
Director
The Travel Planners

convention venue.

"Heritage walking tours, a sound-and-light show at Golconda Fort, and an annual calendar of events such as the Hyderabad Literary Festival and various dance festivals will enrich (the MICE experience of delegates)."

According to Rajat Kumar, Andhra Pradesh commissioner of tourism, local cultural and arts are highlighted in 12 festivals between August 2012 and March 2013.

Rajani Nair Deb, chief marketing officer of KW Conferences, added that Hyderabad's "historical grandeur, gourmet cuisine and an easy ambience" make the city "an ideal convention location".

Apart from MICE-friendly venues and attractions, event planners keen on Hyderabad are also supported by a good array of hotels. Hotels of international brands that now stand in the city, such as the 287-key Novotel Hyderabad Con-

vention Centre, the 427-key The Westin Hyderabad Mindspace and the 293-key Hyderabad Marriott Hotel & Convention Centre, also offer substantial conference spaces.

The city's hotel landscape is still evolving. Fairmont Hotels and Resorts will open a 350-room property in Hyderabad before the year is over. The hotel will have a wide range of meeting and function space, including a ballroom that can seat an event with up to 800 people.

Adding to Hyderabad's future MICE offerings is the Arena Town Centre, which will bring with it a business hotel with 300 rooms and 150 service apartments when it opens in 2013.

Local chain, Ginger Hotels, has also started building a 250-room property near the city's international airport.

By 2014, Hyderabad will have 5,315 guestrooms in the four- and five-star category, up from the current count of 3,471 guestrooms.

Jaideep Khanna, general manager sales & distribution, Hyderabad International Convention Centre, said: "After the United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity in October, Hyderabad will be on the global convention map like never before. This one single event will be (the city's) biggest advertisement and exposure to the world."

NEED TO KNOW



A touch of royalty

Wine and dine your star achievers in a palace which was once home of the Nizam of Hyderabad.

Leased by the Royal Family of Hyderabad to the Taj Group of Hotels Resorts, Taj Falaknuma Palace boasts a gem of a dining hall which can seat 101 guests. The dining hall is furnished with the world's longest dining table which measures 33 metres, 100 identical leather-backed chairs and one chair with a higher armrest that the Nizam sat in when he entertained guests with unique recipes and gold plates.

The elegantly designed dining hall also has amazing acoustics, as diners at either end of the room can clearly hear a conversation.

Theme evenings are offered for banquets with at least 40 guests.



Heritage charms for events

The beautiful Chowmahalla Palace, built some 200 years ago, offers its courtyard for event rental.

The lush green space, surrounded by elegant halls of the palace and embellished with fountains, is suitable for theme parties and banquets.

Guests will be welcomed at the gate by ladies dressed in traditional Hyderabad attire, amid strains of *shehnai*, an Indian wind instrument. They are then driven into the palace grounds by uniformed coachmen in horse-drawn carriages.

Gourmet Hyderabad cuisine befitting royalty will be served.

Escape the city

After an intensive conference in Hyderabad, whisk your group off to the tranquil beachfront Sun Ray Village Resort in Visakhapatnam, the second-largest city in the state of Andhra Pradesh.

Built with eco-friendly practices, the property sits on 138 acres and offers 85 guestrooms. Function rooms can accommodate board meetings for up to 75 people, while a restaurant offers two enclaves which are suitable for private gatherings.

Recreational facilities include four swimming pools, a gym and a shaded jogging track.



First Park Hyatt in India arrives in Hyderabad

Park Hyatt Hyderabad has opened, adding 185 guestrooms and 24 suites to the city's five-star room inventory. Organisers can hold their events in residential-style meeting spaces that span nearly 1,600m² altogether. Every function room is equipped with the latest technology, high-speed Internet access and audiovisual systems.

The hotel is 15 minutes from Hi-Tech City and Hyderabad's business district.

Raising convention stakes

The IT-savvy destination is eager to flex its muscles in hosting business conferences, says **Shekhar Niyogi**

Dubbed the ‘Silicon Valley’ of India, Bengaluru has grown beyond its strengths in information, software and aerospace technologies to venture into MICE territory.

Bengaluru’s emergence as a hub for conventions and conferences in India is backed by positive indicators – of the 574,005 international tourist arrivals in 2011 and 318,224 arrivals in the first-half of 2012, a majority were MICE and corporate travellers, said trade sources.

K Viswanatha Reddy, director of tourism, Karnataka, said: “Although Bengaluru gets its fair share of leisure tourists (about 20 per cent), 80 per cent are corporate visitors and MICE delegates.

“The Global Investors Meet in June has made Bengaluru the fulcrum of global investment interest, and so MICE can be expected to increase by at least 25 per cent in 2013.”

So for in 2012, the city has hosted at least one major conference every fortnight, and its event calendar looks set to be full for the rest of this year. Upcoming events include the International Conference on Advances in Mobile Network Communications and its Applications and the 6th International Conference on Information Processing in August, the Global



The imposing Vidhana Soudha is an architectural icon in Bengaluru

Bio-Clinical Trials in September, the Next Generation People Performance Management in October, the Asia Agile in November and the National Conference on Electronics Design, Assembly and Reliability in December.

The city will kick off 2013 with the Global IP Convention in January at the Indian Institute of Science, Bangalore campus. Most of these conferences are expected to host between 1,000 to 5,000 attendees from various

“Although Bengaluru gets its fair share of leisure tourists (about 20 per cent), 80 per cent are corporate visitors and MICE delegates.”

K Viswanatha Reddy
Director
Karnataka Tourism

countries around the world.

Chander Mansharamani, chairman, India Convention Promotion Bureau, said: “Bengaluru is the definitive business city that is constantly evolving to offer next-generation infrastructure for business events. It is on an upward spiral.”

The city is already equipped with ample MICE facilities, led by the state-of-the-art Bangalore International Exhibition Centre, which is spread across 15 hectares with over 40,000m² of covered exhibition space.

NIMHANS Convention Centre, located within the National Institute of Mental Health and Neurosciences, has also established itself as a conference venue. Royal Orchid Resort & Convention Centre is a popular venue for mid-sized conferences while other hotels such as ITC Gardenia, The Leela Palace, The Taj West End and ITC Windsor also offer meeting facilities.

ITC Gardenia general manager, Anil Chadha, said: “In spite of added room inventory and banqueting facilities, the corporate travel and conference business demand in this city is constantly growing. We are bullish about increasing our ARR and overall yield through 2012, and expect a healthy jump in 2013.”

Sanjoy Pasricha, vice president-sales and marketing of the Leela Palaces, Hotels and Resorts,

shares similar views.

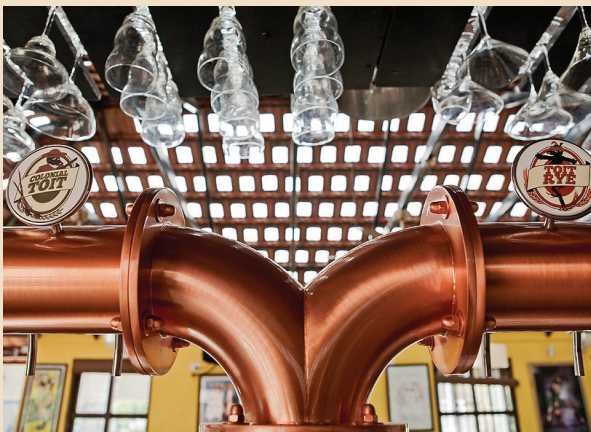
He said: “We expect business to grow steadily in Bengaluru without any dramatic movement. This city has reiterated its potential and position as the leading conference and business city in the country, with many fine dining, entertainment and leisure options in the vicinity, as well as great international flight connections.”

Bengaluru’s hospitality sector is also growing exponentially. The 250-room Ritz-Carlton, Bangalore, 278-room Renaissance Bangalore High Grounds and 250-room Bengaluru Marriott Whitefield will debut later this year, while 297-room JW Marriott Bengaluru, 300-room Marriott Golf & Convention Centre and 397-room Shangri-La Hotel will open next year.

By 2016, Bengaluru’s room inventory is expected to increase by 12,500.

Bengaluru International Airport’s Terminal 1 is currently undergoing a US\$221 million expansion to increase its passenger handling capacity from the present 11.6 million to 17 million per year. Scheduled to complete in December, the upgraded facility will have 23 additional boarding gates, 90 check-in counters and 15 baggage reclaim belts. The airport currently handles 35,000 passengers daily, served by nine airlines.

NEED TO KNOW



Fresh tipples at Toit

Toit Brewpub, a microbrewery and pub in Indira Nagar, has garnered a strong following since opening in March 2011. Its trendy décor and ambience, retro music and a delectable array of culinary delights continue to draw diners in a city with no lack of F&B options.

The microbrewery offers six primary types of brew and presents an innovative five-glass sampler set for guests to taste and decide on which brew to order.

The three-storey resto-bar can accommodate over 500 guests, allowing sections or floors to be booked for MICE events.

Bengaluru gets inaugural JW Marriott



Spa, gym, outdoor swimming pool and five F&B outlets, in addition to Internet access in all rooms and public areas.

Slated to open in March 2013, JW Marriott Hotel Bengaluru is located in the business district beside UB City. The luxury hotel will feature 270 rooms and 27 suites across 19 floors, with eight meeting rooms offering 970m² of meeting space. Facilities include a Quan

Get high at Skyye

Perched on the 16th floor of Bengaluru’s luxury mall, Skyye at UB City is a 1,110m² open-air bar, restaurant and lounge with synchronised lighting beneath its frosted-glass floors and views of the city skyline.

Besides being a suitable spot to unwind with business partners, Skyye makes an ideal venue for networking cocktail parties, product launches and meetings under the stars.

The cover charge is Rs2,500 (US\$45) per guest on a regular evening.

Into Japanese, Scottish spirits

Set in ITC Gardenia, the 81-seat Edo Restaurant and Bar serves authentic sushi, succulent robata-yaki and artful bento meals, alongside Japanese sake, wine and whiskeys.

The array of seaweed, shitake mushrooms and sauces is outstanding. The restaurant is open for private bookings for small corporate groups.

Also in the same hotel, Highland Nectar is perfect for high-level corporate networking sessions with its swanky decor and impressive whiskey collection numbering over 100 labels. There is also an impressive wine list.





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Deal 1 -

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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

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Accumulative of 1,000 participants and above

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Terms & Conditions

- Valid for corporate meeting & incentive groups of 50 participants and above with a **minimum of 3 nights stay at a 5 star hotel**.
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A magnet for trade shows

Armed with MICE hardware and experience, Mumbai is drawing large-scale business events, writes **Shekhar Niyogi**

The conference calendar of Mumbai, the commercial capital of India, looks busy. Between now and the end of the year, the city will welcome several prominent trade shows including the India Finance Summit in September; the MetroRail Asia and the 2nd Cloud Computing World Forum India in October; and the Hospital Build and Infrastructure India Exhibition and Congress in December.

Mumbai's MICE specialists expect the busy streak to continue into 2013, with the 56th All India Congress of Obstetrics & Gynecology taking place in January at the Bandra Kurla Complex in southern Mumbai. The event is expected to draw a record number of more than 10,000 delegates.

MICE infrastructure in Mumbai has provided a good foundation for the destination's trade show growth. Besides event venues such as the Bandra Kurla Complex, the Bombay Convention & Exhibition Centre and the National Centre for the Performing Arts, Mumbai offers PEO/PCOs a selection of quality hotels with event capabilities. Grand Hyatt Mumbai, Renaissance Mumbai Convention Centre Hotel, The Leela Mumbai, JW Marriott Hotel Mumbai and The Oberoi, Mumbai are among



Taj Mahal Palace, Mumbai offers luxury event spaces in a destination where MICE-friendly hotel venues are plenty

the MICE-friendly hotel options available to planners of residential meetings and events.

Sushil Wadhwa, owner of Platinum Incentives & Events, said: "Most five-star hotels in Mumbai have substantial meeting and banqueting facilities which can satisfy the needs of a large spectrum of MICE clients."

KW Conferences managing director, Monimita Sarkar, said: "Mumbai is doing very well for domestic and international conferences. The connectivity and overall business environ-

9

The number of meetings held in Mumbai in 2011, according to ICCA, which ranks the city 42nd on its Asia-Pacific and Middle East charts

ment (in the city) is very conducive for MICE activity."

However, she feels that the city lacks "a large convention centre (similar to those) in Hyderabad or Gujarat".

Meanwhile, Mumbai's Chhatrapati Shivaji International Airport, one of the busiest airports in India, is slated to unveil its new Terminal 2 by end-2013. The state-of-the-art four-storey terminal will span 439,000m². Facilities include new taxiways, 25 fixed link bridges, 52 passenger boarding bridges, 10 baggage

carousels, 104 security check positions, 188 check-in counters, 60 departure immigration counters and 76 arrival immigration counters.

The new terminal alone will be able to handle 40 million passengers a year, fuelling expectations of a leap in passenger traffic into Mumbai once the facility is ready for business.

Mumbai handled 29.07 million passengers in 2011.

Higher arrivals into the western Indian metropolis from 2013 will be supported by a string of new luxury hotels that are slated for opening next year.

Platinum Incentives' Wadhwa, said: "With new luxury hotels such as the Sofitel Mumbai BKC and other international brands that are scheduled to open by 2013, we can expect increased MICE business (into Mumbai)."

Ashis Das, director of The Wanderers, a leisure and corporate travel company, believes that the expansion of airport facilities – which could pull in greater presence of international carriers – and hotel inventory will grow the scale of MICE events in Mumbai.

Other strengths that aid Mumbai's pursuit of business events are the city's extensive fine dining and entertainment options, according to Marie Nadal, owner of Them, You and Me.

NEED TO KNOW



Take your winners to the top of the world

Four Seasons Hotel Mumbai can easily help you achieve that. The rooftop Aer lounge, which sits on the 34th floor of the hotel, provides panoramic views of the city, giving guests the impression that they are on top of the world.

Outfitted in chic decor and furniture, Aer is a good venue for glamorous sunset cocktails for valued clients and business partners. For business travellers looking to unwind after a long day of meetings, Aer offers champagne and cocktails at almost half the price from 17:30 to 20:30 every night.

Aer welcomes private event bookings.

Art in the city

Mumbai's art circles come alive every early part of the year, mostly in February, when Kala Ghoda Arts Festival is held for nine days, featuring art workshops, heritage walks, art exhibitions, theater performances and concerts, among other activities.

Activities are mostly held in the Kala Ghoda Arts Precinct, where the city's finest museums, art galleries, designer boutiques and restaurants are.

Check with DMCs in Mumbai for information on walking tours through the art precinct, or to find out how you may incorporate the art festival into your corporate programme.

Dig into tandoori delights

The new Sofitel Mumbai BKC's Jyran-Tandoor Dining & Lounge offers a treat to foreign delegates who are keen to sample traditional tandoori dishes.

The restaurant is helmed by master chef Shaukat Ali Qureshi, who has perfected his craft in royal Nawabi cuisine over a 40-year career. Must-tries at Jyran-Tandoor Dining & Lounge include *nihari al subho*, *murg shaebi karak seekh* and *tukra shan e shaukat*.

Jyran-Tandoor Dining & Lounge is open from 19:00 to 00:00.



Go Italian in Mumbai

The Leela, Mumbai's fine dining Italian restaurant, Stella, enchants diners with dishes native to regions such as Emilia-Romagna, Tuscany and Piedmont, as well as the usual Italian favourites.

Private dining events are welcomed, and groups can book the restaurant's private dining room.

Stella exudes a warm elegance, and formal wear is required.

The restaurant also boasts a large wine cellar, and is open from 19:00 to 00:30.



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MGTO presses on in India

Challenges are many but the bureau has no intention of cutting its promotions in the market, says **Prudence Lui**



Young Kai Pak

Growth in Indian arrivals to Macau slowed to a crawl in 2011, registering a mere 0.3 per cent increase; Ruins of St Paul's pictured here

The impressive increase in Indian arrivals into Macau seen in 2010 was missing last year.

From a 57.3 per cent growth rate in 2010, Indian arrivals rose a mere 0.3 per cent in 2011.

A spokesperson with the Macau Government Tourism Office (MGTO) counted a number of challenges the destination had to overcome in pursuing the Indian MICE market: rising package costs, pricier airfares between India and Macau, a reduction in load factor following Kingfisher Airlines' withdrawal of services to Macau and the

depreciation of the Indian rupee against the greenback.

"These factors have impacted business travel. Corporates have either cancelled, postponed or are looking at cheaper destinations for incentive movements, such as Thailand, Malaysia or Dubai," the spokesperson said.

He added: "Despite all that, we continue to receive requests for support for Indian incentives. We are hopeful that this slowdown will not be here to stay for very long. Macau is able to capture Indian incentive groups. Our representative office in India receives on average two

enquiries a day on our Incentive Travel Stimulation Program or for souvenirs for MICE groups."

Two applications from India for the support programme were approved by MGTO in the first quarter of this year. These events involved 505 participants who spent two nights in Macau.

Besides these events, Macau also welcomed six Indian incentive groups with a total of 790 participants earlier this year. They stayed up to three nights in Macau.

While the spokesman noted that there were fewer approved Indian incentive applications in 1Q2012 as compared to 1Q2011,

169,660

The number of Indian visitors to Macau in 2011, compared to 169,096 and 107,513 in 2010 and 2009 respectively

the number of inbound Indian incentive groups had gone up. Only one group of 167 delegates were noted last year.

With the help of its representative office in India, MGTO will continue to market Macau as a city for business and leisure through familiarisation trips, workshops, seminars, marts and consumer-oriented marketing activities. MGTO will also partner the travel trade to participate in trade shows in India.

Some stakeholders in Macau such as Sands Cotai Central have noted greater popularity among Indian customers.

According to Natasha Tomé, executive director of marketing, Sands Cotai Central, India makes up 10 per cent of the integrated resort's MICE business. The market registered a 6.8 per cent year-on-year growth in the first quarter. Tomé expects growth in the future due to increased air connectivity, flexible meeting packages and increased demand from the delegates "to go somewhere exciting like Macau".

The property has so far

secured a number of corporate bookings for groups with an average of 300 pax. One of the groups will bring over 2,000 delegates to Macau.

Tomé said: "With new direct flights being offered from India to Macau International Airport later this year, there will be greater ease of access."

Peter Hassall, managing director of Off-Site Connections Event Solutions, said: "As Macau grows, Indian MICE clients will find the destination to be more attractive as a result of competitive room rates and a greater diversity of entertainment and venue options."

However, not all MICE players in Macau are as optimistic. Macau Tower Convention and Entertainment Centre's director of business development, Nesta Pun, said Indian MICE traffic had decreased in 1Q2012 owing to the pricey airfare to Hong Kong as compared to flights to other Asian destinations such as Singapore.

The venue has so far welcomed a 300-pax meeting and dinner by Sony in India in June.

NEED TO KNOW

Macau boasts new IR

Sands Cotai Central is the latest integrated resort (IR) offering in Macau.

The IR brings with it 20,000m² of meetings and convention space and 5,800 guestrooms offered by Conrad, Sheraton and Holiday Inn hotels.

First to welcome guests are Holiday Inn and Conrad hotels, while the 3,863-room Sheraton Macao is slated to open in September. The latter alone will house 15,000m² of event space.



Kun lam Ecumenical Centre shows off new look

Kun lam Ecumenical Centre, a religious landmark in Macau, has reopened after a six-month-long renovation which gave it new interiors and exteriors.

The upper level features a showroom with a dome painted with characters and calligraphy depicting Buddhism, Taoism and Confucianism. The lower level welcomes visitors who wish to escape the hustle and bustle of city life.



A glamorous new side of the Venetian

The luxurious 1,800-seat Venetian Theatre within the Venetian Macao-Resort-Hotel has replaced the former custom theatre where Zaia Cirque du Soleil used to perform.

Positioned as a high-end entertainment venue, the Venetian Theatre is expected to host Chinese and international entertainment. It promises an "exclusive venue experience" with ushers in black-tie, champagne service, gourmet concession items and other premium amenities.

Dine among the clouds

Occupying two levels on top of the AIA Tower, SKY 21 Bar and Restaurant reopened early this year as a sleek and savvy outlet serving Pan-Asian cuisine and offering various entertainment options. The restaurant has a seating capacity of 80 pax.

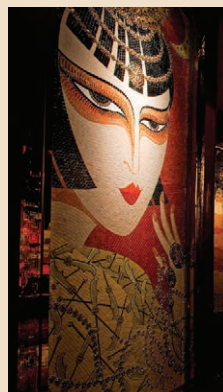
One level above is the SKY B Bar and SKY Life, the latter a party arena that offers entertainment ranging from guest DJs to live jazz sets.

Paint it red

Galaxy Macau has unveiled a new and sexy entertainment establishment in the form of China Rouge.

The members-only lounge boasts sensational interiors that marry the flamboyant styles of 19th century Parisian cabarets and the romantic flavours of 1930s Shanghai. Artworks by leading Chinese artists are displayed too.

China Rouge features live entertainment by leading artists from around the world, and has a spacious bar and lounge area with semi-private sofas and a luxurious VIP mezzanine floor.



India rings in good growth

Indian MICE will continue to grow as long as Singapore steadily innovates and stays competitive, says **Linda Haden**

The potential of the Indian MICE market as outlined by the Singapore Tourism Board (STB) is immense, given that it is one of the fastest growing source markets for Singapore.

Buoyed by improved connectivity to India and greater availability of affordable flights between both countries, further growth is anticipated in the future for both leisure and business travel from India to Singapore.

According to STB, around 20 to 30 per cent of Indian visitors arrive in Singapore each year for business and MICE, a figure envisioned to grow in both value and volume.

As part of the wider scheme of things, STB's South Asia area director for marketing, Srithar GB, said the bureau planned to focus on clustering synergistic events to "enable (Indian) business and MICE travellers to maximise their trips for greater returns by providing collective opportunities to conduct business, meet customers or partners and network across related industries".

Examples of clustered events used to draw Indian MICE were three global environmental events held in June and July – the World Cities Summit (WCS), Singapore International Water Week (SIWW) and the inaugural CleanEnviro Summit.

WCS, held in July, had featured In-Focus: India, a



The Supertrees (pictured here) are iconic structures of Gardens by the Bay, one of Singapore's latest tourism products

11

As of April 2012, Singapore is connected to 11 destinations in India, making it the most connected point to India from South-east Asia

platform for government leaders and industry solution providers to share their findings on urban infrastructure and services in India, while SIWW in June hosted the India Business Forum 2012, a partnership event by Singapore's Public Utilities Board (PUB) and the Confederation of Indian Industry.

Srithar added that STB would continue to nurture a vibrant and robust MICE ecosystem to remain attractive to Indian and other MICE visitors "by working with industry partners to co-create and customise quality business events that showcase industry leadership and thought-provoking content, (thus) providing an avenue for sharing insights and best practices".

Simultaneously, the bureau intends to meet the needs of business travellers and event organisers from India "by continuing to devise strategies that feature enriching and personal-

ised experiences", in a similar vein to the campaign targeted specifically at the Indian leisure segment launched in March.

Despite the apparent optimism, Singapore is faced with an overriding challenge when courting Indian MICE.

"With (Indian) business travellers and event organisers becoming more discerning, Singapore needs to maintain its leading position as a business city of choice through constant innovation, while staying relevant and competitive," Srithar said.

Nonetheless, Singapore can leverage on a number of strengths to compete as a leading hub for Indian MICE. He said: "Singapore has reliable infrastructure and global business networks set against a vibrant and pro-business environment."

"It is also home to a host of unconventional meeting venues and experiences, which make for interesting backdrops for teambuilding and learning journeys that can be incorporated into meeting programmes."

Future developments such as the River Safari Singapore to open by year-end, the Singapore Sports Hub by 2014 and The National Art Gallery by 2015, are expected to expand the city's portfolio of venue offerings and enhance its appeal as a MICE destination for Indians.

Earlier in May and June, Singapore welcomed Marina Bay Cruise Centre and Gardens by the Bay respectively.

NEED TO KNOW



Landmark Village Hotel unveils new Premier category

Far East Organisation's Landmark Village Hotel, located in the heart of the Arab quarter and close to Little India, introduced a new room category in May. Dubbed Premier, the 37m² rooms feature contemporary furnishings and come equipped with amenities such as a 40-inch LCD HDTV, a recliner armchair, an open-concept wardrobe and rain-shower. Rooms are being offered at a promotional rate of S\$248++ (US\$194++) based on double occupancy until September 15.

Clarke Quay gets a new look

Over 10 new dining and entertainment concepts await visitors to Clarke Quay later this year. Two of its five blocks are being renewed for S\$15.6 million (US\$12.2 million). When completed, a new frontage, designed to match the location's heritage architecture, will emerge. New tenants include Sichuan hotpot chain Hai Di Lao Huo Guo and New Zealand-themed restaurant Fern & Kiwi, which will open in September.



Up in the sky for tea

Late afternoon soirees for up to 16 delegates can now take place off the ground with Singapore Flyer's new high tea package. Priced at S\$888 (US\$694), the package includes the use of a private capsule, one rotation lasting around 30 minutes, express boarding, an in-flight host and a menu featuring delectable sandwiches, muffins, scones, éclairs, pastries and macaroons.

Leave a foodie, return a chef

Indian visitors to Singapore looking for gastronomical experiences can enjoy the culinary-inspired itineraries offered by Mercury Travels and Singapore Tourism Board. A five-day option offers tourists the opportunity to sample a mixture of Indian and seafood restaurants, explore Peranakan culture and visit Singapore's main attractions. Bespoke itineraries showcasing the wide range of cooking schools in the city and Singapore's unique local dining experiences are available too.

Sofitel So to debut in Singapore

Accor's third Sofitel So property in Asia is scheduled to commence operations in early 2013.

The 134-key luxury boutique-style hotel, which includes 23 suites, will be housed in a colonial building in the heart of the city's Central Business District.

Sofitel So will feature modern and funky interiors, complemented by the latest advances in room and hotel technology.





Sofitel So Bangkok was designed by at least five leading design firms in Thailand, and was styled by French fashion guru Christian Lacroix

Age of design

There was a time when luxurious boutique hotels – usually with a small room inventory and full of character – and design hotels were choice accommodation for leisure travellers who thirst for unique experiences.

But the guest profile at boutique and design hotels is fast changing. Corporate clients are increasingly choosing such properties for stays or for hosting exclusive events and incentive programmes, noted Asian event planners.

Business travellers and clients who favour unique hotels may span all ages, but they share some similar traits: they are all well-travelled and desire a distinctive travel experience.

Faye Handley, director of Red Events Singapore, who had used luxury boutique hotels such as Naumi Hotel, Klapsons the Boutique Hotel and Hotel Fort Canning for small- to medium-sized events, said these clients were usually aged 35 years and under, and were “forward-thinking”.

“The younger generation is well-travelled. They...wish to stay at hotels that offer a different experience, so they can combine work with pleasure,” said Seema Ahmed, general manager, Gainwell Travel & Leisure India.

Corporate travellers are craving for finer experiences, and the proliferation of design-led and boutique properties rich with character is a reflection of the new demand

Written by **Karen Yue**, with reports from **Linda Haden, Patricia Wee, Shekhar Niyogi** and **Prudence Lui**

For Robert Lim, senior vice president of Holiday Tours & Travel Malaysia, corporate clients who gravitated towards small, unique hotels were “top achievers who demand lifestyle experiences”.

Unique properties are expected to gain a stronger corporate following as clients mature in their buying behaviour and recognise the need to keep event experiences fresh for participants.

The rapid adoption of these unique hotels by corporate clients has been made possible by hotel chains that have their own boutique and design-led product range. Starwood Hotels and Resorts Worldwide has the fashionable W Hotels and the more affordable spin-off, Aloft. Accor Hotels has the MGallery Collection, which comprises boutique properties with its

own individuality, and designer Pullman, which has a larger room inventory. InterContinental Hotels Group has the Hotel Indigo range of stylish boutique properties that reflect the local neighbourhood and culture. These properties boast stylish function venues fitted with quality audiovisual equipment.

Aonia Singapore MICE director, Darryl Rodrigues, said corporate clients were more inclined to pick design hotels that belong to an established chain when organising events abroad, as those “provide some novelty, without compromising on the quality of service clients have come to expect from upscale and luxury properties”.

But just as much attention is also being paid to independent boutique and design-driven properties.

“It is the recognition that the

accommodation experience is as important as the itinerary of the event,” said Rajani Nair Deb, chief marketing officer, KW Conferences India, explaining the growing corporate gravitation towards boutique and design hotels.

“The objective of the meeting is the driver in most cases. It may be a celebration of a milestone or a leadership meeting that prompts the decision to hold the meeting in a design hotel. Brand alignment is also instrumental in clients choosing to hold business meetings in these niche hotels. Clients have briefed us that they (represent) a high-end (brand) and hence the setting for the meeting has to be exclusive,” said Rajani.

Pacific World Hong Kong MICE account director, Ivy Sung, said a client had once requested for the whole boutique hotel to be booked for a product launch.

Violet Wang, senior account manager of Pacific World Shanghai, which uses boutique hotels extensively in the Chinese city, found that small-sized incentives were bigger supporters of boutique and design hotels.

She said: “Our clients have always said that they don’t want big hotels that overwhelm their guests, especially for incentive programmes. They prefer to stay in smaller hotels, which ensure

good service, style and location.

“The bigger the hotel, the less attention each guest will receive – this is a common client prejudice. Design is also a big factor. More corporate clients are looking for low profile luxury, where the hotel’s environment is more subtle and tranquil, instead of one with extravagant trappings and a large inventory.”

Wang noted that her clients’ incentive events require more boutique-style elements and occupy fewer than 100 rooms. Most of the time, such events were not pure incentives, and would be a client appreciation event or corporate sales kick-off meeting, she said.

An increasing demand was emerging from the luxury fashion industry, automotive and finance industry, she noted, adding that incentive programmes are now mostly for under 100 pax, which fit the boutique model well.

Shanghai CTS MICE Centre general manager, Tom Liu, said corporate clients tended to choose boutique and design hotels to avoid large crowds at five-star conference hotels.

Sushil Wadhwa, chairman and managing director of Platinum World Group India, said the ability to offer novel experiences in a good location was the “trump card” of boutique and design hotels, which cannot compete with dedicated MICE hotels on meeting facilities.

“Many times the historical significance of the property becomes a factor in making a decision,” Sushil said, adding that these out-of-the-ordinary hotels are sometimes used when delegates have had their last event at a large chain hotel.

He said: “We did a meeting in Rome in early February for about 40 people, and instead of using a MICE hotel, we chose Grand Hotel Via Veneto (a boutique hotel that occupies 19th century buildings) in the heart of the city. The client was delighted with the hotel’s central location, large guestrooms and personalised service.”

In Shanghai and Singapore, where there is zealous competition among hotels, event planners said boutique and design hotels were attractive because they were priced more competitively than their five-star branded counterparts.

“As hotel rates for larger or chain hotels in Singapore continue to rocket skywards, some clients, including MNCs, have, upon our recommendation, opted for smaller, boutique properties such as New Majestic Hotel and Naumi Hotel,” said Andy Michaels Lim, general manager of Singapore-headquartered Bonvo Travels.

Lim noted that the number of corporate clients choosing to stay in such hotels rose from 100 to 300 between 2010 and 2011.



Twelve at Hengshan



Pangulasian Island Resort



Hotel Muse, Bangkok



Jumeirah Himalayas Hotel Shanghai

Woo these beauties

W Singapore-Sentosa Cove

Date of opening September 2012
Location Sentosa island, Singapore
Number of rooms 240
Why it is hot Starwood's iconic boutique brand allows guests and visitors to unwind in a hip and luxurious urban setting, showcased against the milieu of cutting-edge design, fashion, music and art.
How it can rock your event Start off with a refreshing cocktail reception under the stars in one of the hotel's numerous lawns overlooking Sentosa Cove. Mood music, provided by state-of-the-art sound systems, and soft lighting make a sophisticated, relaxing evening. Guests can adjourn to a sumptuous three-course fusion meal on tables laid out by the outdoor heated pool, as they are entertained by a myriad of jazz artists. To end on a high, guests can head to one of the hotel's four function spaces and dance the night away.
Contact whotels.singapore@whotels.com

Twelve at Hengshan

Date of opening August 2012
Location 12 Hengshan Road, Shanghai, China
Number of rooms 177
Why it is hot A Luxury Collection Hotel of The Starwood Group, it is marketed as a chic oasis in the heart of a bustling metropolis, while being surrounded by restaurants, galleries and well preserved art deco buildings. The hotel is minutes away from historical and cultural sites.
How it can rock your event The venue houses two restaurants and a lounge bar, a spa and a total of 1,303m² of meeting space including the Grand Ballroom, pre-function area, VIP

rooms, meeting rooms and board-rooms. A professional events team is on site to provide support.
Contact (86-21) 5405-0999

Sofitel So Bangkok

Date of opening February 2012
Location 2 North Sathorn Road, Bangrak, Bangkok, Thailand
Number of rooms 238
Why it is hot It is created collectively by at least five leading design firms in Thailand, and styled by renowned French fashion designer Christian Lacroix. His designs are reflected in the hotel's Tree of Life emblem, uniforms, a masterpiece in the lobby and decorative items.
How it can rock your event The Box, a 50m² suspended space with glass walls, is said to be perfect for intimate and exclusive meetings. Other venue choices include a 380m² pillarless ballroom and four loft-style meeting rooms which are equipped with innovative technology and dedicated live cooking stations. The hotel can also produce a range of coffee breaks themed around the elements of water, earth, wood, metal and fire, and other fancy ideas such as Alice in Wonderland.
Contact H6835@sofitel.com

Pangulasian Island Resort

Date of opening January 2012
Location Bacuit Bay, El Nido, Palawan, the Philippines
Number of rooms 42 deluxe accommodation, eight Canopy Villas, 24 Beach Villas and six Pool Villas
Why it is hot El Nido Resorts collaborated with prominent architect Conrad Onglao, known for combining Philippine flair with principles of Western design. The result is an eco-luxury beach resort that draws inspiration from Palawan's geological and ethnic flavour.
How it can rock your event The resort is perfect for high-level incentive

participants. Participants can bask in the sun on Pangulasian's white sandy beach, indulge in a spa treatment or a traditional Filipino *hilot* massage, explore more than 20 dive sites or embark on a guided eco tour.
Contact (63-2) 813-0000

Aloft Bangkok-Sukhumvit 11

Date of opening December 2011
Location 35 Sukhumvit Soi 11, Bangkok, Thailand
Number of rooms 296
Why it is hot It was created for modern, tech-savvy travellers seeking social experiences at an affordable price. As the first Aloft property in Thailand, local architecture firm Hassel was roped in to add customised touches to the space, blending it well with the local culture.
How it can rock your event Tactic, a 265m² meeting space can be split into three separate rooms, each equipped with free wireless Internet access and state-of-the-art technology. Tactic promises to put an end to humdrum meetings, enabling companies to present with pizzazz and optimise idea generation. The space lets in plenty of sunlight and is outfitted with colourful and funky furniture. There is a candyfloss machine, a popcorn machine and a PlayStation 3 game console to jazz up meeting breaks.
Contact bangkok.sukhumvit11@alofthotels.com

Naked Stables Private Reserve

Date of opening November 2011
Location Moganshan valley near Hangzhou, Zhejiang province, China
Number of rooms 121 rooms in Tree-Top Villas and Earth Huts
Why it is hot Not only does this resort boast tranquil and beautiful surroundings, it is also focused on being environmentally-friendly in design, building and operations. Unique

activities for teambuilding are also offered on site. There are two-, three- and four-bedroom villas with hot tubs and grills, and rustic hut studios for one or two guests.
How it can rock your event An incentive group of 50-100 pax will have access to a range of activities and unique meeting spaces. Upon arrival, participants can embark on a guided walking tour of the reserve, followed by a South African six-course dinner. On the second day, they can take part in activities such as Sword Hunt, Mine Field and Talent Show. A BBQ dinner at the Clubhouse, cocktails and a bonfire with live music will cap the evening. End the programme on the third day with teambuilding activities at the Moganshan area, a dinner and award ceremony with live music and drinks at Kikaboni.
Contact groups@nakedretreats.cn

Andaz Shanghai

Date of opening October 2011
Location 88 Songshan Road Shanghai, China
Number of rooms 307
Why it is hot The hotel features rooms with vibrant views of Shanghai and LED lighting that allows guests to customise colours to suit their moods. Dining and entertainment options include Andaz Lounge; Éclair, an all-day patisserie; and Hai Pai, a four-level restaurant, bar and private dining venue offering French and Shanghaiese cuisine.
How it can rock your event There are 11 event venues, from a Meeting Studio that seats 14-16 guests to a ballroom for up to 300. The unique Andaz Garden Studio houses a Glass Pavilion and an outdoor terrace, making it ideal for red carpet events.
Contact (86-21) 2310-1234

Hotel Muse, Bangkok

Date of opening September 2011
Location 55/555 Langsuan Road, Ploenchit Road, Lumpini, Pathumwan, Bangkok, Thailand

Number of rooms 174
Why it is hot The hotel's design was inspired by the golden age of travel during the era of King Rama V of Thailand in the late 19th and early 20th century. Every feature was hand-picked to reflect cosmopolitan chic. Venetian mirrors and black marble floors, for instance, are tastefully integrated with 65-channel Internet TVs and iPod docking stations.
How it can rock your event Take your meeting to the Board Room where there is a private terrace. Meetings and presentations can also be held at The Blind Pig cigar lounge, The Lawn rooftop bar, or one of the private rooms in the hotel's many restaurants.
Contact (66-2) 630-4000

Jumeirah Himalayas Hotel Shanghai

Date of opening March 2011
Location 1108 Mei Hua Road, Pudong, Shanghai, China
Number of rooms 401
Why it is hot World-renowned architect Arata Isozaki, who created the Barcelona Olympic Stadium and Los Angeles MoMA, leads the construction of the Himalayas Center, where the hotel is located. The hotel's exterior reflects Chinese cultural elements and fengshui principles, while the interior features a 1,000-character Chinese poem in the calligraphy of ancient Chinese scholar Huai Su and a 260m² LED screen depicting the sky at different times of the day through multimedia animation.
How it can rock your event The hotel's grand ballroom soars 12m high – the highest ballroom ceiling in Shanghai – and is adorned by a splendid crystal chandelier. There is another ballroom and seven multi-function rooms for 20 to 350 guests. Those seeking unique spaces can consider the rooftop Infinity Garden. The 5,000m² garden has a 300m² event stage and BBQ areas amid lush surroundings.
Contact jhsinfo@jumeirah.com



Hotel Indigo Shanghai on the Bund

Unique hotels make their way into vendor lists

Travel buyers are taking notice of unique hotels offered by major hotel chains and some are slowly gaining acceptance as company preferred vendors.
 Shauna Whitehead, project manager, CWT Meetings & Events Asia Pacific, said: "Not many sole properties are included in preferred vendor lists. However, with Andaz Shanghai being part of Hyatt Hotels, and Indigo Hotel Shanghai on the Bund being part of InterContinental Hotels Group, both are a definite consideration for companies' preferred vendor lists."
 Whitehead believes that there is now a trend for high-end, boutique-inspired properties, merged with local influence and all the essentials that frequent business

travellers would expect. Demand for such properties will increase as meetings and events customers expect high-end servicing and amenities, while also appreciating the local influences that hotels such as these have integrated into their design and hospitality.
 American Express Business Travel director of advisory services-Japan, Asia-Pacific, Australia, Carl Jones, believes companies generally avoid luxury brands in the current economic environment, and "more locations and awareness of these boutique global chain properties" will allow travellers the chance "to stretch their travel budget from a moderate tier property to upscale".
 "(But) I don't see travellers

downgrading from a full luxury brand to an upscale boutique unless mandated or forced," he said.
 HRG China general manager, Harald Weber-Liel, said: "We have noted a growing number of enquiries from our clients in China about hosting special events in boutique hotels. These enquiries range from luncheons with clients and incentive meetings for staff.
 "We could eventually see a rising popularity among clients from certain industries for hosting events in boutique hotels and resorts. However, demand for corporate stay in boutique hotels in China will probably not change too much (soon) as the economic downturn has seen many companies sticking tightly to their

corporate travel budgets."
 While boutique hotels connote a sense of exclusivity for corporate events, which would be a major differentiating factor for clients wishing to deviate from the norm of hosting events in luxury hotels, Weber-Liel said that his company would always consider the objective and size of the event because these hotels were generally smaller.
 He foresees a significant number of design-driven hotels emerging in China due to the growing number of high-end consumers. These developments would benefit China's MICE industry as it would grant corporations a larger variety of venues to choose from. – Patricia Wee

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Too pricey, too soon

Sri Lanka's private sector is determined to overcome room rate woes to grow MICE business, says **Feizal Samath**



Sri Lanka Tourism Promotion Bureau

The Sri Lankan capital city of Colombo has seen hotel room rates rise from US\$60 in 2010 to US\$180 in mid-2011

Sri Lanka is expected to launch a branding campaign in India this October to capture a bigger slice of the Indian MICE market. The joint promotion campaign, undertaken by state-owned Sri Lankan Convention Bureau (SLCB) and flag carrier SriLankan Airlines, was finalised in mid June.

The six-month-long campaign will see MICE roadshows being held in Indian cities such as Pune, Cochin, Chennai, Bengaluru and Hyderabad. There are, however, no information

on whether incentives will be offered to lure Indian MICE buyers.

"We had a successful campaign some years back in tier-one Indian cities and we saw a surge in numbers," said Vipula Wanigasekera, SLCB general manager, who has observed repeat incentive business from companies in India, such as Microsoft and Sony Ericsson.

However, SLCB's objective may strike obstacles in the form of fast-rising hotel rates in the destination.

"There is huge scope for

MICE traffic from India but our prices are very uncompetitive. We are killing the market," said a veteran industry official who declined to be named.

Sri Lanka welcomed more than 170,000 visitors from India in 2011, of which 25,000 to 30,000 were MICE visitors. Sources said the country's MICE segment had stagnated.

Five-star hotel rates in Colombo, the city that draws the most MICE visitors, have risen in the past two years. Rates have gone from US\$60 per night in 2010 to US\$180 in mid-2011.

19

There are 15-19 daily flights between Colombo and seven Indian cities including Cochin, Mumbai, Delhi and Bangalore

Hotel prices must also adhere to a minimum compulsory rate imposed by the government – a requirement that has been repeatedly opposed by the local tourism industry.

"We simply cannot attract incentive travellers from India because Malaysia, Singapore and Thailand offer better rates," said Nilmin Nanayakkara, president of the Sri Lanka Association of Inbound Tour Operators, who added that the market should dictate rates, not the authorities. The government thinks otherwise, saying there is potential to increase prices as Sri Lanka is now a peaceful country.

Despite the challenges, growth opportunities are being shaped by local players who are determined to draw MICE business. "DMCs and hotels have been promoting MICE and we

see growth. We are marketing Sri Lanka as a value-added destination, not a cheap destination, and enquiries are coming in," said a spokesperson for the Taj Group of Hotels in Colombo.

Sri Lanka welcomed two large incentive groups from India this year. One was a 1,000-pax group from Holcim which held a convention at the Bandaranaike Memorial International Conference Hall (BMICH) and stayed in three city hotels. The other was an 800-pax group from Domino's Pizza in India.

Vasantha Leelananda, John Keells Holdings executive vice president and head of destination management sector, believes that Sri Lanka remains attractive to Indian corporate clients. The company handled 2,000 MICE travellers from 10 Indian companies in the first half of the year. Despite the high room rates, Leelananda said "the market is...growing".

The private sector is also working together to bid for events. It recently bagged hosting rights for a global crocodile conference in Colombo next May, which will be attended by 200 delegates, of which more than 50 will come from India.

Sri Lanka's other obstacle is its lack of convention facilities, according to Imran Hassan, director of Lanka Exhibition and Conference Service, who said that the BMICH and the Sri Lanka Exhibition & Convention Centre were the only large venues in the capital city. BMICH can accommodate 1,500 delegates, while the other offers 3,716m² of exhibition space. The space constrain deepens with BMICH's partial closure due to ongoing renovation. But when it reopens next January, it will be able to seat 1,750 pax and will have improved facilities.

NEED TO KNOW



Court lady luck in Colombo

Although Colombo offers various night entertainment in the form of karaoke clubs, glitzy bars and cafes, the city's casinos appear to be the main draw for Indian visitors.

The 10-year-old Star Dust, said to be the longest-established and most popular casino in Colombo, offers daily live entertainment. It is followed by Ballys Colombo, which draws the crowd with 60 gaming tables, an elegant bar, a restaurant and a boardroom. The casino sits adjacent to Beira Lake and is within easy reach from several five-star hotels in the city centre.

The Bellagio and MGM casinos are two other well-known attractions. They offer complimentary drinks and food to patrons who buy a reasonable quantity of chips.

Shop till you drop

There are a number of department stores in Colombo, with House of Fashion and ODEL being the hot favourites of tourists in search of some retail therapy.

Both stores stock big fashion brands such as Gucci, Givenchy, Versace, Calvin Klein and Ralph Lauren, and products are said to be cheaper than those sold in India. Furthermore, ODEL stocks its own brands too.

Shoppers can also get their hands on jewellery, cosmetics, homeware, tea, books, sweet treats, bath products, plants and an excellent selection of Sri Lanka-made T-shirts.

Retreat into a sanctuary

The 120-year-old Gangaramaya Buddhist Temple near Colombo's Beira Lake is a must-see for all visitors to Sri Lanka.

Recognised as an important landmark in the city, the temple comprises many statues of Buddha from Myanmar, Thailand and Japan, as well as the *Seemamalakaya* meditation centre and assembly hall for monks and a gallery with 300 artworks that depict the evolution of Buddhist art over various periods, among other features.

At night, enchanting lights envelop the temple complex.

Make friends with the elephants



The Pinnewala Elephant Orphanage, which lies about 80km north of Colombo, is said to be the first place in the world where elephants were born in captivity.

The 9.7-hectare site was set up by the government in the late 1970s after it was discovered that the elephant population in the country was close to extinction. The orphanage is home to elephants that had lost their mothers or herds, and there are close to 90 male and female elephants.

The best time to visit is in the morning when the young devour milk from feeding bottles and are then guided by mahouts to the nearby river, where they would play.

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