

DECEMBER 2019/JANUARY 2020

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Are destinations
ready for Muslim
MICE?

PPHG gets
strategic about
its people



The pleasure of bleisure

More business travellers are extending their work trips for a bit of pleasure, and are expecting business events to provide opportunities for fun destination experiences



PAUL VALLEE

MANAGING DIRECTOR OF
BESTCITIES GLOBAL ALLIANCE

On November 6, the “Hangzhou—Leading Innovation for Future Conferences” campaign, organized by Hangzhou Municipal Bureau of Culture, Radio, TV and Tourism, was launched in Cloud Town. The campaign shed light on Hangzhou’s unparalleled strengths as the destination for MICE of the new economy, including its industrial competitiveness, innovation drivers and growth potential.

In the campaign, Dr. Wang Jian, founder of Alibaba Cloud and volunteer of the 2050 Conference, delivered a keynote speech themed 2050: Tech Brings Youth Together. Paul Vallee, Managing Director of the BestCities Global Alliance and Executive Consultant of GainingEdge, shared Successful International Conference Destinations. Yang Guang, Director of Political Think Tank Department, China Economic Information Service of Xinhua News Agency, released The Research Report on Hangzhou as the Destination for MICE of the New Economy.

With Huawei’s CloudLink collaborative telepresence solution, the campaign built a bridge between its attendees and the representatives of Hangzhou’s competitive industries, MICE facility and product suppliers, and municipal service departments, regardless of where they were on the day. Centering on “Shaping the Future with a Versatile Hangzhou”, their interaction unveiled the remarkable strengths of the city to accommodate MICE events. Before ending on a successful note, the campaign held the Appointment Ceremony of the Ninth Cohort of Hangzhou Conference Ambassadors, Plaque Awarding Ceremony of Hangzhou’s First Batch of Exemplary Conference Service Suppliers, and Plaque Awarding Ceremony of Hangzhou’s Top 10 New Economy Conference Towns.

Before the initiation, the campaign organizer appointed 20 “48-hour Experience Officers of Future Industries”, who were MICE experts and corporate executives from the new

economy sectors, such as digital economy, fashion industry, new retail, new energy and bio-pharmaceuticals. On November 5, the “Experience Day of Future Conferences”, the “Experience Officers” and five entrepreneurs of Zhejiang-based enterprises exchanged views on the strengths and growth prospect of Hangzhou’s future industries in the context of the new economy. As part of their job description, the “officers” were taken on a tour to Hangzhou’s indigenous culture—tea, silk, epigraphic and sigillographic crafts, and Chinese zither, all gems of local MICE products. They also visited industrial clusters such as Cloud Town and E-fashion Town, and charted out strategies for companies to compete in the era of the new economy with corporate executives from Geely’s Geometry, Lixing Group, Smart Vision, EIFINI, NIO, etc.

Over the past few years, the new economy sectors in Hangzhou, such as digital economy, fintech, bio-pharmaceuticals, cultural and

creative industries, new retail and new energy, have maintained robust growth momentum, which generated a brisk demand for new economy-themed conferences. As its impetus grows strong, the conference industry spares no effort to bolster the clusterization of the new economy industries and further their growth in many ways, such as holding iconic the new economy-themed conferences. Against such backdrop, Hangzhou Municipal Bureau of Culture, Radio, TV and Tourism initiated the “Hangzhou—Leading Innovation for Future Conferences” campaign. It’s hoped that the event will help nurse an environment where the conference industry and competitive industries can reciprocate and nudge each other towards a shared destiny, and illustrate Hangzhou’s resolve as a destination for international conferences.

It's a pleasure to do trips



Karen Yue
Group Editor

The increasing focus on work-life balance has spun off an interesting trend in corporate travel in recent years. Bleisure, which is almost phonetically similar to pleasure, is where business trips are combined with time for leisure.

However, the act of combining business and leisure is not uncommon. We have all done it before ourselves, whenever time permitted. Giving the act a name has helped to make it real.

In July 2016, CWT published a white paper on bleisure. *A Quantitative Look at the Bleisure Phenomenon* analysed a data set of air transactions corresponding to business trips booked by CWT worldwide between 2011 and 2015. The study defined bleisure as a trip requiring a Saturday night stay at the destination either at the start or end, or both. Using this definition, it found that every year, 20 per cent of business travellers took bleisure trips, and those accounted for seven per cent of all business trips. Those values had remained largely unchanged since 2011, which indicated that bleisure was not a new phenomenon.

Bleisure is here to stay. At the start of 2019, Great Hotels of the World found that 75 per cent of travellers extended their work trips for fun in the past year. In October 2019, a study by CWT and Artemis Strategy Group found that bleisure opportunities were seen as a job perk among its respondents. Respondents extended their work trips at an average of 2.4 times over the past 12 months; in Asia-Pacific, that figure is 2.3.

Some of the consistent findings across various studies is that bleisure tendencies are higher among the younger workforce and when the employer is supportive.

As an employee of a company that encourages travel and work-life balance, a team manager, and a business traveller myself, it is clear to see the benefits of bleisure. Exhausting as overseas assignments may be, the upside is we get to experience different destinations, some of which may be too expensive to fly to on our own dime, broaden our minds, get inspired for future projects, and return happy to our desk.

In this issue's cover story, we look at how bleisure is presenting business opportunities to event planners and destinations, and how our industry peers are mixing business with pleasure themselves.



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KAOHSIUNG MICE OFFICE

Hospitable Kaohsiung The New MICE Landmark in Asia



will be further enhanced by a new cruise terminal that opens next year.

Placing yet another feather in Kaohsiung's MICE cap and raising the destination's profile in the global MICE stage is the National Kaohsiung Center for the Arts (Weiwuying), one of Asia's most important centres for arts and performances.

Kaohsiung shines bright as an international MICE harbour city in South Taiwan. With infrastructure developments and targeted promotion, this subtropical city has become a true destination for MICE events of all sizes. Asia's New Bay Area, the major urban renewal project joining city and harbour, the establishment of the Kaohsiung MICE Office in 2013, and the inauguration of the Kaohsiung Exhibition Center in 2014 have made the MICE industry an important driver of Kaohsiung's growth for local industries, events, tourism, entertainment and transportation.

Kaohsiung's accessibility advantage, a result of a convenient international airport, high-speed rail and harbour,

The new slogan, "Kaohsiung, we connect" underlines the city's determination to soar in the world of international MICE. Bearing this promise in mind, all MICE and tourism related participants in the city work together to develop international marketing strategies to shape Kaohsiung into one of the top choices for international conventions and exhibitions.

Kaohsiung's astounding win of ICCA Congress 2020 on its first try demonstrates the success of this strategy.

Team Kaohsiung understands that MICE works as a platform to attract business visitors and tourists at home and abroad, resulting in increased domestic



consumption and export.

Kaohsiung's warm hospitality and enthusiasm as well as MICE strengths are ready for the world to discover.

The year 2020 will be an exciting one for Kaohsiung, with the 2020

Global Harbor Cities Forum happening from October 28-30, followed by ICCA Congress 2020 from November 1-4. These high-profile events will attract more than 1,000 delegates from 100 countries to its shores, and present the perfect stage for Kaohsiung to shine.

Kaohsiung
we connect

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MICE, Association and Corporate buyers share their procurement requirements with relevant and interested destination and supplier leads.

Exhibition Walk-About

A guided tour of featured booths and pavilions in this "meet-and-greet" activity. For Association buyers and Media.

LEARNING & THOUGHT LEADERSHIP

Keynote Address

Come be inspired at this scene-setter opening, featuring perspectives from trending industry personalities.

Association Day Forum

Held by Association professionals for Association professionals, this ever-popular forum curates the current talking points in Association management with interactive discussions.

CTW China Conference and Immersion **NEW FORMAT**

Cover topics from market outlook to industry trends while connecting China's close-knit community of corporate professionals, influencers and decision makers through interactive peer sharing and learning engagements.

NETWORKING & EVENT EXPERIENCE

Say Hi to Everyone!

A first reveal of 2020's attendees during this interactive ice-breaker. Get to know who's who before exhibition days begin. Open to all delegates from IT&CM China and CTW China.

MICE Innovation Hub

Drop in to meet China's brightest technology innovators and explore the fresh solutions created to solve today and perhaps tomorrow's industry challenges.

Corporate Buyers Get Rewarded For Attending

All corporate buyers stand to win attractive lucky draw prizes, with an additional reward scheme in place specifically for local buyers.



FOLLOW US ON WECHAT TODAY!

Stay up-to-date on the latest event updates, and look out for games and prizes to be won.

CONNECT

TOP 5 HEADLINES THIS MONTH



▲ From left: The inaugural SG Tourism Leaders Engagement Series; Wishnutama Kusubandio, Indonesia's minister of tourism and creative economy

No fret for Asian MICE, tourism players despite slowing global economy, say experts

The global economy is in a challenging state, faced with the threat of 'slowbalisation', where the world is turning against globalisation, and rising geopolitical risks, according to Andrew Staples, global editorial director of the Economist Corporate Network, The Economist Intelligence Unit, who spoke at the SG Tourism Leaders Engagement Series.

Indonesia's MICE stakeholders urge elevation of business events sector in tourism policymaking

The Indonesian trade is calling for a stronger,



more prominent position of business events within the new structure of the Ministry of Tourism and Creative Economy, or the TCE Board, in the new cabinet line-up. President Joko Widodo has currently placed the tourism and creative economy sectors under one ministry – which will act as a policymaker – as well as formed a board to be the executive body in charge of both sectors.

Corporate travel to Hong Kong down as security concerns rise

Travel restrictions to Hong Kong as a result of the continuing civil unrest has not only resulted in the cancellation of a major corporate travel event in August, but has now led to two US companies banning travel to the city.

WHAT'S HAPPENING



February 17-19
AIME
(Asia-Pacific Incentive Meeting Expo)
Melbourne, Australia



January 24-27
SITE Global Conference 2020
Vancouver, Canada

CORRECTION: In TTGmice Planner 2019/2022 Asia Pacific's Intelligent Business Events Guide, Thailand's flag was wrongly used on page 145. The correction has been made to the e-book.

Q&A



Jeju guns for MICE to improve quality of inbound tourism

Anticipating a challenging year ahead for tourism, against a backdrop of global economic slowdown and geopolitical unrest, Jeju's tourism authority is looking at inbound business events to bolster its tourism performance in 2020.

New regional areas in Melbourne ready for Asian incentives

Untapped regional areas in Melbourne, such as the Bellarine Peninsula, are fast emerging as new destinations poised for Asia's incentives market. The Australian city also recently reported a financially record-breaking year.



▲ Swimming with dolphins in Bellarine Peninsula



January 12-16
ASEAN Tourism Forum
Bandar Seri Begawan, Brunei

Chooleng Goh, general manager of The Athenee Hotel, a Luxury Collection Hotel, Bangkok, walks the sustainability talk and flies the sustainability flag high. She shares with *TTGmice* her motivations, next upcoming project, and recent TCEB appointment as sustainability champion.

SNAPSHOTS



▲ October 24

Marriott's Serve 360 fam trip kicked off with a relaxed dinner in The Apartment (Bangkok Marriott Marquis Queen's Park's version of meeting rooms) after a tour of the hotel's outdoor herb gardens and chicken coop, as well as the indoor vertical hydroponics farm.

Participants chipped in to help prepare dinner – alongside chefs Michael Hogan and Daniel Bucher – that was made with ingredients headed for the landfill, as well as local produce from the market. It turned out to be quite the sumptuous spread!



▲ November 18

A supportive CVB and local scientific community is key to destination selection. *TTGmice*'s Karen Yue speaks with PC Wong to find out why the Asia Pacific Initiative on Reproduction chose Yokohama for its 2021 convention.



▲ November 15

A performance during the Jeju MICE Expo 2019. The destination demonstrated its enduring appeal for business events, and highlighted upcoming new projects such as the expansion of the ICC Jeju.

◀ November 5

Famil delegates from Malaysia and Indonesia begin their tour of regional Melbourne with the annual Melbourne Cup. An annual highlight in Melbourne's social calendar, the Flemington racetrack also plays host to large groups up to 1,000 theatre-style.

A woman in a black business suit and white top is smiling and talking on a mobile phone. She is standing in a lush green park area with a modern city skyline in the background. The buildings are tall and white, with some having balconies. The sky is blue with some light clouds. The overall scene is bright and sunny.

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Keep policies friendly

A well-designed corporate travel policy can maintain order throughout the entire business travel process. Travelstop's [Prashant Kirtane](#) lists six things to note when building an all-inclusive corporate travel policy

Travel has become an increasingly important part of running a business in the global economy. This is supported by data that most companies have an existing business travel policy to facilitate corporate travel. However, the same study shows that more than 50 per cent of travellers do not have a clear policy when it comes to travel and expense reporting.

A more recent study by Certify found that 72 per cent of organisations surveyed have a formal travel policy, and nearly half of the organisations reported that their compliance rate was less than 75 per cent.

A well-designed corporate travel policy can maintain order throughout the entire business travel process, from the booking of hotels and air tickets to how employees should file their claims at the end of a trip. It also promotes compliance, saves the company money, improves travellers' safety, and prevents fraud. To that end, travel managers need to consider not just the needs and wants of the organisation, but of their employees as well.

For modern-day employees, convenience is the key to business travel satisfaction. A recent study by CWT revealed that business travellers from Asia-Pacific prioritise the ability to make decisions at their convenience above all. The same report had similar findings regarding American and European business travellers.

This means that today's business traveller is likely to choose convenient hotel locations and flight times over breakfast buffets and loyalty points.

By considering employees' travel needs and preferences, you are more likely to produce a travel policy that boosts compliance rates. An added advantage of promoting convenience and safety during the trip is that your business travellers will be able to better focus on representing your company and achieving their goals for the trip.

To make a corporate travel policy that meets both the organisation's and employees' needs, there are six aspects to keep in mind:

1. Education In general, employees want to adhere to policies. When they do not, it is usually because they do not clearly understand the rules. To improve compliance, your travel policy should provide a clear outline of your goals and how business trips can help achieve them.

Prashant Kirtane is the CEO and co-founder of Travelstop. Prior to Travelstop, Kirtane co-founded vacation rental platform Travelmob, which was acquired by Expedia's subsidiary Home Away. Prior to his ventures into startups and the travel/vacation industry, Kirtane worked for 12 years at Yahoo!, where he was senior director of engineering (video).



You will need to train the staff who oversee the corporate travel processes to make sure they know your corporate travel policy by heart. This will include preparing them and your travellers on how to use your travel booking tools.

- 2. Clarity in communication** Define all key phrases, requirements, and rules that may cause confusion. Explain and clearly list out any penalties for non-compliance. You can reduce the room for error by making the reimbursement process clear, user-friendly, and easy to navigate. Be sure to make the policy easily accessible so that employees can refer to it at any time.
- 3. Incentivise compliance** Think of innovative ways to make policy compliance more attractive to travellers. For instance, when employees stay at a hotel or select an airline from an approved list, they can be incentivised. It is important to provide convenient options for employees, such as hotels that are close to meeting locations and flights with shorter flight time. Remember that a top factor for business travellers is the ability to make their trips more convenient and to save themselves time.
- 4. Feedback loop** When you roll out and test your corporate travel policy, you should welcome opportunities for improvement. Make it easy for employees to provide feedback about the rules, requirements, and processes. When you understand your employees' experiences during business trips, you can improve their entire travel and booking experience. This can translate into a higher compliance rate, greater job and travel satisfaction, and less travel-related stress.
- 5. Duty of care** Look into new and emerging technologies that allow you to locate employees while they are away. Make sure to have their contact and emergency contact details available on your travel management platform. Where possible, inform employees about potential risks or dangers in various locales prior to travel, and provide relevant information on resources and support that can be accessed in times of emergency.
- 6. Staying up-to-date** Keep abreast of travel trends, such as bleisure travel and ridesharing. Understand the corporate travel preferences of millennial employees, who will make up 75 per cent of the global workforce by 2025. An annual review of your corporate travel policy will allow you to remove aspects that have become irrelevant or obsolete.

Princess Cruises' new wearable tech to aid onboard event management



Imagine speeding your corporate group through immigration, granting them hands-free access to their cabin, communicating with all attendees without dependence on onboard Internet, and knowing exactly where they all are along with the shortest route to get to them.

This "friction-free" cruise experience is not just a dream,

as Princess Cruises moves to implement the OceanMedallion wearable device across its complete fleet by the end of 2021.

The complimentary device is said to elevate the guest experience by enhancing guest-crew interactions, eliminate friction points, and enable interactive entertainment to deliver a high level of service and personalised attention on a large scale.

OceanMedallion will make its Asian debut onboard the Grand Princess, which will be homeported in Singapore for the first time for the 2020-2021 cruise season. Grand Princess is one of the MedallionClass ships in the Princess Cruises family.

Stuart Alison, senior vice president, Asia Pacific Commercial & Operations with Princess Cruises, said: "It was used at our internal marketing summit recently in the Caribbean. It allowed delegates to add fellow event attendees onto the device, and to see where they are. Participants were also able to access personalised service onboard."

"This technology can revolutionise group travel," he continued, adding that his team is still discovering the full-scale of what the OceanMedallion is able to do for groups.

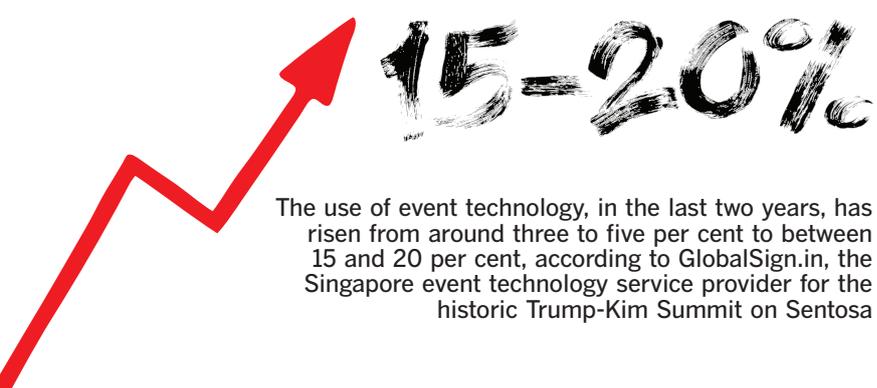
Dark clouds in event IT

Cybersecurity threats and data breaches are "going to get worse before they get better", warned Charles Ng, vice president, EnSign InfoSecurity.

Ng urged organisations to identify their most important asset, know where it is stored and how it is protected.

The most secure is never the cloud, Ng commented, and setting aside a budget of eight per cent on IT is a rule of thumb and a must for cybersecurity.

Paul Hadjy, CEO and co-founder, Horangi Cyber Security added that as companies prioritise faster innovation, migration to the cloud has increased the area of cybersecurity risk. A shortage of talent, in particular engineers trained in the cloud, has added to the risk.



Event tech person to watch: Annabelle Kwok

Who are you? I am a mathematician, hardware hacker and AI (artificial intelligence) practitioner. I founded NeuralBay, and I have spoken at international conferences in Dubai, Hong Kong, Singapore, Indonesia, China and Iran.

What does NeuralBay do? We are an AI company that specialises in image and video processing of humans, objects and text. Through NeuralBay, we provide consultancy for Smart Nation initiatives and MNCs across the region.

How are NeuralBay's products and services applied in the meetings industry? Our solutions can monitor an attendee's journey, find out an individual's interest, provide dynamic marketing solutions, manage human traffic flow, personalise messages and our software can customise a marketing campaign.

An attendee's journey can be analysed to optimise future exhibition setups. An individual's Interest, like looking at a particular display and which item in the display attracted the most attention captured can help in advertising planning and budgeting.

Real-time data collected, such as gender, age and volume of traffic, can be integrated with an LED billboard where advertisements and event schedules can be customised to suit the profile of the person looking at the billboard.

We can create virtual perimeters to manage human traffic flow or directing footfall traffic in crowded areas and our software can recognise anybody, for example, anyone who is wearing a company t-shirt to build a customised marketing campaign.



Drumming to a different beat



A Japanese taiko drum performance is one of the most invigorating and soul-stirring traditional experiences foreigners could experience in the destination.

When seated close to taiko drummers – a special arrangement possible when the performance is reserved for a private group – the beats of the drum become almost tangible and the audience can feel their skin throb with every rise and fall of the performers' arms.

A private taiko performance as part of a business event programme can be organised by Taiko-Lab, one of Japan's largest and most active specialists in the traditional percussion instrument. Taiko-Lab represents a number of local taiko troupes that put up around 150 traditional and contemporary performances around the world annually.

One of its troupes to watch is the three-men Mugen, a multi-talented team that brings a young and chic vibe to the performance. Another star troupe is Yuza-rakuza, whose four members are no strangers to the world stage.

Through six main branches and 14 studios across five cities in Japan, such as Tokyo, Kyoto and Osaka, Taiko-Lab also conducts energetic and fun-filled drum lessons for corporate groups. Participants are given *happi* coats to wear and taken through the basics of taiko drumming on their own drum by enthusiastic coaches, before coming altogether to stage a performance. Plenty of laughter and squeals are promised along the way!

Corporate groups can also choose to combine a professional performance with a hands-on experience. Such a combination runs for 60 to 90 minutes.

Catch some waves Down Under

Opening this January, URBNSURF Melbourne is Australia's first man-made surf park offering visitors of all abilities an authentic surfing experience regardless of weather conditions. Here, visitors can ride waves up to two metres high for as long as 32 seconds in a 320-metre pool, all made possible by wave-generating technology capable of shooting 1,000 high-quality, ocean-like waves every hour.

The park's LED lighting makes night surfing possible, and guests can even choose from different types of waves, from identically perfect waves to a random selection which more closely mirrors the ocean. The park includes a fully equipped pro-shop for board and gear hire, licensed café, and training programmes for all ages. A "freesurfing" session can take an hour, while a group or private surfing lesson can go for 105 minutes.

URBNSURF hosts groups of several hundred visitors onsite and can also tailor experiences for small groups. Surf aside, the park offers event spaces, lagoonside hot tubs, day beds, and landscaped spaces for relaxation.



Aerotel Beijing opens at Daxing Airport

In-terminal airport hotel chain Aerotel has opened a two-storey outpost in Beijing Daxing International Airport's north-east pier, spanning more than 9,000m² and offering 215 guestrooms. Other facilities within include a fitness corner, game room with billiard table, and a library lounge/restaurant which offers an international buffet and a la carte menu.

As the flagship property and a first for Aerotel, the hotel also houses two meeting rooms – Xijin House and Jibei House, and VIP room Guji House. Equipped with an audiovisual system, the facilities can accommodate meetings, private dinners and intimate gatherings for up to 36 guests.



Contemporary event space in Hue ready for functions

Located in Central Vietnam's Hue, Lebadang Memory Space is dedicated to Lebadang, a Vietnamese artist who was naturalised in France in 1980. The privately-owned museum boasts a collection of 293 contemporary artwork pieces, ranging from paper-cuttings to sculptures.

There are five function areas here. For instance, the outdoor area is good for larger events with 200 to 300 people, and can even take in a stage. Meanwhile, the Space Signature Roof Top is able to host intimate gatherings of around 50 people. Construction of an underground multi-functional room is also in the works, and will be ready end 2020.

Art immersion tours can also be arranged for private groups. Catering is available upon request, with six set menus to choose from. Rates start from US\$200 for a two-hour block, for usage of the Space Cafe & Bistro which can hold up to 50 people. For a complete museum buyout, rates start from US\$600, also for a two-hour block.

New mega conference venue joins Phuket's events portfolio

Angsana Laguna Phuket, located at the Angsana Laguna Phuket resort complex in Thailand, has unveiled a brand new, 1,500m² multipurpose space named the Angsana Convention and Exhibition Space (ACES).

ACES can accommodate up to 1,500 guests for a multinational business conference or a MICE seminar in a theatre-style sitting. Other configurations include seating 850 guests in a classroom setting, or 225 guests in U-shape and boardroom arrangement. The venue is also ideal for welcome receptions and gala dinners, accommodating up to 800 guests for banquets or 1,500 guests for standing cocktails.

Light and sound themes are customised for each event, while catering is offered along with the use of the venue, with options ranging from themed coffee breaks to fine-dining banquets. Planners have the added advantage of personalising menus with any one of Angsana Laguna Phuket's six restaurants and bars, covering local and international cuisines.



ADVERTORIAL

Millennium Hotels and Resorts



5

ways to plan your business events with a Singapore touch

MICE planners can inject local elements into the meeting experience at Millennium Hotels and Resorts properties in Singapore.

Business travellers can immerse in a slice of Singapore culture, from its vibrant food scene, charming neighbourhoods to unique Peranakan culture during their visit to the Lion City. Hospitality group Millennium Hotels and Resorts is offering The Extra Millennium Mile, its MICE initiative that injects personalised touches into the meeting experience.

The MICE initiative is held across the group's properties in South-east Asia. In Singapore, four hotels — Orchard Hotel, Grand Copthorne Waterfront Hotel, M Hotel and Copthorne King's Hotel, which are part of the initiative, are offering local food, drinks and activities as part of specially-curated meeting packages.

1. Sip on Singapore-inspired welcome cocktails and drinks

At Orchard Hotel, delegates can toast to contemporary spice-based cocktails that pay homage to Orchard Road's humble origins. Delegates at Grand Copthorne Waterfront are greeted with welcome drinks concocted with ingredients that are inspired by the multi-ethnic culture.

2. Immerse in Peranakan culture

Copthorne King's Hotel showcases Peranakan heritage by organising Nyonya kueh-making workshops, as well as arranging for little gifts like kaya jars and buah long long (a sour tropical fruit) drinks to be decked out on tables adorned with Peranakan kebaya cloth during turndown service.

3. Relive nostalgia with childhood games and snacks

At Grand Copthorne Waterfront Hotel, delegates can take a walk down memory lane with the 'Live Like a Local' survival kit. They can dig into an assortment of old-school snacks and play the Snakes and Ladders board game.

4. Feast on local delicacies

Delegates at M Hotel can trace the culinary journey of Singapore cuisine with its three-day Discover Singapore Stories Event Package. They can wake up to kaya toast and soft-boiled eggs, savour classic hawker fare such as Hainanese chicken rice balls, nasi lemak and even craft their own ice kacang balls. For those who like Mod-Sin food, tuck into inventive dishes such as eggs Benedict prata and DIY chicken rice sushi.

5. Hop on neighbourhood tours

Business aside, delegates at M Hotel can explore heritage sites that are near the city centre hotel. These pre-event tours are complimentary as part of the hotel's three-day Discover Singapore Stories Event Package. Explore significant locations such as Lau Pa Sat, a popular food court and heritage enclaves such as Duxton Hill and Ann Siang Hill.

Meeting organisers can enjoy any of the two following complimentary benefits when meetings and events have been confirmed or held before 31 December 2021. These benefits are:

- Upgraded tea and coffee breaks*
- One complimentary guest room upgrade for the organiser
- Complimentary usage of one breakout room (where applicable)*
- One complimentary guest room for every 25 paid room nights (maximum up to 3 complimentary room nights)
- Complimentary serving of soft drinks
- Breakfast rolls & fresh smoothies / juices on arrival*
- 20% F&B discount for all delegates (except room service, alcohol drink)
- One complimentary meeting package (for every 10 paid delegates)
- Chef's selection of upgraded meal options (meals within hotel managed outlets)*

*Applicable for full-day or half day delegated packages

Booking period: From now till 30 June 2020

ADDITIONAL BONUS

For bookings of more than 100 paid room nights, choose an additional benefit option

MILLENNIUM
HOTELS AND RESORTS

For more information, email
sales@millenniumhotels.com

Purple Sage to dishes out new culinary offerings

Singapore-based boutique caterer Purple Sage has upped the culinary experience by bringing two of the country's well-known chefs, Justin Quek and Devagi Sanmugam, onto its panel of celebrity chefs.

Clients of Purple Sage can expect culinary masterpieces such as black miso foie gras; a modern take on fish and chips featuring seaweed and potato brick pastry, shaved salmon,

smoked dill crème and ikura; and Hokkaido scallop and uni har gow (dumpling) to be served at their events.

Well known for his Franco-Asian cuisine, Quek was the first Singaporean to be appointed the personal chef of the French Embassy and a recipient of the first Chef of the Year



Award by World Gourmet Summit Awards of Excellence. Meanwhile, Sanmugam has over 36 years of experience in the culinary scene, and has published 22 cookbooks.

Joining the duo is Immanuel Tee, who takes on the position of executive chef. Tee was a trainee at several Michelin-starred restaurants. He started his culinary career at Jaan Par Andre before moving to Restaurant Andre, under the tutelage of Andre Chiang. He also worked at Le Bistrot du Sommelier, Guy Savoy and Keystone, and the two-Michelin-starred Pastorale Restaurant in Belgium.

Hyatt to open dual-brand property in Vietnam

Hyatt Hotels Corporation will introduce its first dual-branded Hyatt Place and Hyatt House project in South-east Asia, slated to open in 2023.

Hyatt Place Saigon, District 7 will feature 300 keys, a café, bar, lobby lounge, three meeting rooms, an outdoor pool and fitness centre. Meanwhile, Hyatt

House Saigon, District 7 – which will predominantly cater to guests looking for longer-term accommodations – will consist of 250 studios and one-bedroom suites, and similar amenities. Both hotels will form part of the Eco Green Saigon 13ha mixed-use project.

IN BRIEF

Oakwood to open first Myanmar property in Yangon

Oakwood will be launching its first Oakwood Hotel & Apartments in the Bahan Township of Yangon, Myanmar, in 2H2021. Housed within a newly developed landmark, Oakwood Hotel & Apartments Yangon will feature 128 studio and one-bedroom apartments. Onsite facilities include an outdoor swimming pool, fitness centre, all-day dining restaurant and two meeting rooms.

The Fullerton Hotel Sydney makes debut

The Fullerton Hotels and Resorts has expanded overseas with its first non-Singapore property – the 416-key The Fullerton Hotel Sydney.

Occupying the former General Post Office building at No. 1 Martin Place, the luxury hotel in Sydney's CBD offers Fullerton Experiences, a bespoke programme featuring complimentary heritage tours and events, two F&B options and five event spaces.

All guestrooms are furnished with Harman Kardon Bluetooth speakers, Nespresso machines, TWG teas from Singapore, and a pillow menu. Atkinson amenities have been introduced in standard room categories, with Balmain amenities making a debut in club rooms and suites.

Guests can fill their bellies at The Place, which serves modern Australian cuisine and South-east Asian dishes; and The Bar which comprises The Lounge and The Room. For event planners, the pillarless Grand Ballroom is the hotel's largest function venue, capable of hosting a 1,000-pax banquet.

The building's rich history, dating back to 1874, can be appreciated through Fullerton Experiences' complimentary heritage tours. Docents will share stories of those who have



worked at the General Post Office building, which has connected Sydney to the world through letters, telegrams and phone exchanges.

The 90-minute heritage tours will also showcase the intricate stonework and reveal little-known facts of bygone years. Exclusive tours for hotel guests will run on Fridays and Saturdays at 10.00, while members of the public can join the tours on Fridays and Saturdays at 11.45. Each session can accommodate 15 guests.

Crystal unveils Asia-friendly river cruise brand

Crystal International Asia, in collaboration with Crystal River Cruises, has introduced its new river cruise line experience on *Crystal Mozart* specifically targeted at guests from across China and Asia.

Beginning March 2020, *Crystal Mozart's*

voyages will be anchored by the cities of Vienna, Austria and Budapest, Hungary and will feature a variety of six-, seven- and 10-night all-inclusive itineraries on the Danube River including special Christmastime Market cruises.

Crystal Mozart features private butler service in every room category, king-sized beds, ETRO amenities, robes and slippers, and flatscreen HD TVs. Additional features include farm-to-table cuisine in multiple, open-seating eateries: the Waterside Restaurant, Bistro cafés and the Vintage Room; as well as the Palm Court for entertainment and enrichment presentations.

As part of *Crystal Mozart's* new focus on the Asian traveller, in addition to immersive experi-

ences ashore, a host of new Asian-friendly features will provide "a comforting familiarity to guests from the region".

Dedicated English and Chinese speaking butlers will be available to serve guests while Michelin-inspired cuisine featuring international and Asian cuisine will be served onboard. Shore experiences, which will be led by professional English and Chinese language tour guides, are designed to deepen the understanding of Europe's landscapes, historic cities and quaint villages.

A highlight of every *Crystal* sailing is a complimentary live musical experience that captures the essence and cultural character of the region of each voyage. These "Signature Events" combine access to a landmark venue, such as Vienna's famed Belvedere Palace, with a musical performance.



BORNEO CONVENTION CENTRE KUCHING

10 Years Of Meeting Expectations

With a buzzing line-up of high-profile events and internationally-recognised accolades, Borneo Convention Centre Kuching has cemented its status as a premier convention venue in South-east Asia.



BCCK's key achievements

- AIPC Gold Quality Standards Certification 2018
- AIPC Apex Award 2018 — Top 17 finalist in the Best Client-Rated Convention Centre category
- rAWr Awards 2017 — International Conference Award for Excellence (Below 1,000 delegates) and Purpose-Built Convention and Exhibition Centre Award for Excellence (Below Gross 15,000sqm of total saleable space)



BCCK has hosted international shows such as the 23rd Asian Television Awards

Sarawak has been gaining momentum as a choice city for business events over the past two years. According to the annual statistics report by the International Congress and Convention Association, Kuching, which is the capital city of Malaysian state of Sarawak, was ranked 28th in the list of Most Preferred Cities For Business Events out of more than 90 cities. In 2017, it was ranked 75th on the same list.

Contributing to Kuching's burgeoning reputation as a business events destination are the numerous prolific conferences and events that were held in Borneo Convention Centre Kuching (BCCK) since its inception in 2009. BCCK, which celebrates its landmark

10th anniversary this year, is the first international purpose-built convention centre in Borneo. The centre hosted more than 1,600 events and welcomed more than two million visitors from around the world over the past decade.

Injecting buzz into Kuching

Some of the major events that BCCK has hosted include the International Energy Week, 17th Continuing Professional Development Series Diabetes Asia Conference and the 23rd Asian Television Awards. This dynamic influx of events have channeled growing tourism revenue and visitorship that have raised the profile of Kuching. Over the past six years, BCCK has generated more than RM266 million (\$S86 million),

boosting Sarawak's economy.

Datuk Hajjah Raziah binti Mahmud-Geneid, BCCK's chairman, recalled that expectations were high when the convention centre started 10 years ago. She said: "The entire state of Sarawak was eagerly looking on to see what we could do, and ten years down the road, the results speak for themselves. With our excellent team, support from the government, Board of Borneo Isthmus Development and local stakeholders, we have managed to elevate and showcase Sarawak as a phenomenal business events destination on an international stage."

Making an impactful mark on the world map

Over the years, BCCK has been awarded internationally-recognised quality standard certifications. Tan Sri Datuk Amar Wilson, BCCK's executive director, said: "Last year, the centre was lauded with the sought-after AIPC Gold Quality Standards Certification, which represents excellence in convention centre management. BCCK is the second convention centre in Asia that is recognised by AIPC, which is a global network of more than 185 leading convention centers in 60 countries."

BCCK's Halal-certified kitchens, including its 120-seat Raintree Restaurant, have received certifications include ISO 22000 Food Safety Management System and HACCP, which defines the effective control of food safety. Having met customers' satisfaction, BCCK has also received the ISO 9001 Quality Management System certification in 2013. Last year, the convention centre was also recognised with its third ISO certification, ISO 14001 Environmental Management Systems standard, which

recognises environmentally-responsible practices — a nod towards the global sustainability movement.

Innovating beyond a decade

Paying homage to nature, the distinctive architecture of BCCK is inspired by the rainforest trees of Borneo — the rooftop is fashioned after the native ririk leaf. With 7,435 square metre of rentable space, BCCK is one of the largest convention centres in Borneo. Its highlight facilities include the Great Hall that seats up to 5,000 people theatre-style.

2020 will be a momentous year for BCCK as it will be organising the inaugural Asia Pacific Tourism Expo & Conference, which congregates practitioners and professionals from the tourism and hospitality industry. The venue of the annual conference will alternate between BCCK and other venues in Asia-Pacific.

Eric van Piggelen, BCCK's chief executive officer, said: "To spark innovative practices and collaborative opportunities, BCCK has set up a new think tank group, which comprises a home-grown team of creative individuals, who endeavour to find fresh solutions to empower the business events industry for the next 10 years and beyond."

For more information, visit www.bcck.com.my

 [bcck.sarawak](https://www.facebook.com/bcck.sarawak)

  [bccksarawak](https://www.instagram.com/bccksarawak)



The Great Hall's banquet set-up



The International Digital Economy Conference Sarawak (IDECS) 2019 was held in the Great Hall in BCCK



Making of the world's greatest show

Dubai is determined to make Expo 2020 an unforgettable, record-breaking event on many levels. By [Xinyi Liang-Pholsena](#)

With less than a year to go until its October 2020 launch, Expo 2020 Dubai stakeholders are leaving no stone unturned in promoting the city for “the world’s greatest show” that will be held from October 20, 2020 to April 10, 2021.

Sumathi Ramanathan, director of destination marketing at Expo 2020 Dubai, hopes the six-month-long mega event will be a showcase of “the Olympics of culture, innovation, design and human excellence” and present Dubai as “a destination with a purpose”.

Expo 2020 is also set to be “a record breaking expo” in many parameters, she stated. As the first World Expo to take place in the Middle East, Africa and South Asia region in the event’s 168-year history, Expo 2020 Dubai expects to wel-

come 192 participating countries and 25 million visitors – 70 per cent of which is projected to be international.

Big architecture names the likes of Santiago Calatrava, and Foster and Partners are some the creative forces behind the globe-trotting range of pavilions, which have been themed along the lines of *Opportunity, Mobility and Sustainability* across the 4.4km² site, said Ramanathan.

The site’s centrepiece will be the AI Wasl Plaza, which will boast a dual projection screen, while other iconic landmarks include the AI Forson Park, which is conceived as a venue for major entertainment events and concerts. In addition, the expo site will feature a brand-new metro station.

A vibrant roster of 60-plus live events each day, from

▼ **The Mobility Pavilion will focus on human progress through the physical and digital realms**



A-list concerts to light shows, will guarantee that Expo 2020 Dubai is “bustling throughout 365 days”, which comes on top of 200-plus F&B venues serving up a globe-trotting plate of experiences in one destination, said Ramanathan.

Another exciting aspect is the National Day celebrations of the 192 participating countries each day from January 13 to April 8, 2021.

A raft of experiences also await business travellers at the mega site, which will set the stage for a best-in-class business week featuring TED-style talks, exhibitions, forums and workshops, she added.

With such a dynamic programme, Ramanathan is hopeful that Expo 2020 Dubai will overturn perceptions of world expos as “tradeshows or for business travellers only”.

Working along the tourism entities in the UAE, Expo 2020 Dubai has mapped out a two-pronged global strategy to drive international visitation, with an international consumer marketing campaign just launched across 30 key markets, while a B2B2C approach will be undertaken to collaborate with some 4,000 industry partners across key source markets worldwide.

“An authorised ticket reseller programme has been launched to enable the trade to bundle and package the UAE, inclusive of Expo 2020 Dubai, as a unique experience”, informed Ramanathan. Europe, China and India have been identified as top 10 visitor markets for the expo, while Singapore and Malaysia has been recognised as priority markets in South-east Asia, she added.

“We are interested in working with the trade in growth and frontier markets to co-create campaigns with them. Instead of going direct to consumers, we feel there is an opportunity for us to engage very closely with the OTAs or tour operators and travel agents to create consumer awareness campaigns with them,” revealed Ramanathan. “We have set aside funding for co-op marketing, and we’re also providing fam trips to agents and a whole raft of training materials to help them sell the expo.”



▲ From top: Terrace Districts; Conference and Exhibition Centre



“Incentive providers now get a six-month-only opportunity to bring corporate clients to a venue no one else has brought them to before.”

Sumathi Ramanathan
Director of destination marketing, Expo 2020 Dubai

Corporate visitation will be another market Expo 2020 Dubai is keen to attract. “Incentive providers now get a six-month-only opportunity to bring corporate clients to a venue no one else has brought them to before,” said Ramanathan. Not only will the expo site have several venues that can be privatised for corporate events, she added that teambuilding, incentives and meetings can be easily organised on the grounds, which also boast the 48,000m² Dubai Exhibition Centre.

The response from the trade has been “fantastic”, said Ramanathan. “We have quite a number of enquiries from specialised groups. For example, architectural itineraries are proving to be very popular with architectural associations; we have interest from fintech industry for tours to look at movement of data and artificial intelligence; and interest from businesses looking at sustainable resourcing, climate change, etc. All these topics are being explored at the world expo.

The diverse offerings clearly make Expo 2020 Dubai a “bleisure” destination, she stated. The agency has received “excited” reactions from the trade looking to create itineraries for families, stopovers for honeymooners, students, as well as “considerable interest” from niche and specialist tour operators in food, art and entertainment seeking to “expand their business opportunities”.

When asked if this mega event will help to enable the Middle East to shed its stopover image, Ramanathan said: “Expo 2020 Dubai gives good reason for the world to stop in the UAE and see the world in the UAE.”

Getting ready for Muslim MICE

It is no longer enough to just provide halal-certified food to be a welcoming destination for business event groups with majority Muslim attendees, planners tell [Mimi Hudoyo](#), [Rachel AJ Lee](#) and [Marissa Carruthers](#)

Event planners from Muslim-majority countries are urging destinations and event suppliers to quickly broaden their understanding of Muslim travellers if they wish to benefit from the burgeoning segment.

According to the *Mastercard-CrescentRating Global Muslim Travel Index 2018*, South-east Asia will welcome more than 18 million Muslim visitors by 2020 – accounting for 15 per cent of total visitor arrivals in the region.

Buyers at IT&CMA 2019 said that necessities for Muslim MICE groups go beyond halal-certified food.

A buyer from Dubai who has requested anonymity, said a place to pray in between meetings, and a meeting or conference programme that provisions for prayer breaks on Friday are important as well.

These needs are echoed by Willy Sihombing, CEO of Sedona Holidays Touri & Travel based in Medan, Indonesia. He added that some Indonesian Muslims even prefer staying in a Syariah hotel should there be such an option in the event destination.

“Otherwise, the minimum requirements are halal food and guestrooms with the Qibla sign (indicating the direction to pray),” Willy said.

While hotels are generally more aware of Muslim needs, convention centres (in non-Muslim destinations) have some catching up to do, opined Andre Christian, managing director of Talenta Tour, Malang, Indonesia.

When asked which destinations have done well in welcoming events with majority Muslim participants, Willy and Christian named Japan and South Korea.

Willy said both destinations have been “very serious” about attracting Muslim travellers.

“There are more and more halal-certified restaurants, and you can easily find prayer rooms at public places such as the airport as well as mosques in the city,” he said.

Muslims currently make up of about 20 per cent of Japan’s total arrivals, and most tend to visit for leisure. Regardless, Susan Maria Ong, MICE director, Asia-Pacific, Japan National Tourism Organization, said Japan’s keenness on capturing the Muslim MICE segment is evident, having opened an office in Kuala Lumpur in March 2017. The office has published a Muslim guidebook detailing restaurants and hotels in commonly visited locations in the country.

Taiwan, which has stepped up efforts to draw Muslim travellers, was recently ranked third in the world for being Muslim-friendly, up from the fifth position in 2017.

Jerchin Lee, executive director, Taiwan External Trade



AHMAD FAZAL YAHYA/shutterstock

Development Council, said: “Taiwan has done a lot to promote itself as a Muslim-friendly country; we have everything from restaurants and halal vending machines to prayer rooms in convention centres.”

Lee shared that Taiwan welcomed 60 per cent more Muslim leisure and MICE travellers in 2018 than the previous year. Recently, a 1,300-pax incentive group from an auto parts company in Indonesia visited Taiwan, and Lee said they felt “very comfortable” when travelling around the island.

“Muslims make up about one-fifth of the global population, and we are keen to capture the market, especially outbound travellers from Indonesia, Malaysia and the Middle East,” he noted.

Another destination that has made significant progress in this capability is Thailand, according to Christian. He found Thailand to be a convenient destination for his travellers and one where Muslim-friendly hotels can be found in the popular downtown Pratunam area.

This year, Thailand’s Ministry of Sports and Tourism hosted a series of halal-tourism training sessions with tour operators, tourism-related government and private agencies. The Institute of Asian Studies at Chulalongkorn University has also been recruited to research on specific market demands.

Senior lecturer Ismah Osman of Malaysia’s Universiti Teknologi Mara pointed to Chiang Mai as an example of how a destination can become more Muslim-friendly. The province is preening itself as a prime Muslim MICE hub, offering 12 Muslim-owned hotels.

The Thailand Halal Tourism Association is carrying out training with a range of tourism-related organisations. Halal food advisors are also on hand to concoct more creative menus at events and conferences.

“Halal food doesn’t have to be just chicken biryani and oxtail soup. We need halal catering companies to join hands with MICE centres. Caterers need to understand clearly how to respect halal food and understand the availability of varied options,” remarked Korakod Kanongnuch, president of Thailand Halal Tourism Association.

Products are being developed in Chiang Mai to appeal to the Muslim MICE market. This includes Ping Luang village, home to a Thai Muslim community. The community-based tourism project will welcome guests this year, and boasts a bamboo meeting room as well as a range of community-driven activities – such as halal cooking classes, traditional weaving and fishing – aimed at incentive and teambuilding groups.

INTERCONTINENTAL HOTELS AND RESORTS

The five elements of exceptional events

MICE planners know a little imagination and initiative can work wonders – when you focus on the right elements early in the planning process. The very experienced events team at InterContinental Hotels and Resorts shares five considerations that have enabled it to achieve breakthrough results.

1 Unconventional food and drink

Whether your attendees are gastronomically adventurous or conservative, food and drink can play a starring role. With a little creativity and special arrangements, even tea breaks and cocktails can impress.

• **InterContinental Singapore:** Pre- and post-event drinks at the retro-lux cocktail bar *Idlewild*, with cocktails and mocktails crafted with artisanal spirits from small-batch distilleries.

• **InterContinental Saigon:** Surprise attendees with live cooking stations offering tea and freshly prepared Vietnamese spring rolls.

2 Impressive interiors

A regular meeting need not always take place in a regular meeting room. Opt for sites and spaces with a special character and ambience.

• **InterContinental Danang Sun Peninsula:** The Summit by star architect Bill Bensley lifts the mood instantly with its crisp green, black and white colours and delightful design details.



The Summit at InterContinental Danang Sun Peninsula



Take a break with freshly prepared Vietnamese spring rolls at InterContinental Saigon

• **InterContinental Grand Seoul Parnas:** Bask in natural light at the Private Terrace that boasts breathtaking five-metre, floor-to-ceiling glass panels.

3 Inspiring views

A calming view of the ocean or a bird's-eye view of a sprawling city can offer just the right respite for harried attendees with maxed-out schedules.

• **InterContinental Hanoi Westlake:** The Sunset Bar offers stunning views of Westlake and the city skyline, perfect for an intimate gathering or sundowners.

• **InterContinental Seoul COEX:** From the outdoor terrace at the banquet halls on the 30th floor – Seoul's highest – event attendees can take in a magnificent panorama of Seoul marked by the iconic Han River and Namsan Tower.



The Sunset Bar at InterContinental Hanoi Westlake

4 Recreation and relaxation

Convenient, accessible options for recreation and relaxation can imbue an event with an aura of positivity. Choose a venue where attendees can easily enjoy a variety of exclusive treats.

• **InterContinental Phuket:** The Heavenly Pavilion, Sati Spa and Wellness offers personalised treatments with traditional Thai ingredients.

• **InterContinental Bali:** An immersive Balinese experience within hotel grounds includes a blessing ritual, visit to the Udiyana Sari Temple and Balinese dinner with traditional performances.



Cultural encounter at InterContinental Bali

5 Unique event concepts

Work with the venue manager to create unique experiences or meeting concepts. Consider a range of ideas and find one that reinforces the theme or ethos of the meeting.

• **InterContinental Landmark 72:** Go green in Hanoi with the hotel's Green Engage Committee, whose guidelines on paperless meetings, single-use plastics and energy conservation will help planners fulfil a client's sustainability goals.

• **InterContinental Jakarta Pondok Indah:** The Studio is the first-ever club meeting facility in Jakarta, supported by a team who can advise on everything from f&b to creative meeting ideas.



Green meetings at InterContinental Landmark 72 in Hanoi

Going the extra mile



Highlights

BESydney took the familiarisation trip to a whole new personalised level. After conquering the world-famous Harbour Bridge, delegates were treated to a panoramic view of an art and light projection show on the sails of the Sydney Opera House, as the day of their climb coincided with Vivid Sydney, an annual festival of light, music and ideas.

Another highlight was the welcome dinner-in-the-dark hosted in Luna Park, which featured projection mapping technology to deliver a multisensory dining experience. Projected designs changed along with the programme and presentation of food.

The closing dinner was memorable too, one that was infused with Aboriginal elements on Goat Island. It came with a surprise performance by the Australian Girls Choir and a dazzling explosion of fireworks over the Harbour Bridge to conclude the event.



BESydney's efforts yielded positive payoffs: Delegates spoke of their newfound good impression of Sydney, and discovery of fun experiences in

Sydney's suburbs that they did not think were possible before. Think sand dune quad biking in Port Stephens and horse riding at a ranch within a two-hour drive from Sydney.

Business Events Sydney pushes the experiential envelope with a fam trip that marries creativity with customisation, writes [Adelaine Ng](#)

Hot idea

Bring technology into the programme, such as projection mapping, to enhance creative delivery

Brief

In celebration of its 50th anniversary, Business Events Sydney (BESydney) organised a four-day familiarisation trip for key prospects and clients from its core markets in Asia, namely, China, India and Japan. Besides strengthening ties with these trade partners, the event was also an avenue for the destination marketer to showcase new products and experiences in Sydney and its surrounds to inspire future incentive events.

BESydney worked with a host of local industry suppliers, strategic partners and government agencies to pull off a spectacular show that would also convince clients who had already visited Sydney that this destination warranted repeat visits.

Challenges

This was one of BESydney's biggest fam trips, in terms of participant numbers and investment dollars, according to BESydney's regional director for Asia, Sinead Yeo.

"It's not always easy to combine different markets together into one core programme. We worked around that by splitting the various markets up into different activity groups. For example, the Indian group visited the iconic Sydney Cricket Ground and spent time with (Australian) cricketer legend Stuart MacGill, while the Japanese contingent went to Manly Beach, as beaches were high on their requests," she said.

To overcome the other major challenge of catering to the food preferences of different nationalities, BESydney arranged for separate dining experiences. During combined dining sessions, organisers opted for an array of Asian and vegetarian offerings to tickle everyone's taste buds. BESydney also impressed with its swift response to last-minute requests. One chilly day after scaling the Sydney Harbour Bridge, it had its scheduled restaurant prepare a hot soup within 30 minutes, in time for the arrival of all groups.

FAST FACTS

Event
BESydney 50th Anniversary
Sydney Familiarisation

Organiser
Business Events Sydney

Event company
Business Events Sydney

Venue
Various hotels and attractions
in Sydney and regional NSW

Date
May 26-30, 2019

Attendance
21 corporate clients,
travel agents and media

Breaking with tradition



To highlight the growing demand for unique event experiences, Penang Convention & Exhibition Bureau chooses to launch its global campaign in an unconventional venue. By [S Puvaneswary](#)

Hot idea

Unique venues can create greater excitement around an otherwise solemn business event objective

Brief

Penang Convention & Exhibition Bureau (PCEB) launched its global business events campaign, Penang 2020: BE Unfiltered, on July 12, 2019, in conjunction with Experience Penang Year 2020 and Visit Malaysia 2020. It aims to grow business events visitorship to the Malaysian state and showcase four new products including a mobile app containing information on Penang for delegates.

Penang-based Dreamz Productions Events Management

FAST FACTS

Event
Launch of Penang 2020: BE Unfiltered

Venue
Hin Bus Depot

Date
July 12, 2019

Attendance:
Approximately 100 people

“Dreamz was able to conceptualise an outdoor party that enhanced the unique features of Hin Bus Depot. They successfully brought together elements from the event’s rave theme and Hin Bus Depot’s urban and contemporary art edge to create a fun evening.”

Ashwin Gunasekeran, CEO, PCEB

was roped in by PCEB to co-organise the event as well as select an appropriate setting.

Event highlights

Hin Bus Depot, a former bus depot that is now a unique venue, was selected for the launch. Its large and flexible grounds were the winning factors, recalled Dreamz’s managing director Cheah Weiyeong.

Cheah explained that the venue could be divided into several sections that would support the main launch event, the press conference, and dinner party for attendees. The sprawling land onsite also provided the perfect spot to feature a collection of Penang’s famous hawker stalls in an open air setting.

A memorable entry and registration area was created – arriving guests were greeted by an art gallery that exhibited works of local artistes which they could pose with for photos going onto their social media platform. This ensured expanded visibility for the launch event.

Challenges

As this was PCEB’s first time using Hin Bus Depot for its event, Cheah said his team had to work very closely with the bureau to determine the right setup for the event.

Cheah said: “The challenge was to find the best layout for Hin Bus Depot as there were no designated stage area and seating area. There were also limited facilities and amenities available at the venue compared to the usual hotels or ballrooms, such as dining tables, chairs and equipment like large LED screens and lighting effects for the main event.”

Another challenge was the weather, as parts of Hin Bus Depot were outdoors and not sheltered.

Solutions

Meticulous planning and PCEB’s unwavering support were keys to getting around the challenges.

PCEB gave Dreamz approval for all required equipment to be rented, thus solving the problem of the lack of standard event facilities and amenities.

A wet weather contingency plan was drawn up. “(Our solution) was to move the hawker stalls to the covered patio so guests could continue to enjoy their food (even if it rained),” Cheah said.



The pleasure of bleisure

More business travellers are extending their work trips for a bit of fun, and are expecting business events to provide opportunities for destination experiences.

By Rachel AJ Lee

It is not uncommon to hear about business travellers taking a couple of days after a working stint to rest and relax – where time and schedule permits – before flying back to reality.

The lines between business and leisure have been blurred years ago, with corporate travel managers and event planners believing that bleisure – a word the industry has coined for the act of turning a business trip into a pleasurable vacation – will continue to gain traction. This upward trajectory is buoyed by factors such as supportive superiors and companies, and the rise in experiential travel.

Buyers at IT&CM Asia 2019 believe that the bleisure trend is driven by the younger workforce, who take work-life balance seriously and are encouraged by the minimal extra expenditure needed for a pleasure extension since the airfare has already been paid for by the employer.

Seneshash Yitbarek, general manager, Ethiopia-based Business Plus Vacation, does it herself.

“When I travel for exhibitions and tradeshows, I take a few days off to explore the destination,” she said.

Doing so allows her to “connect with the locals”, who are a “good source of information” on what to do in the destination – all of which is knowledge she takes back to her clients.

“Compared to the past, business trips now must have (an element) of leisure, whether it is part of the event programme or a personal extension,” observed Cindy Lie, executive director of Indonesia-based Infinity Holiday.

While the thirst for bleisure is strongest among the younger generation of business event attendees, Lie noted that the trend is also catching on among the older business travellers.

Faten Elbeaini, owner of Lebanon-based Daily Tours, said the desire to combine business and pleasure was natural among her clients, as they had to “travel all this way from one country to another”. Her clients would often carve some time out to explore the event destination.

According to a report released in October 2019 by CWT, companies were mostly supportive of

bleisure travel if employees paid for their personal expenses (76 per cent), especially in Asia-Pacific (79 per cent).

The study, created by CWT and conducted by Artemis Strategy Group between January 29 and February 9, 2019, found that respondents regarded the possibility of extending a business trip for pleasure as a job perk. The average number of times in the past 12 months that the respondents had extended their trip was 2.4. Travellers from the Americas took the lead with 2.7 times, followed by 2.4 in Europe, and 2.3 in Asia-Pacific. The average number of extended days – globally – was 4.3 days.

Punhan Gajarov, administrative services unit senior specialist (corporate travel manager), from Azercell Telecom in Azerbaijan, said: “For us, it’s a long way from anywhere, and we (the company) are happy for our staff to rest for a couple of days.”

Gajarov sees greater demand for leisure extensions when work assignments take his staff to South-east Asia, as air tickets cost more and it is a nine-hour flight to the region.

Peter Lombard, founder of US-based Globe Guides, finds higher bleisure occurrence among companies that are willing to “give their staff some fun time” and are “not particular about them coming back to work immediately”.

He often sees half the group staying on for a few days before or after the business event to experience the host destination.

When asked what do people favour doing during their leisure extensions, Lombard said: “It’s the new norm to do something that your peers have not done, whether it’s a cooking class, or trekking. Also, (bleisure travellers) don’t want to go to a popular temple and follow a flag; they want small group tours to a temple that’s one hour away and is peaceful and quiet, and be able to interact with the locals.”

The blurring of lines between business and pleasure is also impacting the way business events are conducted, with more planners looking at ways to inject fun into a solemn programme.

Lie noticed that her clients were increasingly requesting for

fresh ideas to experience a destination. She recently organised a meeting and incentive programme in Bangkok for an Indonesian insurance company, which included a teambuilding activity with a local theme. Delegates got to visit a local market to buy ingredients to make *som tam* (green papaya salad); travelled by public transport such as the BTS; and learnt *muay thai* from a professional.

Similarly, Gajarov is seeing a greater push for business events with a local flavour, where the fun part of the event may be held in a different destination in the same country.

For instance, a C-suite meeting may take place in Bangkok while the teambuilding activity and recreation are conducted in Phuket.

“We try to ensure our teambuilding programmes are done outside of an enclosed venue. If we find ourselves in a wine-making country like Italy, Moldova or Spain, we let our staff visit a vineyard, pick grapes, and learn how to make and bottle wine,” he elaborated.



“For us, it’s a long way from anywhere, and we (the company) are happy for our staff to rest for a couple of days.”

Punhan Gajarov

Administrative services unit senior specialist (corporate travel manager), Azercell Telecom, Azerbaijan

AMAZING THAILAND

Experiencing Pattaya's attractions, alongside the tastes and culture of Thailand, made for an interesting four-day programme for Arizona-based multi-level marketing company, Forever Living.

Some 800 people from around 150 countries participated in two full days of meetings and trainings at the five-star Royal Cliff Beach Hotel and its sister property, Royal Cliff Grand Hotel, before being let loose on the third day. Then, a full-day of outdoor teambuilding activities were conducted at Royal Cliff's landscaped Lotus Garden.

To round off their stay in Thailand, a full-day tour of popular sites in Pattaya including The Sanctuary of Truth, Nong Nooch Tropical Garden and Coral Island was offered.

The itinerary also included lavish dinners every night, prepared by Royal Cliff chefs, as well as cultural performances.



BALI BALI GOOD

Frolicking on a beach in Bali sounds like fun, and this is exactly what a Singapore-based company made sure to include in its itinerary, which Pacto Convex helped to organise.

Holding a Beach Olympic Games – on W Bali's beach – aimed to strengthen team communication, collaboration and adaptability, as well as improve problem-

solving abilities through a series of fun activities. The 50-pax group was divided into teams, and each had to complete different challenges.

Prior to the outdoor teambuilding session were two days of meetings. To get the most out of the trip, a few delegates extended their stay in Bali to experience the destination.



SUN, SEA AND SAND

Business trips can sometimes can be tiring for participants but when half of the trip is made up of social activities, it will go a long way in helping delegates unwind.

That was exactly the case for 850 dealers of Legrand India, who participated in four-day programme organised by Luxury Tours Malaysia. The trip comprised two full days of conferences, a day of teambuilding activities, and a day of social activities.

A welcome dinner at Pullman Putrajaya Lakeside – themed Bollywood Night – set the mood right, allowing participants to mingle before the conference kicked off in Sunway Putra Hotel Kuala Lumpur's Grand Ballroom.

Teambuilding activities commenced on the third day at the Sunway Lagoon Theme Park. The group was divided into teams and each had to work together to solve a set of clues which would lead to

a treasure discovery. There was also an F1-inspired friendly competition at the Sepang Go-Kart Circuit.

The itinerary took the group out of the city, southwards to Port Dickson where delegates played volleyball, soccer and cricket by the beach, and participated in sea sports like banana boat rides, jet skiing and paragliding.

After a morning of fun, therapeutic massages with hot stones and ointment was provided at a private beach area.



LIVIN' LA VIDA LOCAL

Navigating public transport in a new city can be unnerving but a Singapore-based financial institution ensured that its 56 delegates were able to enjoy doing so as part of a meeting and incentive trip in Hokkaido, Japan.

Organised by Singapore-based Dynasty Travel, participants were divided into seven teams, where each had to visit four train stations to gather clues and solve puzzles which eventually led them to their final stop.

Through this Amazing Race-style activity, delegates also learnt more about the Japanese city and its way of life.

Overall, the trip lasted five days/four nights, which included two full days of meetings. The programme concluded on a high note through a gala dinner and a prize-giving ceremony for winning teams.



A perfect blend

How are business events in Asia marrying serious work and energetic play?
S Puvanewary finds out

Careful now

As more business and leisure trips collide, International SOS & Control Risks' Aditya Luthra says companies need to reevaluate their degree of duty of care to travelling staff

Bleisure travel has become commonplace as part of many an organisation's job benefits. This has presented a conundrum that many organisations have found difficult to navigate.

While organisations now broadly understand and exercise duty of care for their staff, does this duty extend to employees who add on leisure time to their business trips? If it does, should organisations continue to exercise the same level of vigilance – including maintaining a degree of visibility over a business traveller's itinerary?

A study in 2016 conducted by Carlson Wagonlit Travel, found that 20% of 1.9 million business travellers surveyed included time for leisure in their work trips. As the figure demonstrates, the workforce of today accepts the blurring of boundaries between work and other life domains. Will the same workforce also accept that there could be some concerns over compromised privacy as part of efforts to ensure their safety?

There are several factors for employers to assess – the risk level of the recreational activities or destination, the risk tolerance and work culture of the organisation, the awareness of the staff on the organisation's duty of care obligations, and policies concerning the period when responsibility is passed over to the traveller.

PROBLEMS POSED BY LACK OF EMPLOYEE VISIBILITY

When business ends and leisure begins during overseas assignments is often when communication and accountability between the employer and employee becomes increasingly sparse. Bleisure trips contain an aspect of adventure or exploration; employees are less likely to structure their leisure itineraries, and may even switch hotels or turn off their phones to minimise roaming fees.

This is likely to come with a change in the level of risk that employees expect compared to the business portion of the

trip, and also in their level of vigilance against potential risks.

According to Ipsos MORI Global Business Resilience Trends Watch 2018, 44% of organisations surveyed found it challenging to communicate with employees during a crisis, and 39% found it challenging to track employee travel.

Imagine how these challenges could be compounded during bleisure trips.

Should an incident occur during any trip – bleisure or otherwise – it is critical that within an hour of the incident or what is referred to as the “golden hour”, employers are able to identify and assess who is affected, so that the appropriate security and medical help can be arranged and delivered swiftly.

Disasters, whether natural or man-made, can be unpredictable and while emergency response capabilities in disaster-prone countries have improved, having employee visibility adds another significant safeguard for both employer and employee.

SIMPLE MEASURES FOR EMPLOYEE VISIBILITY

The topic of employee visibility can be an uncomfortable one, as questions are raised about GPS tracking or by-the-hour updates. However, this paints an incomplete picture of what employee visibility means. Rather, it is ensuring that the necessary preparation and communication channels are in place to mitigate all potential risks in any environment.

The first step for business travellers is as simple as taking precautions like updating oneself on the latest security, medical travel and cultural conditions in their destinations before and during travel, which enables them to take the necessary actions to alert their company in the event of a crisis. They can also share their location through a secure platform to ensure that their whereabouts are known to the company. Both these efforts can be achieved through the International SOS Assistance App. Managers



▲ The workforce of today accepts the blurring of boundaries between work and other life domains

are able to quickly access reports on the whereabouts of their travelling staff and decide on the most appropriate course of action, in consultation with travel risk management partners.

The second step is establishing a mode of communication that is available when needed. Communication platforms like the International SOS' TravelTracker Incident Support allows travellers to be contacted quickly and reliably, and provides them and their employers with peace of mind. Business travellers who will benefit from an immediate channel for communication include those who experience minor incidents, sudden illnesses, or major catastrophes resulting in displacement or injury.

The responsibility of companies which have employees going on bleisure travel extends beyond simply approving such travel requests. The responsibilities and potential risks that comes with this type of travel must be taken into account.

The key lies in employees and employers determining where their respective responsibilities begin and end in such situations, and in setting up clear protocols of what each party can and should do in the event of a crisis or emergency. If this can be achieved, then the phenomenon of bleisure travel may not create significant disruption for employers and employees alike in the years ahead.



Aditya Luthra is the security director – security solutions, Asia, International SOS & Control Risks. He leads client engagements around Asia and Australasia, developing bespoke solutions in support of organisations and managing their travel risk mitigation strategies, policies and procedures.

Land of fun opportunities

Asian CVBs have noticed the pick up in bleisure, and have jumped on the bandwagon to position themselves as hosts with the most

INDONESIA

The Indonesia Convention and Exhibition Bureau (INACEB) is taking steps to maximise the potential of business events destinations – namely Jakarta, Bali, Bandung, Yogyakarta, Surabaya, Medan and Lombok.

In Bali, for example, event delegates can choose from activities such as watching cultural performances, cycling through villages, water sports or relaxing by the beach. Meanwhile, Bandung and its surrounds offer unique culinary experiences.

Local DMCs and event organisers can incorporate local attractions into business events programmes, such as having dinner in a palace, or providing a traditional massage service during coffee breaks. – **Mimi Hudoyo**

JAPAN

The Japan National Tourism Organization (JNTO) has banded together with the Japan Convention Bureau (JCB) to stimulate and promote attractive bleisure offerings

to overseas travel planners and agencies.

For instance, JCB is working to encourage more unique and historical venues to open their doors to meetings and event functions. These can range from traditional Japanese gardens to supermarkets, which corporate groups can use exclusively.

JNTO promotes local gems in outlying regions, and is working with local prefectural governments and suppliers to launch a *100 Experiences in Japan* book.

Local CVBs and DMOs are also rolling out their own promotions. In August 2019, Kobe City launched its *After MICE* programme to business travellers to experience the city through 20 shortlisted activities, while DMO Kansai Nara Treasure Travel is promoting its night tours and private access tours to restricted temples and shrines in Nara. – **Pamela Chow**

MACAU

The Macao Government Tourism Office (MGTO) has been encouraging bleisure

travel through its *Travel Stimulation Program*, which enriches incentive travel through support schemes such as complimentary tourist information kits, souvenirs, cultural performances and half-day historical tours.

MGTO recently launched a promotional campaign under a social and digital media partnership with Bloomberg to highlight the city's bleisure offerings through a stylish video mini-series. The campaign targets high net-worth and well-travelled millennials with increasing purchasing power and openness to explore authentic destinations. – **Pamela Chow**

MALAYSIA

The Malaysia Convention & Exhibition Bureau has positioned the country by showcasing its endless list of activities and places to explore for pre- and post tours, or for after work-trip extensions.

These include ecotourism and soft adventure activities such as whitewater rafting, snorkelling and diving, hiking, mountain climbing, glamping and bird-watching. The country is also a destination for more relaxed activities such as retail therapy, theme parks, golfing or visiting museums.

Such options are plentiful and diverse, and is never far from the main cities where business meetings and conferences are held. – **S Puvanewary**

PHILIPPINES

The country's destination branding is *More Fun in the Philippines*, which is also reflected in the CVBs MICE marketing materials, promotes both meeting facilities and activities in locations namely Manila, Cebu, Boracay, Palawan, Bohol, Davao, Clark-Subic, Bacolod-Iloilo, Vigan-Laoag and Baguio-Banaue.

While there are more than 7,000 islands in the Philippines, the country offers more than sun, sand and sea. Individuals can indulge in soft adventure such as jungle and volcano trekking, cycling, ziplining, or attend one of the country's vibrant festivals.

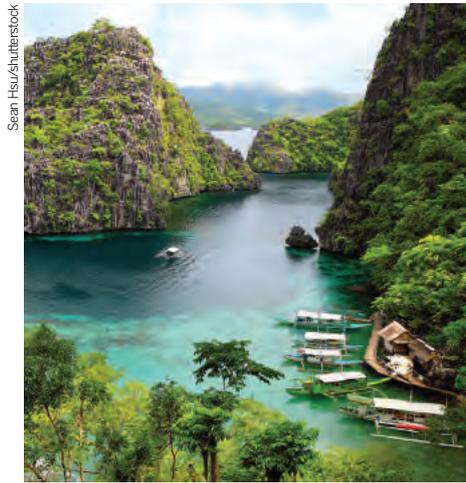
The Philippine Convention Bureau assists event planners by coordinating onsite inspections and planning tour itinerary, as well as offering support in-kind. – **S Puvanewary**

SINGAPORE

The Singapore Tourism Board (STB) launched the *In Singapore Incentives & Rewards* (INSPIRE) aimed at small- to mid-sized MICE groups. The incentive programme offers 63 complimentary group experiences designed to complement MICE



▲ From left: Locals making religious offerings in Ubud, Bali; Nara, Japan has a rich collection of traditional sites



▲ Clockwise from left: Desaru Coast Adventure Waterpark in Malaysia; crystal-clear waters in Busuanga Island, Philippines; Garden Rhapsody show at Gardens by the Bay, Singapore; Eternal Spring Shrine and waterfall within the Taroko National Park in Hualien, Taiwan; Korean kimchi

group itineraries and provide exclusive experiences. These fall under four categories: dining, entertainment and nightlife; thematic tours and learning experiences; tailored attraction-based experiences; and distinctive teambuilding activities.

Experiences include creating bespoke cocktails using herbs and spices found in UNESCO World Heritage site, the Botanic Gardens; an insider's tour of Singapore's Silicon Valley, the One North vicinity, with exclusive fireside sharing sessions by founders of successful businesses; as well as a private after-hours Garden Rhapsody show at Gardens by the Bay.

To qualify for INSPIRE, groups must travel to Singapore between now and December 31, 2021, with a minimum of 20 foreign attendees and stay for at least three days in the Lion City. – **Pamela Chow**

SOUTH KOREA

Korea Tourism Organization (KTO) has created pre-and post tour programmes for bleisure travellers, and is ready to provide support in the form of arranged transportation.

The country has myriad attractions both in the day and night, though the nights tend to be more lively. Bleisure travellers can visit night markets, or enjoy shimmering views from a vantage point in Seoul or Busan. For a more traditional experience, the palace is an interesting place to visit, as travellers can wear the hanbok and tour its expansive grounds.

KTO also has a list of experience programmes for travellers such as learning how to play a traditional instrument, or learning to make kimchi. – **Mimi Hudoyo**

TAIWAN

Meet Taiwan welcomes bleisure tourists, and has a strategy in place that entices business travellers to stay longer after their



trip by encouraging them to bring their spouses, families and friends and stay on after their work is complete to explore the destination.

Bleisure options in Taiwan range from hiking in Taroko National Park and soaking in hot springs in Taichung, to paragliding in Puli and exploring the various night markets in Taipei.

Aside from its attractions, Taiwan also positions itself as a friendly and welcoming nation, is a safe place to travel in, and convenient to get around by public transport. All these and more are heavily promoted by the CVB, which will also support planners by providing information on all things from sightseeing to venue arrangements, to fit a whole range of budgets. – **Rachel AJ Lee**

THAILAND

To entice business travellers to extend their stay, the Thailand Convention and Exhibition Bureau (TCEB) created *Thai-*



land 7 MICE Magnificent Themes – such as Fascinating History and Culture and Exhilarating Adventures – in its five MICE cities (Bangkok, Phuket, Khon Kaen, Pattaya, and Chiang Mai).

TCEB has also launched a *MICE Thailand Signature* campaign, where it works with over 300 establishments to offer business travellers attending TCEB-supported events, special discounts and privileges across six categories such as health & wellness, and gourmet & cuisine.

Heavy promotion of Khon Kaen is now underway, with efforts to play up the destination's fun activities such as bicycle rides in Nam Phong National Park and Isaan silk weaving at Ban Hua Fai.

The bureau works very closely with the local private sector as well as trade associations like Thailand Incentive and Convention Association, to ensure that event planners have access to a diverse range of bleisure products and services. – **Rachel AJ Lee**

World at their feet

Experts in injecting fun into serious business events, these event planners know just how to jazz up their own work trips



PETER LOMBARD
Founder, Globe Guides

I'm a foodie, and I love cooking, so taking a cooking class is my idea of relaxing. Cooking is also an interesting way to learn about the country through its local dishes. I've cooked in various countries I've visited, such as in Thailand, China, Afghanistan, India, and South Africa. In Afghanistan, I learnt to how to make a delicious chickpea stew, and I was the only student in class – it was great to get undivided attention.

MANUEL RAOULT
Director groups, MICE, individuals & FIT, Raoult Moise Voyages

I arrived in Bali a few days before the Bali Beyond Travel Fair in June, and went sightseeing at the Garuda Wisnu Kencana Cultural Park. I also visited a nightclub in Bali, where I had a good time. What I enjoyed most was meeting the local people; I made connections with a few people that night whom I still stay in touch with through social media.

KELLI VETTORETTO,
Regional director, HelmsBriscoe

We had our global conference in Houston this year, so I flew three nights earlier to Austin, where I saw a different part of the US. That was great trip because I got to spend a few days at a different location and learn more about the city. It was pure relaxation and I made the most out of the trip.



CINDY LIE
Executive director, Infinity Holiday

I flew over the Grand Canyon in a helicopter, and while I was in the air, my jaw dropped because I was in awe of this natural wonder. The Colorado River running, carving its way through the desert landscape was so beautiful. We also landed inside the Grand Canyon and explored the area before flying back to the city. The gorgeous desert scenery will forever be etched in my mind.



ANTHONY AKILI
President director, Smailing Tour Indonesia

I just attended a conference in Vietnam and had seven hours of free time, which I chose to spend on a culinary tour that involved riding a Vespa. It was a fun three-hour guided tour where we were taken to the best pho shop in town; to the market where street food was sold; as well as a local coffee stop. Another memorable experience I had was in South Korea. There, I went on a culinary walking tour guided by a scholar and expert on Korean food. Apart from eating in local establishments, we also learnt a lot about the history and food culture.

CHERRY PRADIL-PILOS
Operations manager, Cicerone Travel and Events Management

For me it was a visit to the Korean Demilitarised Zone. It was a business trip to South Korea, but I also took my kid along for a holiday. As the younger generation sees South Korea through K-pop and cuisine, it was a good chance to learn about the country, its history, and how South Korea managed to achieve its status today. Taking some time out of a business trip is also a way for me to find new attractions for my clients.

BILYANA TANEVA
Sales manager, Condor Holiday

Whenever I have free time, I try to explore the city, and have a workcation. For example when I'm in Bangkok, I will walk around the city and visit the shops in the evenings, as the city is a great destination for shopping.



SANDEEP RAMAKRISHNAN
Director, Consumer Links

In August, I led an incentive group to the US, where the programme began in New York and ended in Miami. Once the programme was over, I extended my stay and travelled to North Carolina where I met an old school friend whom I had not seen for a very long time. We had a good time as we are good friends and spent much of our time reliving old memories.



A unique welcome

Seoul is ready for Muslim business event attendees, but greater awareness of its warm welcome is needed, writes [Adelaine Ng](#)

Many people need to blink twice when told there's a mosque in Seoul, including non-resident Muslims. The South Korean metropolis is far more well-known for music entertainment and pickled cabbage than its cultural diversity.

Yet in its bustling heart of Itaewon lies a grand place of worship for residents and visitors of the Muslim faith, and it is surrounded by a melting pot of restaurants from different cultures including a surprising number of Middle Eastern and halal offerings. It's something that Seoul's promoters of convention business are keen to point out.

"Seoul's offering for Muslim business events is not yet well known," said Ji-hyun Kim, director of the MICE Planning Team at Seoul Convention Bureau (SCB). "So we need to keep promoting the offering through things like familiarisation tours".

It's no secret that the Muslim travel market has

▼ Coex offers prayer rooms and halal dining services





KOREA MICE BUREAU

Kaleidoscope of Korean Experiences

Meeting planners can choose from a diverse array of unique venues sprinkled around South Korea to give MICE events a memorable touch.



South Korea is making its mark as a top convention destination on the world stage. In 2017, the Asian economic juggernaut came out tops in the 2018 International Meetings Statistics Report by the Union of International Associations (UIA). Having hosted 1,105 international meetings in 2017, South Korea took the number one spot in the ‘Top International Meeting Countries’ list for the first time.



▲ Just KPOP in Seoul
◀ Jeondeungsa Temple in Incheon

Providing convenience and strategic advantages to MICE planners is the award-winning Incheon International Airport, which has connections to more than 186 cities worldwide. The technology-forward country also boasts cutting-edge meeting infrastructure that includes large-scale convention facilities and hotels; and to top it off, a colourful and dynamic Hallyu culture that makes South Korea an exciting business destination. Inject a special touch into your meetings and offsite experiences with a wide range of unconventional venues, from time-honoured temples to exquisite museums. Here are some of the Korea Unique Venues that have been selected and recommended by the Korea Tourism Organization.

MICE Cities in South Korea



▲ Jeju Folk Village

For culture cultures



◀▲ The Korea Furniture Museum in Seoul displays traditional furniture in hanoks.

Korea Furniture Museum, Seoul

What More than 2,500 pieces of ornate traditional Korean furniture takes pride of place in the Korea Furniture Museum, which is a popular haunt of many museum curators and designers. Visitors can relive the splendour and beauty of the wooden furniture pieces, which are set up and displayed like how they would look like in hanoks (traditional Korean houses). Visitors can appreciate how the furniture, which dates back to the 19th century (late Joseon dynasty), complements the interior of the

10 hanoks as well as the Korean lifestyle that values harmony with one's natural surroundings. Look out for the women's quarters, which opens out to a gorgeous view of the city. Widely regarded as one of the most beautiful museums in Seoul, the Korea Furniture Museum is situated in roughly 6,600 square-metre manicured gardens. Viewing and touring the museum is strictly available upon request. The museum grounds were famously opened for prominent events such as the G20 Summit VIP reception in 2010 and the IMF Managing Director's Dinner in 2013.

Key features

- The museum's largest Palace House can accommodate 80 people for a standing reception, the Storage House can have up to 25 people and the front garden can cater for up to 100 people.
- Located within 5km of JW Marriott Dongdaemun Square Seoul, The Westin Chosun Seoul and Lotte Hotel Seoul.
- Near shopping spots such as Dongdaemun Market, Lotte Department Store and Lotte Duty Free Shop.

Event ideas

- *Heritage-themed tea reception and luncheon or dinner*
- *Private museum tour followed by a VIP dinner*



▲ The Korea Stone Art Museum in Seoul has an extensive collection of Korean stone sculptures.

Key features

- The special exhibition hall can accommodate 150 people while the rooftop, which offers panoramic views of the city, can fit up to 300 standing people for a reception.
- Its cafe, which is adorned with embroidery works, can accommodate around up to 60 people.
- Within 5km of the Four Seasons Hotel Seoul, Koreana Hotel, JW Marriott Dongdaemun Square Seoul, The Westin Chosun Seoul, Lotte Hotel Seoul and The PLAZA Seoul.

Korean Stone Art Museum, Seoul

What Tradition and modernity coexist at the Korean Stone Art Museum in Seongbuk-dong, a picturesque district surrounded by Bugaksan Mountain and the historic Seoul City Wall. Curators have gathered Korean stone sculptures that were scattered around the globe to give a comprehensive look at the role of stone in Korean culture. Some 1,300 ancient stone sculptures and traditional embroideries are showcased alongside works by local contemporary artists. Special events can be held at the indoor exhibition area and outdoor garden with a postcard-perfect trail that is blessed with a bird's eye view of Seoul's city skyline. The museum has hosted events by the World Bank and the UNWTO Global Summit on Urban Tourism in 2018.

Event ideas

- *Sunset networking cocktails with a splendid city view at the stone and rooftop gardens*
- *Banquets in the stone art-adorned indoor exhibition hall*
- *Opening event*



▲ Asia Culture Centre in Gwangju has a plethora of meeting venues, from the theatre, meeting rooms to outdoor plaza (far right).

- Event ideas**
- Large-scale conferences, forums and symposiums
 - Company award ceremonies

Key features

- The sprawling complex has 16 meeting rooms with a combined capacity of 2,800.
- The ACC Theatre, which comprises two spaces, is an innovative space that can host a variety of performances, from popular genres to contemporary art.



Asia Culture Centre, Gwangju

What Asia Culture Centre (ACC) is a massive cultural complex that was constructed to promote international exchanges and cultural activities. Built on the site of the May 18 Democratization Movement of 1980, the architect designed many of the buildings below ground to honour the location's historical significance. The complex includes diverse spaces such as an outdoor plaza, library park, and arts theatre for visitors to enjoy exhibitions, performances and many other cultural programs. ACC has hosted major events including the International Symposium of Electronic Art (ISEA) 2019, ASEAN-Korea Cultural Tourism Forum and Gwangju Biennale.

For K-pop fans

Just KPOP, Seoul

What For many music fans around the world, Seoul is best known as the birthplace of K-pop, and Just KPOP embodies the city's trendy vibe. This K-pop-themed lifestyle and entertainment restaurant is the first of its kind in the country, which shines the spotlight on popular Korean culture. Operating as a brunch café and deli in the day, this hip venue transforms into a restaurant that also serves up live musical performances with food at night. Performances span from contemporary Korean music, from hip-hop, jazz, pop to traditional crossover music.



▲ Sing and jive to the infectious Korean pop tunes to Just KPOP in Seoul.

Key features

- The venue, which accommodates up to 400 people, has a stage that is equipped with specialised sound and lighting systems.
- Event management staff can provide one-stop support services, taking the hassle out of planning events.

- Event ideas**
- Staff appreciation events complete with singathons
 - Product launches with a hip Korean twist

Why Korea?

International reputation

- Ranked No. 1 in the 2018 International Meetings Statistics Report by the Union of International Associations (UIA)
- Hosted international events such as the G20 Seoul Summit 2010 and Rotary International Convention 2016

Outstanding MICE Infrastructure

- Offers the fastest average internet connection in the world and free Wi-Fi in public areas for seamless connectivity on the go

Unique Experiences

- Unconventional business meetings experiences that tap on the South Korea's rich culture and heritage

For history buffs

DMZ Museum, Gangwon

What The DMZ Museum opened its doors in 2009 in the Civilian Control Zone (CCZ) at the northernmost end of South Korea in Goseong in Gangwon Province. The museum provides detailed information about the Korean War, which resulted in the setting up of the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ). The museum offers a comprehensive understanding of the DMZ, from its historical background to reports on the area's future ecological importance and cultural value. Visitors can also visit the Goseong Unification Observatory en route to the museum. Due to its location within the CCZ, the use of the meeting spaces is subject to prior application and approval.



▲ The DMZ Museum in Gangwon delves into the Korean War and the setting up of the Demilitarized Zone.

Key features

- The main conference hall in the multi-purpose centre can host seminars, academic meetings and international conferences.
- The meeting spaces can cater for group events from 20 to 300 pax in the largest hall, and the purpose-built outdoor stage can be used for performances.



- History-themed workshops and meetings with a townhall address at the outdoor stage
- Staff excursions



▲ Colourful lanterns adorning a building entrance in Jeondeungsa Temple in Incheon.

Key features

- The hanok at Jeondeungsa Temple can be catered for indoor banqueting and outdoor events may be organised with prior approval from the temple.
- The temple provides temple stay and cultural programs. Activities include temple etiquette, meditation and making prayer beads. Temple food, which is suitable for both vegans and vegetarians, is provided.



- Temple stay as part of a company retreat or incentive trip
- Cultural immersion programmes

Experience Hallyu culture

• Experience the vibrant culture K-pop and K-drama that have taken the world by storm

Highly customisable support programmes

• The Korea MICE Bureau offers associations and corporate groups generous and highly customisable support to successfully host international meetings and business events in South Korea

For more information, visit www.koreaconvention.org

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KOREA, BEYOND MEETINGS
WWW.KOREACONVENTION.ORG

“We try our best to understand and accommodate visitors from different cultures and provide them with unique and authentic experiences that are customised for groups. We are also developing and promoting programmes that allow Muslims to experience their favourite content.”

Ji-hyun Kim
Director, MICE Planning Team,
Seoul Convention Bureau



been gaining in prominence in recent years, including Muslim business travel. It is projected to grow to 156 million visitors by 2020, representing 10 per cent of the travel segment and generating US\$220 billion in business value, according to the latest *Mastercard-CrescentRating Global Muslim Travel Index*.

“South-east Asian companies, including from Indonesia and Malaysia, are on the rise and are one of the most important markets for SCB,” said Kim. “Participants (from these) companies are often big fans of the Korean Wave and are highly interested in Korean fashion, beauty and pop-culture. (To this end) we promote various programmes, such as the broadcasting theme park tour, SM Town Coex Artium, and K-pop singing and dancing experiences.”

Kim notes that the Muslim market isn’t considered large yet for Seoul but it is “definitely a market with growth potential”. Muslims currently represent up to 20 per cent of SCB-supported programmes and the number is growing, with the incentive tours market proving to be the strongest segment.

Seoul’s sprawling Coex venue for conventions and exhibitions has also been responding to the call for services for Muslim business travellers, who have use of a specially created prayer room and can request for halal dining options from Coex’s official in-house catering company, Gramercy.

In addition, InterContinental Seoul Coex



▲ See Seoul from an elevated angle; Seoullo 7017 is a park occupying what was once a highway for vehicles



xooosabur/shutterstock

▲ Witness the changing of the guards ceremony at the gates of Deoksugung Palace

offers a prayer time clock, a Qur'an, prayer mat, Qibla prayer direction signage and a compass while Grand InterContinental Seoul Parnas hotel provides a prayer time clock, Qur'an and compass.

"The Muslim market is a significant one for both international conferences and tradeshow," said Stewart Ho, Coex's international marketing manager.

"This is also the case for us for our own organised shows, such as the Jakarta International Premium Products Fair. Recognising the overwhelming Muslim population of Indonesia, we promote the fair as a stepping stone for trade and business in the Indonesian halal market".

Ho also points to the Halal Trade Expo, an annual event for the past five years at Coex, as another example of the market's significance. The expo saw more than 30,000 visitors with 200 exhibitors in 2019, leading Ho to state: "At Coex we are certainly expecting inbound numbers from Muslim-centric (countries) to continue to be bullish, if not rise, in the coming years."

But while Seoul's efforts to attract the Muslim travel market has been noted by CrescentRating, especially commending the growing halal food options, the company's founder and CEO Fazal Bahardeen told *TTGmice* there are areas for improvement.

"Having (more) halal food options and prayer facilities at event venues and expos, and a few fine dining halal options for business meetings (would be desirable)," he said. "A good example is what Taipei is doing now. They recently opened a prayer room at Taipei 101. Most of the attractions also have (introduced) prayer rooms."

A Jakarta-based DMC executive who asked to remain anonymous agreed. "(Seoul) needs to provide more information for Muslim visitors," she said. "For example (showing the) praying direction in hotel rooms, facilitating signs for halal food at breakfast areas, awarding halal certificates to restaurants and providing more prayer rooms at (attractions)."

DEVELOPMENTS TO WATCH

01 A new convention centre in Seoul, designed to attract more international conferences, is under proposal as part of expansion plans by the Coex group, giving Seoul seven convention centres upon government approval. The Coex Center Jamsil would be built within the expansion's 720,000m² of space and includes entertainment venues, hotels and a marina. Completion is expected in 2025.

02 Seoul Tourism Organisation (STO) is forming partnerships with other cities such as Gangwon-do and Gwangju-si, which will benefit business groups that organise their stay in partner cities. Business groups that stay longer than one night in Seoul and either Gangwon or Gwangju may get additional support including funding to host their events. STO is working with more second-tier cities to offer similar benefits.

03 Seoul MICE Alliance has been moving to focus on exhibition business rather than associations meetings and re-organising internally to reflect the priority. Emphasis is placed on IT convergence, bio, green, fashion, design, cultural contents, and medical industries. The move is in response to meeting the needs of exhibition industry members who host annual events in Seoul.



FAST FACTS

50 The number of international participants needed to unlock a range of benefits for business groups, such as a welcome message at Incheon Airport, customised experiences and bidding support with conditions

6,000 The number of delegates from China's Auran group who visited Changdeokgung Palace in 2016, on a rare business event hosted in a Korean palace that included a performance

1 million The number of Muslims expected to visit South Korea this year, after numbers in the first half of 2019 showed a 9.8 per cent hike compared with the previous year



White, sandy goodness

Phu Quoc's strong tourism infrastructure for the holiday market is helping to attract bleisure-seeking MICE groups, writes [Marissa Carruthers](#)

▲ Phu Quoc Cable Car, which connects Phu Quoc island to Hon Thom in southern Vietnam, is named the world's longest by the Guinness Book of World Records

The Vietnamese island of Phu Quoc is planting itself firmly on the region's map as it emerges as a healthy player in the business events market.

Vast development in tourism and infrastructure, as well as the entry of a string of quality local and international hotel brands and products in recent years, have seen Vietnam's largest island position itself as a major contender for events.

With its white sandy beaches, marine parks, vast jungle and growing collection of business-related facilities, Phu Quoc is all ready to combine business with the beach to entice bleisure-seeking event attendees.

William George, area director of marketing at IHG Indochina, said: "The location is beautiful, with unspoiled beaches and opportunities for outdoor team-building activities, and for delegates to learn about the rich local culture."

InterContinental Phu Quoc Long Beach Resort opened in June 2018, pushing the island's MICE offerings. The 459-key resort features more than 2,000m² of indoor event space. This includes an 870m² Grand Ballroom for 600 banquet guests, a purpose-built auditorium for 130 people, and multiple breakout rooms.

George added that the island's strategic location is

helping to boost its profile. It sits a 40-minute flight from Ho Chi Minh City and two hours from Hanoi, and connects to the key regional cities of Singapore, Hong Kong, Kuala Lumpur and Guangzhou in less than two hours. He added: "The destination is also new; something important for many MICE bookers."

Alexander Leven, general manager of Asian Trails Vietnam, said the increase in regional flights to Phu Quoc is playing a part in stimulating growth.

According to the latest statistics from Kien Giang province's Department of Tourism, Phu Quoc welcomed more than 2.2 million visitors in the first seven months of 2019. In July alone, 528,809 arrivals were recorded, a 28.5 per cent year-on-year increase. Of these, 48,167 were foreigners, marking a 5.2 per cent rise.

Another factor spurring growth is all nationalities now qualify for a visa exemption for up to 30 days, and visitors using a connecting flight through Hanoi also do not need a visa.

A major game-changer to the island's MICE market was the opening of JW Marriott Phu Quoc Emerald Bay in 2016. The luxurious Bill Bensley-designed resort features indoor and outdoor meeting spaces to-

talling 5,080m², with the Grand Ballroom able to host up to 600 people in its 688m² space.

Francesca Barba, director of sales and marketing at JW Marriott Phu Quoc Emerald Bay, noted the MICE sector has been increasing “year on year”, with the main source market being domestic, followed by Singapore, Hong Kong, South Korea, Malaysia, Taiwan, China and India.

The ease to combine a business trip with island activities also make Phu Quoc an attractive destination for business events. Barba said water sports, island and beach hopping, pepper farm visits and riding the world’s longest over-the-sea cable car to amusement complex, Sun World Hon Thom Nature Park, are among Phu Quoc’s highlights.

Despite its rise in popularity in the MICE space, tourism players claim challenges remain for Phu Quoc to reach its full potential.

Jeff Redl, managing director of Diethelm Travel Vietnam, said equipment is lacking on the island.

“Hotels are offering a lot more meeting facilities and the number of conference and ballrooms are increasing. But if you need audiovisual equipment and other items, you cannot find it there and have to bring it from Ho Chi Minh City, which brings up the cost. Phu Quoc still hasn’t reached the level it really needs to truly develop as a MICE destination,” Redl elaborated.

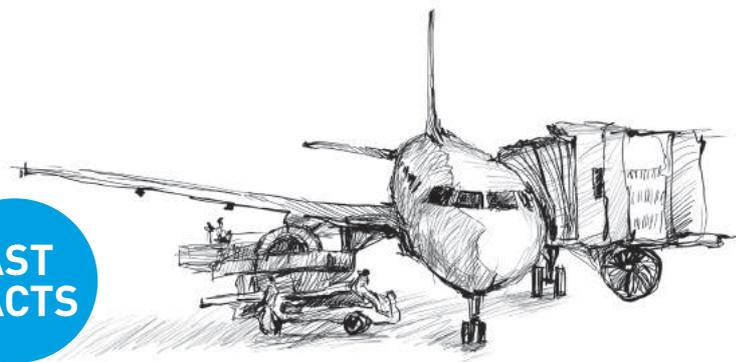
Seasonality is another issue for Phu Quoc. Redl added: “During low season, there are many hotel rooms but, for example, during New Year and Tet, there is a shortage. There is also a big difference in hotel rates between low and high season.”

In response, Barba said business events can get around the seasonality issue by planning outside of peak periods. “We have seen (business events) coming to our property even off-season.”

Despite the island’s growing reputation, George thinks more promotion is essential as “Phu Quoc is still an unknown destination” among longhaul guests and international MICE buyers.



FAST FACTS



28.8

The YOY percentage increase in international arrivals to Vietnam, bringing the total number in the first nine months of 2019 to 12.87 million

20

The percentage of travellers to Vietnam who came for business during the first nine months of 2019

248

The number of tourism projects given investment licenses on Phu Quoc island, totalling 335,448 billion dong (approximately US\$14 billion)

DEVELOPMENTS TO WATCH

01

High-tech aquarium, The Sea Shell, is slated to open on Phu Quoc early-2020. Located within a wider theme and waterpark development from Vinpearl Land, the 27,500m² turtle-shaped aquarium is expected to be a model for future aquariums featuring innovative advanced technology. Guests will be taken on a journey through five galleries that relate to different parts of the world, with educational programmes on Vietnam’s waters.

02

Kien Giang provincial officials are appealing for investment in key tourism areas, including Ha Tien-Kien Luong, Rach Gia-Kien Hai and U Minh Thuong, which link Phu Quoc with the Mekong Delta. It is calling for investment into creating and developing high-quality tourism products that incorporate eco-tourism, sea and island tourism and coastal tourism.

03

Watch out for multipurpose development Grand World Phu Quoc. Located within the Corona Resort & Casino Phu Quoc complex – the first Casino in Vietnam where Vietnamese can play – the site spans more than 85 hectares and will be developed into an upscale resort, recreation and trade services complex. Highlights include shopping streets, two five-star hotels, five four-star hotels and five three-star hotels.

◀ JW Marriott Phu Quoc Emerald Bay features luxurious event spaces



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Down the heritage track



Kill Leong/shutterstock

- ▲ General Ye Ting's Former Residence offers a peek into his life and old Macau
- ▼ Mandarin's House was home to the late Qing theoretician and reformist Zheng Guanying



liu yuxi/shutterstock

Cultural tours to experience Macau's rich heritage are on the rise but careful development is needed for MICE groups to benefit from them. By **Prudence Lui**

An emergence of cultural tour operators in Macau in recent years is paving the way for more quality and insightful destination experiences for visitors, and providing greater opportunities for planners to satisfy their delegates' desire for unique and memorable destination experiences during business events.

One of the pioneers in this specialisation is CoForte Organisation Development, which started offering cultural tours focusing on art, history and culture for special groups since 2016.

Brian Yau, the company's vice president for creative strategy, sustainability and CSR, told *TTGmice* that the demand for cultural tour inclusions is on the rise among his corporate clients.

"More than 60 per cent of our clients would choose cultural tours when they select Macau as their event destination. They favour indoor activities such as *azulejos* (Portuguese ceramic tiles) painting as well as art and music jams," he said.

CoForte works with DMCs by designing and offering experiential activities for the corporate client, leaving the DMC to take care of supporting logistics.

Yau thinks that unique, experiential activities are growing on the back of "homogeneous MICE products", forcing planners and event attendees to crave "more special and in-depth tours".

Another player that is leading the cultural experiences revolution in Macau is Macau Explorer Cultural Travel, established in 2014. Its managing director, Manuel Wu, was an urban planner before he made a career switch to the travel industry and took a chance at specialising in walking tours that spotlighted Macau's 400-year history. He never looked back, and today offers cultural experiences to corporate and association groups.

Despite the presence of these cultural tour specialisms, Macau's ability to offer truly immersive destination experiences for event delegates is hampered by capacity limitations and a lack of variety.

Wu said traditional facilities in Macau tend not to be able to accommodate large corporate and association groups.

"For instance, a Portuguese baking class in a local

cake shop will not be able to take more than 70 people at once,” he explained.

Olinto Oliveira, director for live communications with MCI Group, added that “the local market has yet to offer a wide variety (of authentic local content) from multiple suppliers”.

“Our clients do not want a standard tour, they prefer something that is organically embedded into their programme, such as classes on baking Portuguese egg tarts, Asian tea ceremony masterclasses and *azulejo* painting workshops,” he added.

A vague understanding of what experiential tours mean has also led travel agents to offer the usual sightseeing tour around a heritage area of Macau plus a narration of its historical background, and nothing else.

Industry leaders acknowledged that such tours were not experiential at all, might be of poor standards, and would put the destination’s image at risk.

To tackle this challenge, the Macau government, through the Macau Government Tourism Office (MGTO), has curated the *Step Out, Experience Macao’s Communities* walking tour series. Eight walking tour routes are available, with details on the route and featured attractions for each captured on its website and a dedicated mobile app. The latter guides visitors down the routes, allowing for independent exploration and is perfect for business event attendees looking to extend their trip in Macau for leisure.

The walking tours vary in duration, from 25 minutes to 40 minutes, and tell different stories of Macau’s culture and heritage.

For instance, the Crossroads of China and Portugal route takes 24 minutes to complete and introduces the participant to eight sights such as Senado Square, Mandarin’s House. It focuses on architecture and districts with a strong Chinese and Portuguese influence.

“MGTO has been doing a good job (in this aspect), but it is not enough,” opined Bruno Simões, president of the Macau Meetings, Incentives and Special

► MGTO makes it easy for visitors to explore Macau’s culture and heritage on their own, through a mobile app



Events Association. “Macau has limited alternative programmes and experiences to offer. This is clear to see when you compare Macau with other destinations listed on TripAdvisor. Much more must be done to develop these programmes and support companies and individuals that work in this area.”

Yau sees an opportunity for MGTO to work closely with tour specialists like CoForte to expand the destination’s portfolio of experiential tours.

He said: “We could develop the tours together while MGTO could exercise quality control and promote good quality tours.”

“Culture is a drawcard for Macau tourism, and should be leveraged very carefully; otherwise it is merely a gimmick.”

Brian Yau
Vice president, creative strategy, sustainability and CSR, CoForte Organisation Development



DEVELOPMENTS TO WATCH

01 The Passenger Terminal Building South Extension of Macau International Airport will be fully operational by end of 2019 upon completion of the airside corridor. With this facility, the airport will be able to handle 10 million passengers every year. Airport security facilities have also been upgraded while an Express Link service to the airport has been added to provide greater convenience to travellers journeying through the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area.

02 MGTO and Alibaba Cloud are collaborating on three projects to establish smart tourism: Tourism Information Interchange Platform, Application for Visitor Insights, and Smart Application for Visitor Flow. The Macau tourism website has also been redesigned to feature responsive design, visually-oriented content, map integration, and social media integration. These user interface improvements promise a better browsing experience for travellers seeking inspiration and tips on Macau.

03 The Outline Development Plan for the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area, which will have positive implications on Macau’s tourism industry, has positioned Macau as “a hub of exchange and co-operation where traditional Chinese culture prevails and other cultures flourish in harmony”, a “World Centre of Tourism and Leisure” and a “Commercial and Trade Co-operation Service Platform between China and Portuguese-speaking Countries”.

Strategic good

Pan Pacific Hotels Group's commitment to inclusive hiring is winning over its staff, improving loyalty and retention rates, and inspiring its CSR chief to do even more to help those who need support. By [Karen Yue](#)

"I've been in the hospitality industry for 35 years and I know that people is the key to success in our business," exhaled Wee Wei Ling, executive director of asset, lifestyle and corporate social responsibility at Singapore-headquartered Pan Pacific Hotels Group (PPHG), as she settled comfortably into her chair at the start of the interview.

While that may be a common corporate declaration, Wee and her team at PPHG have set strong examples in their investment in people.

PPHG has been practising inclusive hiring on an ad hoc basis with special needs schools for several years before it embarked on SG Enable's Project IN, a School-to-Work transition programme for persons with disabilities (PWD), in 2017. The company has since taken its participation in SG Enable further by developing a structured recruitment and training process for PWD.

Today, PPHG employs 16 PWD across its Singapore hotels and serviced suites, with another 12 undergoing training.

To ensure integration with its regular workforce, PPHG's hotels redesign processes around its PWD hires and carve out routine and structured tasks that are better suited for these individuals. For example, PWD hires may focus on folding linens or tagging uniforms with RFID.

"They perform important roles too, as they are helping to relieve our regular staff to focus on the more complex or laborious jobs, or those that require customer interaction," explained Wee.

PWD hires are given the opportunity for career progression. Citing an example, Wee said: "We have an employee who started out clearing tables during breakfast service when we have manpower shortage. Today, she is able to take orders for coffee and tea."

So, how does inclusive hiring translate into investment in its people and

business success?

A six-month study conducted by Elijah Wee, assistant professor of management at Foster School of Business, University of Washington, and involving over 1,000 employees across all organisational levels from PPHG's corporate office and properties in Singapore, found that the company's inclusive hiring policy over the years has yielded positive outcomes at the employee and organisational levels. This is especially so when the effort is accompanied by experiential and reflection activities which reframe disability as a strength and help employees make sense of the implication and meaning of the policy in their day-to-day work.

As a result, significantly higher levels of compassion, organisational pride and proactive customer service were observed, among other indicators. The research also showed that compassion is a strong predictor of the company's financial performance.

"We think we are helping the needy, but in fact we are benefitting far more from them," remarked Wee.

"When we work with special schools, our HoDs and supervisors are invited to see how students are trained in a simulated hotel environment. We don't go in blind."

Wee Wei Ling

Executive director, asset, lifestyle & corporate social responsibility, Pan Pacific Hotels Group

"Through interactions with their special needs colleagues, our staff have become more like a family. They have become a lot more patient, and are more willing to help and watch out for one another," she shared.

Having to design its work processes to accommodate PWD hires also "forced us to be innovative in our work system, looking at the usual process and finding a more efficient way to do





the same old things”.

PPHG’s work in inclusive hiring has earned loyalty and improved retention among its younger generation of employees, who “rate their employers by how much they do for the society”, observed Wee.

PPHG’s investment in its people extends to its ageing workforce. The company has renovated back-of-house spaces, particularly in its older hotels, to include safety features such as hand rails and non-slip tiles, reworked the job scope of its elderly staff, and moved them into roles with less physical responsibilities.

A yearly employment contract is also offered to staff who are past their legal retirement age, to provide option for continued employment for those who feel they are still able to work and want to.

“The new roles present opportunities (for our elderly staff) to learn new skills, while the opportunity for continued employment keep them active and allow them to feel they can still contribute to the company,” Wee remarked.

Having seen success in its inclusive hiring practices, PPHG is eager to encourage its business partners to do the same.

The company introduced its key-card holder supplier to the option of outsourcing some of its more repetitive jobs to people with autism, and even connected the company with the right organisation, set up meetings and facilitated the arrangement.

“We didn’t just make a recommendation and then took our hands off,” remarked Wee.

With the same objective in mind, PPHG also supports efforts to improve the employability of PWD through

▲ **Left: Brenda Tay is a guest services agent at Pan Pacific Singapore, where she performs her duties in the linen department**

Right: Danial Af-fandy, stewarding coordinator at Pan Pacific Singapore, works closely with his colleagues in the pastry kitchen

its work with adopted charity Extra. Ordinary People and Samsui Kitchen which runs a vocational training programme for final year students in special education schools.

As part of a fundraising campaign from September 25 to October 24, 2019, PPHG outsourced the making of three customised dim sum items that were supplied to and served at all its hotel dining outlets.

The pilot project provided special needs students with an opportunity to learn a real skill and prepare them for partial or full-time employment when they graduated in November.

PPHG’s inclusive hiring efforts tended to support students who were less likely to be employed after graduation, such as those with independence issues or have higher support needs.

“We select these students and place them (in our training courses) to help ease their transition. Instead of simply going home or be institutionalised (upon graduation), these children now have a chance at employment. It gives them dignity, and for their caregivers, hope,” she explained.

Understanding that hiring PWD is a long-term commitment that requires patience, PPHG spends six to nine months to settle a new hire in, and will redesignate the individual to another department or role should there be difficulties.

“We will keep trying, and we can afford to because in hotels, we have many departments and roles. We can keep moving the individual, say from stewarding to housekeeping, until he or she is happy,” said Wee.

Wee, who drives PPHG’s CSR work, dreams of setting up a school

in Singapore that focuses on providing hospitality training to special needs children at an earlier age, so they can sooner discover what they are good at and have a better shot at employment when they graduate. Her dream may be fulfilled once inclusive hiring gets enough buy-in from other supportive employers who are willing to provide the right work environment.

PPHG’s active community work has motivated staff to do the same themselves.

“For example, we have staff who often provide ideas on how to further improve the work environment for their special needs colleagues, and what to do for homes throughout the year,” said Wee.

“I must say that while it is good to have CSR work starting from the ground up, deeper and wider assistance must come from the top. Companies must take the lead and be committed to do better and more useful things than just visiting homes or distributing goody bags during the festive season.”

Wee’s other passion is in the arts, and she drives PPHG’s support for local artists by purchasing and using their creations in the company’s properties around the world. PPHG has also produced a book that spotlights its regional local art collection as well as carved out an art gallery in the lobby of Parkroyal Beach Road Singapore for artists who need a platform to showcase their work.

“As a young girl, my father (Singaporean billionaire banker Wee Cho Yaw) told me that as his eldest daughter, I must have a big heart. Perhaps he has named me Wei Ling so that I will be willing (phonetically similar) to help,” she laughed.

Catch up: Kriangkrai Kanjanapokin

Respected business events organiser, and the founder and group CEO of Thailand-based Index Creative Village, shares how he makes things happen



What set you on the business event organiser path?

When I was working as a producer at a TV channel, I learnt so much about how to customise events according to the needs of the clients, something I eventually fell in love with. In 1987, I decided to form my own company with the motto “Make it happen”. We’ve come a long way since then, and my company is now a leading event organiser in the region, with businesses across South-east Asia, as well as Japan.

What are one of your greatest achievements?

I managed the Thailand Pavilion at World Expo for five years, and will be managing the next one in Dubai come 2020. Working with international organisations can be difficult, but the building of the country’s reputation (on this world stage) is incomparable.

What do you hope to achieve?

To become a successful Thai company, so much so that we gain recognition and acceptance from our peers in other countries.

I want to push my company to be a regional power especially in the business events and exhibitions sector. To do that, I ensure my team is cohesive, and we are all working towards the same common goal.

What motivates you every day?

I believe in going the extra mile, and am always ready to attempt something no one else has done before. For instance, I worked with the Thai government to bid for the hosting of the World Expo (which we eventually) lost to Dubai; and starting a running marathon in a tough market like Japan.

What do you do in your spare time?

I travel. When I’m on the go, I take the chance to broaden my mind, while thinking of my future plans. Travel can really help. Surrounding myself with music is another outlet for me, as I can write lyrics, play instruments, as well as arrange music. In some cases, I use my own music for business events. – *Suchat Sritama*

Appointment



Dane Cheng



Greg Foran



John Pelant



Julia Swanson

Dane Cheng

Travel industry veteran Dane Cheng is now the executive director at Hong Kong Tourism Board. With over 30 years of experience in the travel and tourism industry, Cheng previously held senior positions in general management, marketing, communications and international affairs in various regions during his time with Cathay Pacific Airways.

Greg Foran

Greg Foran has been appointed as Air New Zealand’s new CEO, a role he will assume in 1Q2020. A Kiwi native, Foran is currently president and CEO of Walmart US, a role he took up in 2014. He first joined Walmart International in 2011 where he served in a number of capacities, including as president

and CEO of Walmart China, and then president and CEO of Walmart Asia up until he assumed his current role.

Jenni Hartatik

Onyx Hospitality Group has appointed Jenni Hartatik as general manager of Oriental Residence Bangkok. She previously held the same rank at two China hotels, the Radisson Blu Forest Manor Shanghai Hongqiao and Hilton Dali Resort & Spa.

John Pelant

CWT has appointed John Pelant as executive vice president and chief technology officer. Based in Minneapolis, Pelant will oversee the development of CWT’s engineering and technology, innovation and IT infrastructure and operations.

Julia Swanson

The Melbourne Convention Bureau (MCB) has appointed Julia Swanson to the position of CEO. Swanson has been acting CEO of MCB since April 2019 when former CEO Karen Bolinger departed from the organisation. Swanson has over two decades of experience, nine of which were at MCB.

Karen Merrick

The newest general manager of JA Manafaru Maldives is also the second female general manager in JA Resorts & Hotels’ portfolio of eight properties. Prior to this, she spent the last three years running the Song Saa Private Island in Cambodia.

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