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**DESTINATIONS**  
Japan, Australia  
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# A PRECISE JUGGLE

The Pacific Asia Travel Association serves an exciting industry which is growing despite a challenging global landscape, but CEO Mario Hardy says there are many tasks to tackle, from driving tourism to lesser-known destinations and encouraging sustainable processes to engaging next-gen professionals

# TTG associations

January 2020  
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# A two-way affair

It has often been said that when associations pick the next host city for their congress, they consider how the destination can help them achieve their goals, be it in attracting the most local or regional attendees, facilitating the best local connections, drawing the maximum value in business exchange, or providing the most attractive form of support to bring costs down while enabling the best programming and content.

Destinations with CVBs experienced in building a bid document for international association meetings, excellent events infrastructure, immaculate global reputation for having a track record in hosting similar gatherings, and convenient air access from major cities worldwide naturally rise up on associations' shopping list.

While there is nothing wrong in focusing on all that carries the association to its event goals quickly and easily, it does take far-sighted associations leaders to consider what they can do for the destination through their events.

When the Pacific Asia Travel Association (PATA; look into the mind of its CEO Mario Hardy in this issue's Profile feature, pages 10-13) plans its events around the world, it considers unique destinations that it can help uplift by bringing business travellers – they spend more than holidaymakers, and

are more likely to return for personal vacations should they acquire a positive destination experience – and directing global media attention to them.

Of course, with PATA's raison d'être rooted in the promotion of responsible development of travel and tourism in Asia-Pacific, one would think that the association has to have such benevolent event objectives.

Consider then the Asia Pacific Initiative on Reproduction (ASPIRE; read more about it in our News section, pages 4-5), whose purpose is far from promoting destinations. Yet, when it takes its annual events around the region, it makes it one of its key tasks to identify local talents and create opportunities for them to deliver a lecture or presentation on their expertise.

This allows its wider community of fertility experts to appreciate local expertise, raise the reputation of the destination's fertility prowess, as well as bring about more lasting benefits such as encouraging greater confidence among local professionals, those in hopes of specialising in this medical field eventually, and those seeking expert fertility treatments or advice.

So, when you plan your next congress, I hope you will – in a variation of John F Kennedy's famous words – not just ask what the destination can do for you, but also what you can do for the destination.



**Karen Yue**  
Group Editor

## PROFILE

# 10

### A precise juggle

The Pacific Asia Travel Association serves an exciting industry which is growing despite a challenging global landscape, but it has many key tasks to tackle, from driving tourism to lesser-known destinations and encouraging sustainable processes to engaging next-gen professionals, its CEO Mario Hardy tells [Pamela Chow](#)



## GUIDE TO

# 13

### Event tech innovators

Asia's thriving business events industry has created plump opportunities for homegrown event technology agencies to prosper



## DESTINATIONS



### Japan // Island charms

Anticipating a spike in visitors in town for the Olympic Games, the island of Shikoku is shouting out its surprising event venues and improving connectivity, writes [Pamela Chow](#)



### Australia // Deeper engagements

The associations sector is evolving, eager to become the movers and shakers of tomorrow. This is how Melbourne is responding, writes [Adelaine Ng](#)



### Taiwan // Taipei plays to her strengths

An amalgam of new meeting hardware, unique venues, Michelin-star dining and natural landscapes in the metropolis promises extraordinary opportunities for event organisers. By [Rachel AJ Lee](#)

## DEPARTMENTS

2 To our readers

4 News

9 Talking point

3 Contents

6 On the shelves

24 Case study

# Regional fertility congress rotates back to “supportive” Japan

By Karen Yue

An enthusiastic national convention bureau and an eager local scientific community have led the Asia Pacific Initiative on Reproduction (ASPIRE) to return to Japan for its 2021 congress, almost a decade since it last convened in Osaka in 2012.

Explaining ASPIRE’s destination choice, association co-founder PC Wong, said his team looked for destinations that satisfied these critical factors: strong support from the local scientific community, committed convention bureau, global accessibility in terms of air access and hassle-free visa requirements, costs, and presence of experienced PCOs.

Elaborating, Wong said the Japan National Tourist Organization (JNTO) was enthusiastic from the get-go, working with his office bearers to evaluate various Japanese cities that would meet ASPIRE’s objectives.

Although “most people would like to meet in Tokyo” and a majority of Japanese fertility specialists are located in and around Tokyo metropolis, Wong said Yokohama was chosen for the convention because of its close proximity to Haneda International Airport – a 30-minute car

ride – and a suitable convention centre in the form of the soon-to-open Pacifico Yokohama North, while being comparatively less expensive than the capital city.

He opined that returning to Japan “was an easy decision to make” because the last gathering in Osaka had left a deep and positive impression on members.

“The Japanese have a knack for pleasant surprises. During our Osaka convention, we were surprised with a tuna cutting ceremony. It was very unusual for us foreigners, and therefore very impactful,” Wong recalled.

Bringing the convention back to Japan will also allow ASPIRE to benefit from the strong presence of local experts who will contribute to the programme as speakers.

“There are many Japanese specialists with vast knowledge and great ideas, but their command of English may sometimes hold them back from sharing what they know with the international community. ASPIRE hopes to identify great Japanese talents on their turf and create opportunities for them to deliver a lecture or presentation on their expertise.

“We scout for talented speakers everywhere we go, with the aim of bringing more Asia-Pacific specialists into the spotlight. This is part of our legacy-building efforts for the local specialist community, and we’ve made good

progress. More than 90 per cent of our scientific programme at ASPIRE 2020 in Manila will feature Asia-Pacific specialists. When we first started with our conventions, regional speakers contributed to just 50 per cent of our programme,” he explained.

ASPIRE 2019 in Hong Kong attracted almost 2,000 fertility clinicians and scientists from around Asia-Pacific, and Wong predicts an even greater number of attendees at the Yokohama edition due to early delegate boosting efforts by JNTO.

“We usually promote a convention a year ahead, but JNTO started to market ASPIRE 2021 this year. Right after the 2021 bid was won, JNTO, Yokohama CVB and Pacifico Yokohama went with us to Hong Kong to promote ASPIRE 2021, and will do the same when ASPIRE convenes in Manila next year,” he said.



Wong: supportive CVB, eager experts

## Massive Galaxy-branded events complex to open in Macau

By Pamela Chow

Macau is affirming its appeal as a MICE destination with the latest unveiling of the Galaxy International Convention Center (GICC) and 16,000-seat Galaxy Arena, set for an opening in 1H2021.

Operated by the Galaxy Entertainment Group, GICC will bring a total of 40,000m<sup>2</sup> of event space, including a 10,000m<sup>2</sup> pillarless exhibition hall, an

auditorium for 650 guests, a banquet hall for up to 2,400 guests, a 4,000m<sup>2</sup> conference hall comprising three dividable spaces, and a ballroom catering to more than 1,000 guests.

Luxury lifestyle hotel Andaz Macau has also announced it will be joining the Galaxy Integrated Resorts precinct, also scheduled for an opening in 1H2021. The property will feature a dedicated check-in lounge catering to large event groups, over 700 rooms and suites, an Andaz lounge, a bar and restaurant, fitness centre and an indoor pool.

The brand was chosen as it could help add a local flavour to the event experience, which is what delegates these days look for – the opportunity to culturally immerse themselves in the destination – revealed Galaxy Entertainment Group’s director, operations development, new resort, Scott Kreeger.

These new developments will be connected to Galaxy Macau, the destination’s largest collection of luxury hotel brands under one roof comprising The Ritz-

Carlton, Macau; Banyan Tree Macau; JW Marriott Hotel Macau; Hotel Okura Macau; Galaxy Hotel and Broadway Hotel.

GICC is also touted to be able to elevate event planning capabilities by introducing Event Studio – a team of event professionals who can collaborate with organisers on venue selection, theme, décor, entertainment, as well as visual and lighting effects. For instance, one of the most innovative features planners can look forward to is the interactive capability of wall displays around GICC. These digital screens can be synced with mobile devices, allowing attendees to interact with their smartphones.

Organisers can also choose to customise the sweeping 75m LED façade wall, a capability which will have huge potential in “creating excitement for the event even before (attendees) enter the building”, said Kreeger.

He added that in the lead-up to GICC’s opening in 2021, Galaxy will be working with local event stakeholders to hoist up the destination, with a focus on raising awareness of the destination’s offerings.

This included participating in more regional and international shows – namely Tourism Expo Japan and IBTM World in Barcelona.

A rendering of the upcoming GICC complex





Malaysia chalks up another conference win; Kuala Lumpur pictured

## Hangzhou powers up for association meets

In November 2019, Hangzhou unveiled a new campaign, *Hangzhou—Leading Innovation for Future Conferences*, to spur the development of the Chinese city's business events industry, increase its contribution to the economy, and attract more association meetings.

The launch took place at an event in Cloud Town Exhibition Center, which fielded star speakers such as Alibaba Cloud's Wang Jian and BestCities Global Alliance's Paul Vallee.

This follows the Hangzhou Municipal Bureau of Culture, Radio, TV and Tourism's August roadshow in Beijing, one of Hangzhou's sources for association meetings and main target market. The roadshow updated national associations and societies about the city as a strong destination for meetings. Event experts delivered keynotes that focused on Hangzhou as an academic stronghold and industrial trendsetter; the city's adequate infrastructure and quality services; as well as the numerous business match-making opportunities.

Hangzhou Municipal Bureau of Culture, Radio, TV and Tourism's Zhang Ansheng; Zhejiang Association for Science and Technology's Tian Mei; and ICCA's Noor Ahmad Hamid were in attendance alongside representatives from associations and societies, PCOs and Hangzhou-based conference companies and hotels.



## Congress win for M'sia's biomechanics industry

Malaysia has won the bid for the 12<sup>th</sup> Asia Pacific Conference on Biomechanics (APCB) in 2023, the second South-east Asian country ever to host it.

The annual event provides platform to encourage, foster, and promote research in the field of biomechanics in the Asian-Pacific region, and build a community for the industry.

As the biggest biomechanics conference to be held in Malaysia, APCB 2023 is expected to welcome approximately 800 delegates and deliver an estimated RM8.4 million (US\$2 million) in economic impact.

Organised by the Asia-Pacific Association for Biomechanics (APAB), the conference was brought in by the Malaysian Society of Biomechanics (MSB) and supported by various authorities such as the Malaysia Convention & Exhibition Bureau (MyCEB).

Zulkefli Sharif, CEO of MyCEB, revealed that Malaysia nailed her victory in Taipei, Taiwan earlier in November.

"The bidding process required countries to present their pitch to the executive council of the Asia-Pacific Association of Biomechanics (APAB). Malaysia was successful as we put forward a very compelling case and a winning ingredient with the strong support by various authorities including MyCEB, the Ministry of Tourism, Arts and Culture Malaysia (MOTAC) and the Ministry of Education Malaysia (MOE).

"APAB was also impressed with the line of education and medical institutions that were part of the panel of partners such as University of Malaya, University of Malaya Medical Centre, University of Malaysia Terengganu, National Sports Institutions and more," said Zulkefli.

Noor Azuan Abu Osman, chairman of MSB, added that the conference will bring top-level biomechanists to Malaysia, which will in turn help to create a strong legacy in the field of biomechanics in the region.

### { Bureau brief }

#### South Korea highlights more unique venues

The Korea Tourism Organization (KTO) and the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism have added 19 new venues to their collection of qualified Korea Unique Venues across the country, bringing the total to 30.

Such venues are non-traditional meeting spaces, and include museums, historical buildings, renovated factory facilities and more. New entrants include Bonte Museum in Jeju, Hyundai Motorstudio in Goyang, and Eland Cruise in Seoul.

#### Bali gets her own CVB

The Bali administration, in conjunction with several private companies in the Indonesian province, founded the Bali Convention & Exhibition Bureau (BaliCEB) at the end of October 2019.

The independent, non-profit organisation will promote Bali as a destination for business events, with the greater aim of bolstering event arrivals, as well as help to win bids for large-scale international events to the island.

#### Jeju on a quest for more meetings

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

To achieve this, tourism authorities are working to improve direct air connectivity and playing up Jeju's track record in hosting such events, as well as its upcoming venues that will appeal to meeting planners.



## New mega conference venue joins Phuket's function portfolio

Angsana Laguna Phuket, part of the Laguna Phuket integrated resort complex in Thailand, has unveiled a brand new, 1,500m<sup>2</sup> multipurpose space.

Named the Angsana Convention and Exhibition Space (ACES), the flexible venue can accommodate up to 1,500 people for a conference in theatre-style, 850 guests in a classroom setting, or 225 attendees in U-shape and boardroom arrangement, with room to spare for light, sound and staging.

The venue is also ideal for welcome receptions and gala dinners, accommodating

up to 800 guests for banquets or 1,500 for standing cocktail parties.

Light and sound themes are customised for each event, while catering is offered 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.

Events held at ACES are supported by a team of Certified Meeting Planners.

## SACEOS, STB, WeChat team up to better engage Chinese visitors

The Singapore Association of Convention and Exhibition Organisers and Suppliers (SACEOS), Singapore Tourism Board (STB), and WeChat have come together to launch the MeetSG WeChat Mini Program (MeetSG).

This makes Singapore the first country in the world to introduce such an initiative targeting Chinese business event attendees. With MeetSG, a library of information about Singapore as an events destination, business events and meetings community, as well as the city's offerings, will be made available to over one billion monthly active users on WeChat, in their native language.

Developed in partnership with WeMeet, MeetSG will enable event organisers to connect with their Chinese attendees by offering information including event schedules and venue, news and push notifications. It also allows Chinese attendees to access up-to-date leisure information and offers to enhance their overall visitor experience in Singapore.



**From left: WeChat's Eagle Yi; SACEOS' Veemal Gungadin; WeChat's Juliet Zhu; STB's Andrew Phua; and WeChat's Fengming Ma**

As a start, the MeetSG WeChat Mini Program will be piloted with a few upcoming business events in Singapore which attract a significant proportion of Chinese delegates. They include the Singapore Airshow in February 2020 and the Asia Pacific Maritime in March 2020.



## New-build Novotel Christchurch Airport opens

Accor has opened the doors to its six-storey, A\$80 million (US\$109 million) new-build Novotel Christchurch Airport hotel, which stands just next to the terminal of the eponymous airport in New Zealand.

There are 200 guestrooms within – including 10 suites and 10 accessible rooms – alongside facilities such as the Food Exchange restaurant on the top floor, lobby bar, fully-equipped gymnasium, and Wi-Fi throughout.

Event planners may avail the 10 conference and function spaces, which range from the rooftop Tekapo room with views of the Southern Alps accommodating up to 260 guests, to boardrooms with natural light. All meeting venues are pillarless and include broadband, Wi-Fi, and the latest in-built audio visual systems.



## Vietjet links Danang with Singapore and Hong Kong

In December, Vietjet launched two international routes connecting Danang with Singapore and Hong Kong.

On December 12, 2019, the Hong Kong-Danang route commenced operations. Flights depart Hong Kong at 17.20 and arrive in Danang at 18.05. Return flights depart from Danang at 12.45 and land in Hong Kong at 15.30.

The airline also launched the Singapore-Danang route on December 20, 2019. Operating daily, flights depart Singapore at 10.50 and land in Danang at 12.30. Return flights leave Danang at 12.20 and arrive in Singapore at 15.55.

# Contemporary event space in Hue now available for bookings

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

Surrounding the museum are some 2,532 plants and trees, spread across 16,000m<sup>2</sup> of space across five function areas. This 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 groups of around 50 people.

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.

A second phase of development for the museum is in the plans, and works include the construction of an underground multifunctional room that can hold up to 150 pax. The project will be completed at the end of 2020.



# Maldives gets first integrated resort

Crossroads, the first and largest integrated leisure and lifestyle destination in the Maldives by Thai developer Singha Estate, has opened two of its nine islands.

The first island is home to the lifestyle district and heart of the mega project, The Marina @ Crossroads, an 11,000m<sup>2</sup> retail and entertainment space. The attraction, which is in close proximity to the city, houses luxury retail outlets, fine dining restaurants, a state-of-the-art event hall, as well as a PADI-certified water sports and dive centre.

SAii Lagoon Maldives, which is under the Curio Collection by Hilton, boasts a total of 198 rooms and villas, including overwater pool villas. The property is Hilton's third property in the Maldives, and marks the first Curio Collection by Hilton in South Asia.

The project's sustainable development aspect can be seen through the efforts made at Maldives Discovery Centre, an interactive educational-centre-cum-museum that promotes environmental conservation and Maldivian local arts and crafts. Another is the Marine Discovery Centre, a marine life laboratory that hosts biologists who carry out research and longitudinal studies on sea-life and coral propagation through a Junior Coral Curator programme and a clownfish release initiative that span within the area of 64,000m<sup>2</sup>.

The second island is the 178-key Hard Rock Hotel Maldives, which is developed and managed by S Hotels & Resorts. The hotel, which introduces music-inspired stays, is also considered to be the brand's first Maldivian outpost.



{ Advertorial }

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# TCEB entices groups with more activities, venues

The Thailand Convention and Exhibition Bureau (TCEB) has highlighted 115 new activities and venues across 14 Thai cities, in time for meeting groups heading to Thailand in 2020.

The list of activities include enjoying ethnic hill tribe cuisine in Chiang Mai, producing salt lick for wildlife near Pattaya, dinner on the floating table in the lagoon in Phuket, exploring the historical streets in Bangkok on a Thai Bus Food Tour, and discovering a new venue –

a former rice-milling barn in Khon Kaen.

Second-tier cities, located near primary destinations, also offer new experiences for delegates. These include a café run by inmates from an occupational training programme in Chiang Rai, turning sea salt into spa products with salt pit operators in Samut Songkram (near Bangkok), supporting a crab bank housing young crabs before their release into the sea in Chonburi (near

Pattaya), producing paper and thread from pineapple fibre in Song Khla in southern Thailand, and ice-breaker activities in a former US military camp in Udon Thani (near Khon Kaen).

Also announced was a range of new venues that will appeal to planners intending to work fun activities into their programme. They are Volume Climbing Gym in Khon Kaen, Zero Latency (virtual reality attraction) in Bangkok, Water Sport Ground in Pattaya, Thai Wake Park in Chonburi, and the Windsurf Club in Nakhon Sri Thammarat.

To encourage planners to take advantage of these new products, TCEB has developed three support campaigns: Meet Now: The Big Sisters; Meet Now: Beyond Bangkok & Pattaya; and Meet Sustainable.

Meet Now: The Big Sisters offers financial support for groups of 50 to over 1,000 pax, of up to 500,000 baht (US\$16,511) for two locations, Bangkok or Pattaya. Meet Now: Beyond Bangkok & Pattaya offers financial support of one million baht for groups of 30 to over 10,000 pax.

Lastly, Meet Sustainable offers a maximum of 200,000 baht – for a group of at least 50 people – to events with at least two qualified sustainable practices such as using a venue certified for sustainable environment or energy management or donating left-over food to a non-profit organisation.



Thai Wake Park in Chonburi is one of the new venues that can host large groups

## True Icon comes to life in Bangkok

The highly-anticipated two-level auditorium in Bangkok's Iconsiam has opened, injecting an additional 12,000m<sup>2</sup> of conferencing space to the Thai capital city.

Named True Icon Hall, the venue spans levels seven and eight, seating up to 2,700 people in flexible, fast-change halls that incorporate automated banks of seating. In addition to its three large halls, True Icon Hall also boasts 14 meeting rooms, ranging from 26m<sup>2</sup> to 400m<sup>2</sup>, which can accommodate a further 950 people.

Several innovative solutions have been included in the auditorium, including fast registration through facial recognition scans, and an audio translation innovation that allows conference attendees to listen to real-time translations from an application on their smartphones instead of rented headphones.

Sound insulation systems have also been embedded into the walls to reduce disruption from other events held in adjacent or nearby halls. Yet another highlight of True Icon Hall is the use panels of light pixels for the ceiling – said to be the first in an Asian conference venue.

Market interest in the new venue has emerged swiftly, with more than 30 conferences and events confirmed for 2020 and another 100 pending confirmation. Attendance at these events range from 200 to 3,000.

Confirmed events include the Asia-Pacific Society of Cardiology Annual Conference in March 2021.

## Pullman opens two hotels in China

Accor's upscale hospitality brand Pullman Hotels and Resorts has opened two properties in China, one in Suzhou, which boasts high-speed train access to Shanghai, and the other in Huizhou, a key gateway on the east coast of the Greater Bay Area.

Pullman Suzhou Zhonghui in Suzhou's Xiangcheng District offers 413 rooms and suites. Each suite includes a Pullman fitness bag and workout guide with yoga mat, while these items are available upon request in all other room categories.

F&B options include the brand's signature Junction Bar; Perle Café which offers all-day dining; Lingering Garden which serves up Cantonese and Suzhou cuisines; and Japanese restaurant Mokusei Teppanyaki.

For MICE groups, the hotel features a 1,200m<sup>2</sup> column free Grand Ballroom, equipped with a 360-degree and 4D holographic project system; two Junior Ballrooms at 300m<sup>2</sup> and 220m<sup>2</sup>; five meeting rooms, and a terrace space for outdoor events.

Recreational facilities include a Fit Lounge with a 650m<sup>2</sup> workout area and an 18m indoor swimming pool with Jacuzzi, a gym, steam bath, sensory showers and yoga room.

In Huizhou, Pullman Huizhou Kais has opened within the city's downtown district, part of Kaisa Huizhou Building, the tallest building in the city.

There are 307 guestrooms, including 13 suites and 14 family rooms, on offer here, all of which are outfitted with the brand's signature Pullman Bed.

Guests will have access to recreational facilities such as 2,000m<sup>2</sup> recreational space, an indoor swimming pool on the 46<sup>th</sup> floor, spa; as well as an all-day dining restaurant. Event planners may avail the 10 indoor meeting and function spaces, comprising a 800m<sup>2</sup> pillarless Grand Ballroom with LED screen.



Pullman Suzhou Zhonghui's lobby



# China reaches out

Chinese associations continue to thrive on China's Belt and Road initiative, investing in opportunities for knowledge exchange with the outside world. By **Caroline Boey**

Just as China's open Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) has spurred Chinese cities to aggressively court international association meetings, the Middle Kingdom's own industry associations are making firm moves to build business exchange and knowledge-sharing platforms with their country partners and international peers.

To prepare Chinese associations going international, the China Association For NGO Cooperation (CANGO) – under the Ministry of Civil Affairs – and the China Council for the Promotion of International Trade (CCPIT) Commercial Sub-council launched the China Congress of Associations and Chambers of Commerce in 2018.

Held on October 17 to 18, 2019, the congress welcomed associations, investment promotion and commercial bureaus and meetings management suppliers from China and beyond, national and city-level convention and exhibition bureaus, as well as CCPIT chapters.

Alicia Yao, the event's organising committee chairman, said the event aimed to "guide associations' manage-

ment of research institutions, conference development and investment promotion, help trade associations to carry out brand building, establish a cooperation mechanism between the Belt and Road trade associations, and provide a platform for international and domestic cross-border exchanges".

Emphasising the Chinese government's full support of the local associations' move to go beyond their borders, Yao pointed to the issuance of the Notice on Fully Hearing the Opinions of Chambers of Commerce and Industry Associations in the Process of Formulating Administrative Regulations and Regulations Administrative Standardization Documents by The General Office of the State Council in March 2019.

Vivian Zhang, director of event specialist MCI China, observed many Chinese domestic associations had begun to market themselves as international entities that were committed to being academically authoritative, raising the influence of the industry and having a strong voice.

Zhang said: "Chinese industry associations have

resources and academic status. The challenge is how to make use of these resources to develop healthily."

She observed that Chinese association heads were now younger and more exposed internationally, adding that association communication had also changed from one-way – external to internal – to two-way.

Citing an example, she said the China Infection Control Annual Conference of the China Association for Infectious and Preventive Medicine had Chinese experts and scholars deeply involved in the planning stage of the International Academic Annual Conference.

For long-established associations to grow, Zhang said new strategies and professional support were needed.

Faced with limited staff headcount, Chinese associations must re-examine their core focus, advised Zhang. Her suggestion is to outsource operations to a professional management team and for the association to concentrate on building its core content.

Mike Williams, senior partner and consultant at GainingEdge, an agency that

advises the convention and meetings industry, also suggested that Chinese association executives attend training by Union of International Associations (UIA) and International Convention and Convention Association (ICCA) held in China on governance, financial management, membership growth, and case studies of association best practices.

While Chinese associations are eager to do more, the ongoing US-China trade war could impact their efforts, opined Kitty Wong, president, K&A International and past-president, World DMC Alliance.

She explained that associations needed "approval" from the central government to organise any event. With China tightening up surveillance, Wong opined the national associations cannot do much without approval and may not even consider bidding for international conferences to be held in China.

She added: "Without a local organising committee to back them up to obtain approval and/or sponsorship, there is no reason for international NGOs to bring a conference to China."

Still, she encourages Chinese associations leaders to attend international congresses, conventions and seminars outside China "to make friends and exchange ideas with colleagues in their own fields globally".

"Don't be shy in connecting with the world," she advised.



**Wong: make bold connections**



**Mario Hardy**

## A precise juggle

The Pacific Asia Travel Association serves an exciting industry which is growing despite a challenging global landscape, but it has many key tasks to tackle, from driving tourism to lesser-known destinations and encouraging sustainable processes to engaging next-gen professionals, its CEO tells **Pamela Chow**

**The world today is facing many challenges all at once, from trade wars to political upheavals. How is the travel industry faring in such a state of affairs?**

Unfortunately, I think these challenges will (become) even greater moving forward. We have political, economic and climate challenges, and what we read in the news has a direct impact on currency fluctuation. For example, the Thai baht is extremely strong at the moment, and that impacts us at PATA (which is based in Bangkok), and many other businesses, too. We have very little control over these situations.

At the same time, there's been an impact with less Chinese coming over to Thailand (due to a tour boat accident in Phuket that led to other traveller security concerns), South Koreans not going to



We're an advocacy organisation, but at the same time, we also want to support our members, share (insights on) trends and understand the implications of all of these changes. It's challenging because (the world) changes at a really fast pace. All you need is a tweet at 03.00 from someone living far away, and the world changes, mostly in a negative way.

What we've been telling our government members is that it's extremely important for a destination to diversify their product offerings and not rely on one source market. The more balanced your source markets are, the less risk of being impacted by a drop in numbers.

#### **Is that also a pertinent consideration for the western destinations?**

Yes, that's one thing we're monitoring very closely with organisations such as WTTC and UNWTO through Uniting Travel.

Meanwhile, over in Europe, there is a sentiment at the moment about flight shaming, which is shaming people for flying because it's creating carbon dioxide emissions. This is growing at a really fast pace in Europe, where (regional travellers) are encouraged to take the train, find alternative ways to travel or not fly at all. It impacts outbound travel via longhaul flights because the longer the flight, the more emissions.

#### **Do you think flight shaming will drive the airline industry to look more seriously at their emission levels?**

They have to, for many reasons. The price of fuel is going up, which is a big push for them. Greta Thunberg has been doing a great job speaking the truth and what people don't want to hear, and this will put pressure not only on airlines, but on the entire travel industry – and other industries – to seriously look at solutions. There are solutions out there but they're costly and not accessible to everybody.

#### **Speaking of environmental solutions, PATA ran the BUFFET Initiative, aimed at cutting food wastage in the travel industry. It ended in May 2019. How did it fare?**

We ran the campaign for more than 12 months – probably 14 months in total – and it got a lot of publicity and interest from various parties in the industry. We had a lot of people asking questions, such as “can we implement it?”

The BUFFET Toolkit is a set of 10 tools that are available on our website. They're copyright-free, so anyone can replicate and use them, be they organisations, hotels, convention centres, restaurants or canteens. These are DIY solutions for anybody to implement, and to measure how they're actually succeeding in food waste reduction.

Probably the most successful part was the competition we organised among students. We had seven teams around the world that competed by implementing the tools in either staff canteens or local hotels in their communities, and then measure the results from it. The winners were a group of students from Bangalore, who implemented the solution in their student canteen and were able to measure a 50 per cent reduction in food waste, which was enormous.

#### **How confident are you in seeing sustainability efforts continue beyond the programme?**

We know that many other organisations have since implemented the BUFFET Toolkit. Even today we meet up with people who ask about where they can find it. We met with Kempinski (a luxury hotel chain) recently, and they said they'd definitely look into it.

Even though the campaign is officially finished, we're still going to continue promoting it. We may actually do some campaigns on and off during different periods of time to remind people about these tools. As new solutions and technologies become available, we may update them and continue to promote the initiative.

#### **What else is PATA doing to encourage improved sustainability in travel and tourism?**

We've announced our partnership with the Asian Development Bank and Plug and Play Singapore to develop the Plug and Play Travel Asia Pacific platform. Through this, we want to work with the hospitality sector. PATA brings our vast network of members who may want to use (innovative) tools, and Plug and Play will help us to find a solution.

We're (targeting to have) five hotel groups. So far, Hilton, Minor Hotels and Jetwing Hotels in Sri Lanka have signed up. We're looking for two more and have ongoing discussions with a few others. Graham Harper (PATA's director of sustainability and social responsibility) was in Sri Lanka a few months ago, and sat down with the Jetwing team to identify what problems and pain points they had.

#### **What are some concerns that have already surfaced?**

For instance, Jetwing is already known as one of the most sustainable hotel groups in the world. They want to go further. They have joined the programme to explore what else they can do, (especially since) they have so many properties. It could be about renewable energy, implementing clean technology in their properties, water consumption, or food or general waste.

The programme will work to understand what would have the most positive

Japan at the moment (due to political disputes), and so on. There are other crises in other parts of Asia where numbers are significantly dropping for a period of time. What's important is to understand what (the crises) are and how long they are going to last.

The actual number of tourists coming to Asia is still increasing. Although it is not growing as much as it did before, there's still phenomenal growth in the region.

#### **How is PATA helping the industry to navigate through these times?**

What we can do as an organisation is stay ahead of the curve to understand what the current trends are, what the potential impacts are, how we can mitigate these problems, and if things improve, how we can benefit moving forward.

impact on the organisation – of course for their bottom line and profit margins – but at the same time doing good for the environment and community. It will then source from more than 10,000 solution providers around the world that can solve the problem, which will be scalable across all properties. If we can do this with five hotel groups, implementing some of these technologies in thousands of properties can have a significant impact and make our industry more sustainable. We don't want to publish just a research report. That could be one aspect, but I also want tangible, measurable results.

#### **What kinds of hospitality solutions will become more accessible through this platform?**

To give one simple example, there's a technology company that provides high-pressure showers that can reduce water consumption by 50 per cent. One simple little widget that they put into the shower can make a significant difference in Thailand, Singapore and many other places with a shortage of water.

#### **PATA plays an active role in stimulating tourism business in unique destinations by holding its own events there. How have such destinations benefitted?**

I'm really proud to say that PATA has had a very direct impact here in Thailand, where the campaign promoting 12 hidden gems in 2014 is now promoting 55, and it keeps increasing every year.

Based on this initiative, Indonesia has started to promote 10 new destinations, and the Philippines is promoting islands that are lesser known. Hosting events has certainly helped to raise awareness for those destinations, and other tourism boards are now starting to embrace this idea.

For PATA Travel Mart 2019, Kazakhstan and (capital city) Nur-Sultan were completely new destinations. For the majority of delegates, it was their first time visiting Kazakhstan. Everyone I talked to at the event said they were happy that we selected this destination, because they may not have gone to Kazakhstan otherwise. It was a country they weren't familiar with, but it has so much potential.

**“...WE'RE A 68-YEAR-OLD ORGANISATION. IN ORDER FOR US TO CONTINUE TO GROW FOR MANY YEARS TO COME, FUTURE LEADERS HAVE TO BE INVOLVED WITH US AND BE PART OF IT FROM AN EARLY STAGE.”**

(Kazakhstan travel and tourism stakeholders) were extremely pleased with the publicity, the satisfaction of people visiting, and the trade deals done with Air Astana and other service providers in the country.

There were big discussions between Vietnam and Kazakhstan to develop some flights as well. I personally had a meeting with an investment firm that was looking at developing duty-free (shops) in the country and they have started to advertise for it, which is something Kazakhstan has never had before.

#### **How do you select which destinations to support through PATA events?**

We always have to look at accessibility

and the support from both the government as well as the private sectors in terms of presence and promotion of the event.

#### **What are PATA's plans going into 2020?**

Our vision and theme for 2020 is *Partnership for Tomorrow*, based on United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals.

We always talk about the unique strength of this public-private membership that we have, and how we actually bring the two sectors together. Now we're bringing education, youth technology and other parts of the (travel) industry together to form partnerships – even between government departments. A lot of our focus in 2020 will be on discussions around how we can form very successful partnerships between organisations.

We also want to continue to grow. We are trying to find new ways to partner with different organisations to encourage students to not only join as a member, but engage with us, with other students and with leaders within the industry.

This is really important as we're a 68-year-old organisation. In order for us to continue to grow for many years to come, future leaders have to be involved with us and be part of it from an early stage.

#### **Tell me about PATA's youth programme.**

We've started our youth symposiums and a new programme where we hold workshops at universities with industry leaders sharing insights. In a space of four years, we now have more than 5,000 students affiliated with the organisation. We have 23 student chapters globally: Singapore, Malaysia, Thailand, Nepal, New Zealand and Canada. We have university members in Europe as well.

#### **Is it a challenge for legacy associations to relate to the younger generation?**

Yes, old trade associations in every sector have faced challenges in recent times. Only those who are willing to adapt to the new marketplace will continue to survive. We're constantly looking at new ways to engage with youth and also existing members.

We recently assigned people as community managers, and the youth (department) was our first and most successful one. Our new Youth Ambassador engages students all the time.

We want to do the same thing with other members, so now we have someone engaging with our government members, and another with the rest of our community through events and activities year-round.



## **Leading the charge towards better tourism**

Mario Hardy was appointed CEO of PATA in November 2014 and is also the past chairman of the Board of Trustees of the PATA Foundation. He comes from 30 years of experience in specialised aviation businesses focusing on data analytics and technology, and is also the founder of Venture Capital firm MAP2 | Ventures, an investment fund in the field of fintech, artificial intelligence, machine learning, greentech and fast-moving consumer goods. In 2016, he received an Honorary Doctorate of Letters from Capilano University for his philanthropic work in Cambodia, where he helped develop a school for underprivileged children, and for his support in the development of a community-based tourism project in Vietnam.



Active Visual

# Event tech innovators

Asia's thriving business events industry has created plump opportunities for homegrown event technology agencies to prosper

## ACTIVE VISUAL, SINGAPORE

Active Visual started in 2004 providing audio-visual support to events and consumers. Over the past decade, the company grew its suite to include lighting and staging services, and the last three to four years saw the opening of a new team specialising in system integration.

It has accrued a clientele spanning government agencies, educational institutions and international event organisers. The company recently worked with Suntec Singapore Convention and Exhibition Centre and Digimagic Communications to develop the ImmersiveAV Suite – a new audio-visual capability that makes use of holographic projection technology to create a more sustainable and immersive setting for experiential events.

Willy Bey, director for Active Visual, shared that the company focuses on building closer B2B relationships with its

counterparts across the world – in countries such as Thailand, China, Cambodia, Japan and the US – as well as “collaborating hand-in-hand with renowned brands to provide more comprehensive and competitive solutions”.

He added: “We will focus on improving on our current technologies, such as projection mapping, LED walls and more sophisticated system integration solutions for our coming projects.”

## AIQ COMMUNICATIONS, SINGAPORE

Singapore-based firm AIQ takes pride in its patented Video and Image Recognition Technology (VIRT) which enables users to interact with still images and videos.

In 2018, VIRT was used at RetailEX ASEAN, where an app was created for the tradeshow in Thailand. To demonstrate the power of VIRT, AIQ CEO Marcus Tan made a presentation where people in the audience were able to point their smartphone camera at his slides, and instantly get the presentation file in the app which they can download and share with their peers.

Explaining the benefits VIRT can bring to an event in Asia, Tan said: “In Asia where people are generally too polite to ask questions, the technology can be used to improve interaction during a panel discussion. For example, one could point the VIRT-powered app at the ses-

From left: **Encore Event Technologies;**  
**Digimagic Communications**

sion backdrop and be directed to a page where they could text their question or opinion to the moderator.”

VIRT can also provide greater value to event sponsors by allowing sponsor logos, posters, and videos on display at the event to be interactive. Sponsors can tailor the message they want to convey when their materials are scanned by the event app.

## DIGIMAGIC COMMUNICATIONS, SINGAPORE

Founded in 1999 as a multimedia and events agency, Digimagic found its niche in experiential media that was well-received by clients such as museums, corporate galleries, theme parks and events.

“One of our first experiential media projects was designing the visitor experience for the Housing Development Board’s gallery, where we introduced immersive theatre and interactive experiences like rotoscope and hologram displays,” explained Digimagic’s owner/founder Donald Lim.

Since then, the agency has worked on similar presentations around the globe. For example, in 2010, it supported the 4G



network launch of telecommunications brand 3 in Indonesia with rotoscopes, holograms, projection mapping and drones across 28 cities.

Now, Digimagic provides an even wider range of technological solutions, such as interactive stations, immersive theatres, augmented reality (AR) and virtual reality. Its team also serves as “turnkey consultants” who oversee every aspect of event technology, from set design to execution.

Later this year, Digimagic will launch the immersive and interactive exhibition Time Capsule at the Singapore Flyer.

# Constructing the future

Despite not having any relevant experience, these two young, bright-eyed inventors created a novel solution for event planners, writes **Pamela Chow**

Brilliant innovations often come from unlikely sources, and this power duo may have just created the business events industry’s next big thing.

National University of Singapore (NUS) undergraduate Vien Le and alumnus Aaron Khoo have launched Avenevv, a platform where venues can showcase their event spaces, qualify leads, automate quotations, manage bookings, generate e-invoices, as well

as receive payments and post-event feedback.

Avenevv, which includes the extension Avenevv for freelance suppliers, currently lists some 100 spaces from more than 30 venue partners. These include InterContinental Singapore, Robertson Quay, City Serviced Offices, Zouk and Arcc Spaces. The platform has since bagged an award under Singapore Tourism Board’s Tourism Innovation Challenge for MICE.

“Event planners face the issue of visualising venues and their possibility for event usage, and physical visits could be a bigger pain point for overseas event planners. We also observed that the process of communicating with many different venue owners is often manually done and time-consuming,” noted Le and Khoo.

With this platform, booking processes – from quote collation to invoicing across various venues and their different policies – can be streamlined. The ecosystem also casts a spotlight on unique spaces that may have fallen off the radar.

They explained: “In recent years, we have

seen (strong potential in) alternative uses for under-utilised venues such as restaurants, offices, retail stores, co-working spaces or sports centres. However, being non-conventional event venues, they may not be event-ready.”

With Avenevv, such venue providers are now equipped with a one-stop-shop that merges enquiries, bookings, payment and even refunds.

## AN OUTSIDER PERSPECTIVE

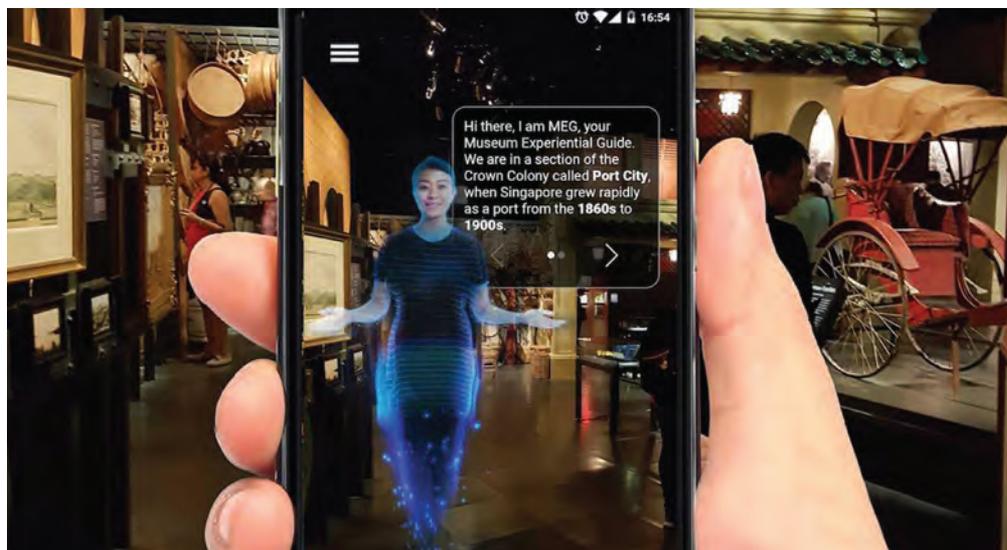
Rolling out this product was no mean feat.

Although Le and Khoo had prior experience in organising academic events in junior college for more than 1,000 attendees, they and their team members from NUS had no prior experience in the hospitality sector.

It was a “chance

**Aaron Khoo (left) and Vien Le, the brains behind Avenevv**





## ENCORE EVENT TECHNOLOGIES, AUSTRALIA

Previously known as Staging Connections, Encore Event Technologies has an established reputation for event production that has seen it grow from humble beginnings in Melbourne to branches across Australia and beyond.

It debuted in 1986 when technology was very different with the use of overhead transparencies and VHS for video.

“We have been instrumental in bringing new products to the event services

market,” said managing director of Encore Event Technologies ANZPAC, Tony Chamberlain. “We have a ‘PluggedIn’ team that is dedicated to the discovery of new products and services as well as developing new technologies of our own. Our digital range includes everything from webcasting, to projection mapping, 3D renders of what events will look like, through to polling and conference apps.”

Encore’s services now include event styling and design, and in-house partnerships with premium hotels and venues within Australia, servicing their

customers’ audiovisual and production needs.

The company has been expanding globally, with teams from New Zealand to Mexico.

It is growing its presence in Asia too, taking its venue model to countries like Hong Kong, Malaysia, Philippines, Singapore, South Korea and Thailand.

In other recent innovations, Encore has been using kinetic lights, which can be programmed to move in time with music or create visual experiences like wave formations, bringing an element of fun and theatrics to a business event environment.

meeting with a veteran in the hospitality sector” that spurred them to develop Avenev. Aside from functioning as an events booking platform, it can also collect event data that will inform on trends and consumer behaviours to benchmark the events industry.

To create a solution to address the pain points of the MICE industry, the team conducted rigorous testing with close to 50 corporate and professional event planners.

“They enabled us to better appreciate the intricate process of how decisions are made for B2B planners. There are many factors beyond

price: the event theme, objectives, an event planner’s personality and their organisation workflow, the venue operations and so on,” they expressed.

The next

challenge – and one of the biggest, confessed the duo – was introducing the concept of automating venue reservations to event planners, “who would always aspire to customise and add a personal touch”.

The pair added: “We also understand that there are certain reasons why most companies stop at listing, as bypassing is a common problem that could arise. The interaction between event planners and venue managers could get very complicated – beyond what a platform can cater for. Most of the time, event planners and venues may interact directly because that is what they are used to doing.”

However, they asserted that the benefits outweigh the concerns of integrating digital booking in the planning process. “When we break down the things that an event planner actually does, manual tasks take up a large amount of time and effort. Instead of focusing on developing great content for the event, event planners are now doing jobs that could be automated with technology,” they stressed.

The team is slowly making progress in converting more planners to the digital side. To entice them, the team is offering the management software for free while working on keeping it as user-friendly as possible.

## NOT RESTING ON THEIR LAURELS

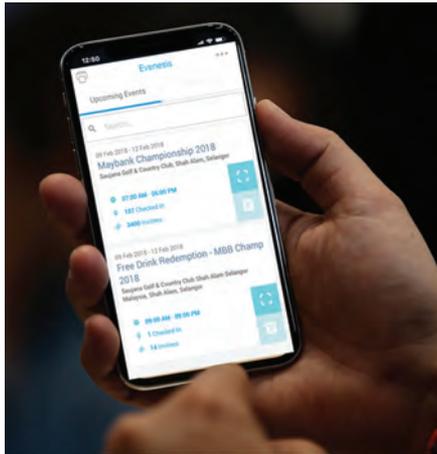
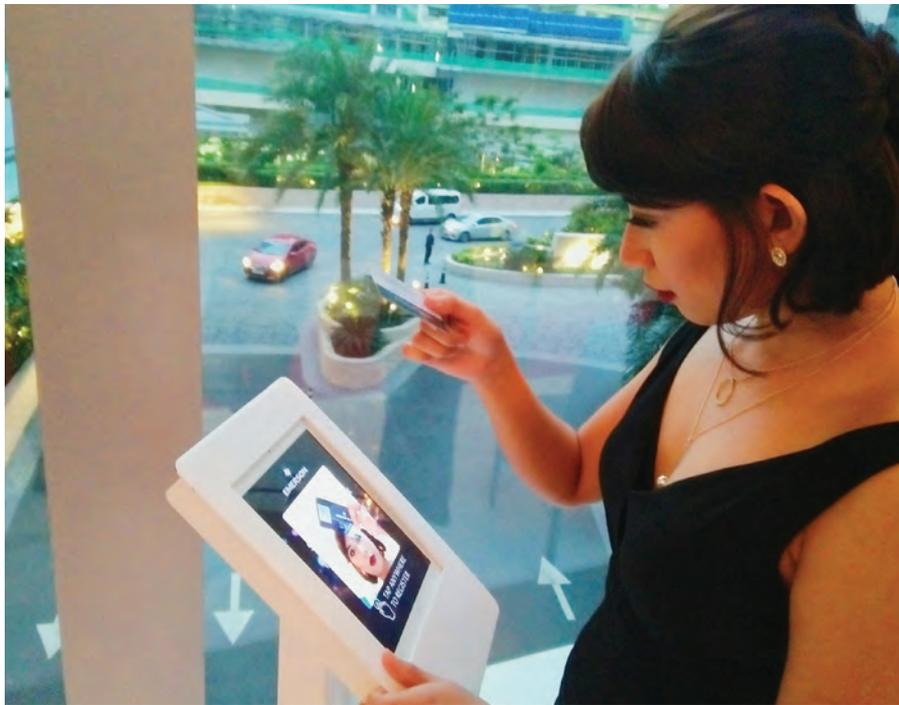
Avenev is off to a good start, but the team is hard at work to bring in more industry partners. Aside from proactively reaching out to organisations and event planners, they also organised the Event Tech Show Asia Pacific earlier this year to raise more awareness about automating event processes and Avenev.

Meanwhile, community site Avellage – which offers promotional deals to planners and suggestions on new event ideas – was also recently launched. Currently, the platform is undergoing testing and enhancement, backed by feedback from both event planners and venue partners who provide business context and updates on other challenges faced by the industry.

“Given heightening event expectations, what we hope to challenge is the perception that certain events can only take place at certain venues.

“The use of venues has changed over time and that seeing different event possibilities is crucial in sparking new event ideas and concepts for better attendee experience. We hope to drive innovations in the industry with this mindset,” the pair concluded.





From above: ThinkBIT Events Philippines; Evenesis – Y Us, Malaysia Events

Encore’s latest event app enables a vast number of features. The new holographic curtain creates amazing visuals to look as if content is floating mid-air like a hologram.

## EVENESIS – Y US, MALAYSIA

Yusno Yunos founded his company, Evenesis – Y Us in 2010 with an audacious vision to create a comprehensive cloud-based end-to-end event management system for event planners, participants and suppliers.

His inspiration was sparked when he could not find a local automated solution that could do event invitations, guest database management, floor plans and seating arrangements in a single application.

He thus created the Evenesis software, which remains the core product for the company. In 2018, the Evenesis Facial Recognition Check-In feature was added to the software, while an abstract

management and business matching software joined the line-up in mid-2019. The abstract management tool allows conference organisers to manage their abstracts/ papers submissions on the same platform as Evenesis, while the business matching software intelligently connects delegates and exhibitors. Not only are trade visitors able to meet the right sellers in an event, conference attendees – specifically start-up founders – can now request for meetings at specific times with the closest matched potential investors.

Evenesis – Y Us is now working on an emotion analysis session tracking software that will enable organisers to analyse their attendees’ moods/ emotions during an event. This product is scheduled to be in the market by 1H2020.

When asked how Evenesis– Y Us fares against major competitors, Yusno said: “We have the advantage of being able to fully customise our product to meet the needs of event organisers with dedicated local support in developing countries in Asia-Pacific. While (the global players) are well-known in the US, we have a better presence here. In fact, I would say we have a stronger brand reputation.”

Evenesis – Y Us was the event technology partner of the Singapore MICE Forum in July, organised by the Singapore Association of Convention and Exhibition Organisers and Suppliers. The company handled online pre- and on-site registration with facial recognition capability, as well as business matching appointments.

## THINKBIT EVENTS, PHILIPPINES

CEO Jedd Timothy Lim, together with some university classmates, started out developing software for web and mobile app in 2014. A year later, they launched ThinkBIT Events, which provides technology solutions to business events.

The company debuted with Onsite solution for fast, simple, efficient and hassle-free registration using iPad. Added features are real-time attendee count, searchable attendees, customisable fields, and personalised cover and greeting.

Its Conference mobile app offers an immersive experience by enabling live Q&A between the audience and speakers, scans the event’s programme, provides information about exhibitors and participants, and more.

It also offers a paperless raffle system and Quirk It, a self-service photo booth that adds personal touches with customised quirky GIF template that can include corporate branding.

Today, ThinkBIT Events handles a list of prominent corporate clients, and business is growing.

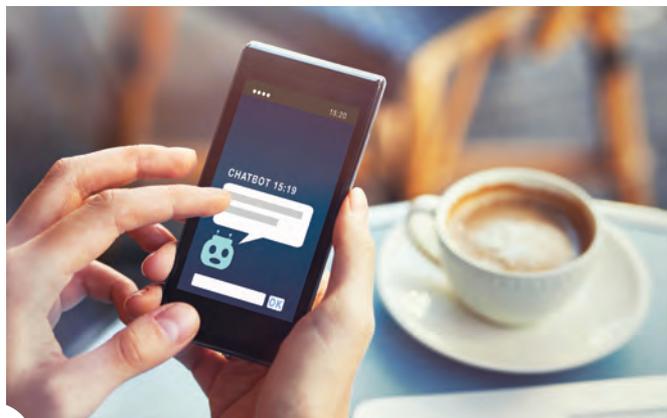
To keep pace with market changes, the company is innovating its existing products by enhancing and adding new features while working on adding on an RFID-based system (Radio Frequency Identification).

“While (the global players) are well-known in the US, we have a better presence here (in Asia).”

### Yusno Yunos

Founder, Evenesis – Y Us





# Event technology trends to watch

Keep your eyes on these trends that can shape the way you deliver your next event

**ATTENDEE APPS** Event apps put attendees in the driver's seat, empowering them to take control of their own experience and stay connected to all that an event has to offer. Using their own device, attendees can ask questions in real time, connect with other attendees and provide feedback while brands benefit from the opportunity to capture data and nurture a relationship with attendees long after the event is over.

**MIXED REALITY** Virtual and augmented reality will be combined to create mixed reality experiences that allow attendees to interact and engage with an event in a more personalised way. For example, conference attendees can use their phone cameras to find their next session via a 3D map of the venue. Mixed reality also offers a unique opportunity for attendees to participate in motion-capture installations

or allow exhibitors to showcase their products. It can even be used to enhance networking opportunities through interest matching.

**FACIAL RECOGNITION AND FEEDBACK** Facial recognition is already being used at events to more quickly (and securely) register and check-in attendees. Next year, Tokyo will be the first Olympic host to introduce facial recognition at its venues. Facial feedback offers a different use case for the same facial recognition technology. It allows organisers to capture attendee emotions in real-time. Imagine being able to monitor if attendees are bored, confused, happy or annoyed, and being able to intervene quickly.

**VOICE INTERFACES** It is predicted that half of all Internet searches by 2020 will be initiated via voice. This technology

has so many use cases for events. Voice command devices can streamline event registration, help attendees find their way around exhibition halls, or learn more about the conference agenda or specific session. By automating these types of interactions, attendees receive timely, efficient support while organisers are able to reduce onsite staff and overall cost.

**CHATBOTS** Chatbots that use artificial intelligence are the concierge of the future for live events. At South by South West (SXSW) this year, a chatbot named Abby acted as a personal concierge for attendees and fielded 56,000 unique questions via Facebook Messenger and the SXSW mobile app, saving countless man-hours.

**WEARABLES** The overall adoption of wearable technology has thus far been mixed. Smart watches have been hugely popular; smart glasses, not so much. However, this doesn't mean we should rule out the glasses technology. Smart glasses offer the ability to customise the event experience by providing delegates with personalised information about the event space, an upcoming session, or suggest which stand to visit – reducing the overwhelming feeling of a large tradeshow floor.

– *Cvent Asia's Will Kataria, Jack Morton Worldwide's Barbie Lam and Eventbrite's Joshua McNicol contributed to this article*

# Island charms

Anticipating a spike in visitors in town for the Olympic Games, the island of Shikoku is shouting out its surprising event venues and improving connectivity, writes **Pamela Chow**

A sleepy mountainous island south of Hiroshima, Shikoku is looking to the upcoming Tokyo Olympic and Paralympic Games in May to bring in a stream of events and meetings, with its tourism board and stakeholders gearing up to raise awareness of the destination.

This comes as the nearing Games are expected to drive up crowd density and hotel prices in Tokyo, a concern that may potentially turn business away from Japan altogether, expressed Tadashi Kaneko, executive vice president, Japan National Tourism Organisation (JNTO). To mitigate this, JNTO is focusing on promoting local gems in outlying regions through a *100 Experiences in Japan* book.

One of Japan's such hidden destinations is Shikoku, which comprises four prefectures: Ehime, Kochi, Kagawa and Tokushima. Kagawa Prefecture's Taka-

matsu is one of Shikoku's main cities that have carved out space, and a name for hosting business events and exhibitions.

Located along the Seto Inland Sea, Takamatsu is known for its maritime transportation industry, and the Kagawa Prefectural Government and Takamatsu City Convention and Visitors Bureau provides financial assistance of up to ¥10 million (US\$91,320) to support conventions and events.

"Takamatsu has a convention centre and hotels that make it very convenient as a business and conference destination," said Yuka Minami, manager, Tourism Shikoku.

This convention centre is Sunport Takamatsu, which houses a main hall with 1,500 seats, two small halls, 12 meeting rooms, as well as an exhibition space. Notable events held here include the 27<sup>th</sup> National Ambulance-crew Sym-

posium in January 2019 for more than 6,000 pax; the 2018 joint 14<sup>th</sup> iCACGP Symposium and 15<sup>th</sup> IGAC Science Conference; and G7 ICT Ministers' Meeting in 2016.

But events are not limited to the convention centre, as the city is populated with historical and cultural facilities also available for hire. These include Hiunkaku, the second house of the 12<sup>th</sup> feudal lord of Takamatsu; outdoor museum and Kabuki theatre Shikoku-Mura at the foot of Mount Yashima; and the scenic Ritsurin Garden, where the conserved Sanuki Guest House and Kikugetsu-tei Teahouse are also available for conference and meeting bookings. The Sanuki Guest House, also known as the Commerce and Industry Promotion Hall, hosted the G7 Summit's luncheon.



**Above: Kagawa International Hall, the main venue of the G7 ICT Ministers' Meeting in Takamatsu, Kagawa**  
**Below: Kikugetsu Tei teahouse in Ritsurin Garden**



Over in Kochi, the city is slowly turning its strength as a holiday destination into one with meetings appeal.

Taichiro Oogi, staff, department of inbound tourism, Kochi Visitors & Convention Association, lamented: “We do not have enough facilities, and we have not welcomed any big and international MICE-related events yet; Kochi has always been a leisure destination.”

He believes that the city would require greater promotional efforts and more information exchange on the meetings front, as well as venue development, before it is able to flourish as a business destination.

As such, Kochi is banking on its attractiveness as a pre- and post-event destination to draw its share of groups.

For instance, the tourism board collaborated with Singapore-based ABCDE Fitness on a marathoner package that included flights, accommodation at Mont Bell Mountain Lodge, warm-up sessions with a local running group, passes for the Kochi Ryoma Marathon in February 2020, private tours and workshops, and a dinner with local residents.

Such creative collaborations are essential to attracting visitors today, said Takanori Asai, deputy director, Kochi Representative Office in Singapore. He expressed: “It has become really hard to promote a destination through traditional means, so we’ve had to come up with new ways to promote Kochi.”

Also, travel to Shikoku is also set to become even more accessible, with China Airlines’ flights between Taiwan Taoyuan International Airport and Takamatsu Airport recently coming online, and a new highway connecting Kochi Regional Airport and Kochi City currently under construction.

## { Need to know }

### 1 Room limits

While boasting a number of convention venues and unique facilities, Takamatsu City only has six hotels offering a total of 981 rooms, so be sure that your conference attendance can be accommodated.

### 2 Getting around

Shikoku is a mountainous region with many gorgeous valleys; as a result, some activities or unique venues are only accessible by road. Planners interested in pre- and post-event programmes are highly recommended to hire a bus.

### 3 Avoid major festivals

August is a popular month of festivals across Shikoku, such as Saijo Festival in Ehime and Yosakoi Matsuri Festival in Kochi. Planners may want to plan around these dates so as to avoid high hotel and flight prices.

## { Pre/Post }



Masanoshi Hirose/shutterstock

### Skirt beside the whirlpools

The majestic whirlpools in Tokushima’s Naruto Straits can be viewed from several vantage points. Visitors can admire the phenomenon from 45m above, through glass panels from the Naruto Bridge Observatory along the Uzu-no-Michi Walkway, or take a sightseeing boat ride – with operators like Naruto Kanko Kisen and Uzushio Kisen – to get an up-close view.

### Ride like the wind

Cycle down the Shimanami Kaido bridge on a bicycle and enjoy breathtaking views of the cerulean sea. Tracing a dedicated bikeway, the tour by Fuji Travel Service is led by a guide from a local cycling team, and provides drinks, a pick-up service, meal and sightseeing along the route, as well as a support car. Participants can choose from different bicycles such as road bikes and tandem bicycles.



### Stay in a thatched cottage

Ochiai Village in Iya is home to a number of thatched-roof cottages available for stay. Dating as far back as 300 years, these cottages have been renovated and elegantly furnished into lodging facilities that overlook the peaceful valleys of Iya. Catering services with food from local harvests can also be reserved, along with cottage booking, through the Togenkyo Iya-no-yamazato Office.



### Hold back the river

Enjoy the scenery of Kochi either while drifting along a peaceful river in a canoe, or on an adrenaline-inducing whitewater rafting session through the rapids. Kochi’s rivers – Yoshino, Shimanto and Niyodo – are clear and unpolluted, and a number of companies around the prefecture offer such outdoor activities. Participants can also choose to go fly fishing or stand-up paddling along these rivers.

### All trails lead to yuzu

Pay a visit to Yanase Shinrin Tetsudou Heritage Railroad in Kochi, the site that produces Japan’s largest supply of yuzu. Developed in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, this rail belt running through a mountain forest affords a beautiful view of the yuzu orchards that are recognised as a Japan Heritage Site by the Japanese Agency for Cultural Affairs. Groups can also partake in yuzu aroma workshops here.



Andrey Bayda/Shutterstock

An aerial view of the sprawling Melbourne city at night

# Deeper engagements

The associations sector is evolving, eager to become the movers and shakers of tomorrow. This is how Melbourne is responding, writes **Adelaine Ng**

Associations looking to Melbourne to host its meetings are looking for deeper levels of engagement with the destination, with indications of furthering its involvement beyond the city and into regional areas.

No longer content with basic tourism services, associations are now asking bureaus how they can leave an impressionable footprint long after the networking sessions are done and delegates have headed home.

“We (are continuing) to work with our clients on a much deeper level,” said Melbourne Convention Bureau CEO Julia Swanson. “The nature of the association market is changing and what clients want from convention bureaus is definitely evolving.”

Creating legacies is today’s buzzword and they can be social or economic. An example is the UITP Global Public Transport Summit in Melbourne in 2021, marking its return to the Southern Hemisphere after a 25 year hiatus.

“One of the things they’re trying to achieve is to build much more of a focus on women in transport, so we’re work-

ing with them on a number of different initiatives to build engagement from females in the conference,” said Swanson.

“There (could) be a ‘women in transport’ breakfast or education scholarships. We’re looking at how we can build and make that a much more inclusive area from a gender perspective. We see that as a very important focus as we build the public transport sector in Melbourne, but it also helps build that sector across Australia and globally,” she continued.

The MCB’s willingness to adapt to changing needs from associations seems to be serving the city well.

Among a record financial year of A\$507 million (US\$344 million) in secured business events, there were several “big wins” in the associations sector, including the World Rotary Conference which will bring some 20,000 people to Melbourne in 2023. What’s more, Swanson said that 80 per cent of association business is booked in Melbourne’s quieter winter months between April and September.

Growth in associations is also being echoed at the Melbourne Convention and Exhibition Centre (MCEC), which has seen a 29 per cent increase in number of events hosted and the number of attendees steadying, after relating to *TTGassociations* in 2018 of a flat sector with declining participant numbers in meetings. MCEC had hoped the addition of a A\$200 million expansion would turn things around after it opened in July 2018, and it appears their hopes were not misplaced.

“The expansion has provided us with a unique opportunity to cater for events of sizes that MCEC was not previously known for and has exceeded all expectations,” said MCEC’s director of sales, Darren Waite. “We have been inundated with interest ... (With) customers seeing it as a seamless connection to the existing centre, we are receiving more interest in full buy-outs of the centre.”

It’s not just Melbourne city that benefits from increased bookings either. Swanson shared that associations are increasingly interested in engaging with pre- and post-travel in regional Victoria, which is seeing a boom in food and wine offerings. Areas like Geelong and the Bellarine Peninsula, previously seen as poorer tourism cousins to Phillip Island and Morn-

**“The nature of the association market is changing and what clients want from convention bureaus is definitely evolving.”**

**Julia Swanson**  
CEO, Melbourne Convention Bureau



ington Peninsula, have also stepped up their offerings by engaging and mentoring suppliers who can meet the international market's needs.

Notably, Geelong is also planning to open its own convention and exhibition centre in coming years.

"There are significant growth opportunities for us and also more opportunities leveraging off international associations that will be conferencing in Melbourne on a bigger scale, the satellite meetings and the onflow," said convention bureau manager at Business Events Geelong, Mark Day.

"I think that the Geelong Convention Center and the 200-room hotel that comes with that, and a Holiday Inn opening in 2020 gives us a really good base to be able to service that market."

A recent fam programme for South-east Asian agents showcased a range of possibilities for groups, including a behind-the-scenes tour cum progressive dinner at Geelong's GMHBA Stadium which offers 32 event spaces, to a cooking class at Jack Rabbit Vineyard. Throw in some teambuilding possibilities and cultural experiences and it would appear there's little the region can't offer.

Swanson knows the proof is in the pudding. Speaking ahead of the International Convention of Jehovah's Witnesses which took place in November 2019 with about 50,000 delegates, she informed delegates will do "record touring" of all the regional areas.

"I think (it) will be the largest group that's ever gone to Healesville Sanctuary at one time, but they're certainly visiting (destinations) across regional Victoria," said Swanson. "They're coming a long way to attend the conference and they're making the most of their time here".

## { Need to know }

### 1 Help when you need it

Melbourne Convention Bureau offers a range of assistance for associations that include securing a local host to lead or financially-underwrite the bid, develop bid strategies, and coordinate site inspections for key decision makers.

### 2 Avoid peak event periods

Small- to mid-sized event spaces may be more challenging to secure in November and December, which are popular months for celebratory events like company end-of-year, Christmas and New Year parties.

### 3 Better value out of the city

Regional suppliers provide more cost-effective spaces and experiences, and are also more willing to go the extra mile for clients, as they need to work harder than their city counterparts to attract business.

## { Pre/Post }



### A fascinating insight into aboriginal culture

A cultural education programme at the Narana Aboriginal Cultural Centre can challenge many perceptions about Australia's indigenous beliefs and animals. The award-winning centre is where visitors can learn about the country's indigenous culture, Ancient Dreaming stories, Connection To Country through Songlines, artworks, cultural artefacts and bushfood. There's also an Aboriginal art gallery and outdoor area to meet emus, wallabies and kangaroos. The authentic and immersive experience is located an hour's drive from Melbourne.



### Get in touch with your wild side

From swimming or sightseeing with wild seals and dolphins to learning to surf, Sea All Dolphin Swims is a great experience that will put delegates in touch with nature's marine wildlife. Located 30 minutes from the beginning of the Great Ocean Road in the historic town of Queenscliff, the experience offers a memorable event to inspire adventure and education.



### Creating the best swells

Australia's first man-made surf park, URBN-SURF Melbourne, has just opened at Melbourne Airport, offering visitors of all abilities an authentic surfing experience regardless of weather conditions. Made possible by intelligent wave-generating technology, the facility boasts a 320-metre pool that produces waves between 0.6 metres and 1.9 metres, with rides lasting up to 32 seconds. LED lighting means visitors can surf throughout the day.

### It's all black and white

Experience Phillip Island's Penguin Parade in a new way after a A\$48 million (US\$32.6 million) restructure. A new architecturally-acclaimed and environmentally friendly visitor centre offers fun and interactive activities, state-of-the-art theatre, dedicated education wing, and a wide range of dining and retail options. More than six hectares of penguin habitat have also been restored which Australia's largest colony of Little Penguins can reclaim the area as their own.



### Zoom around a track

Just seven minutes away from Phillip Island's famous Penguin Parade lies the Australian Moto GP Circuit, offering visitors a drive in their state-of-the-art go-karts. More than 750 meters long and replicating the world-famous Grand Prix Circuit, it promises a view of rugged cliffs and a breathtaking coastline on the southern loop of the track. Teambuilding opportunities are also available.



# Taipei plays to her strengths

An amalgam of new meeting hardware, unique venues, Michelin-star dining and natural landscapes in the Asian metropolis promises extraordinary opportunities for event organisers. By **Rachel AJ Lee**



globe photo studio / getty

**TaiNEX 2 opened in March this year, and when combined with TaiNEX 1, makes for the country's largest venue**

**E**arlier this March, the Taipei City Government established its first MICE office – a breakthrough after years of effort – in a bid to create a sound environment to further develop the city's business event sector against a backdrop of an ultra-competitive Asia market.

And the city is smartly playing to her strengths, vividly highlighting unique locations where business events can be held such as the Huashan 1914 Creative Park and Taipei Expo Park; bettering its infrastructure with the recent launch of TaiNEX 2; and wearing its newly-minted Michelin-star status proudly.

Pu Lin, director of arts, Taiwan Creative Industry Development (which oversees Huashan 1914 Creative Park), said: "There is only one Huashan. Foreign companies like Google like to come here, and make use of our unique indoor and outdoor spaces to present their products. TedX Taipei is also held here every year."

In addition to being a function space, Huashan 1914 Creative Park also doubles up as lifestyle destination for delegates to explore in their free time, as there are

quaint shops and hole-in-the-wall cafes that have set up homes here.

Similarly, the 14-hectare Taipei Expo Park has a lifestyle component – the 9,900m<sup>2</sup> Maji Square, filled with more than 80 lifestyle shops and F&B options. The park has numerous indoor and outdoor spaces, three of which are dedicated for corporate and association groups: the Expo Dome, Eco Ark, and Expo Hall.

Rich Shen, director administration management of Taipei EXPO Foundation which manages Taipei Expo Park,

**"As the conference attracts students, academics and professors, I need a destination that has a wide range of choices in terms of accommodation and food."**

**Tetsuya Sakai**

Professor and head of department, department of computer science and communications engineering, Waseda University

shared: "We can hold tradeshows and gala dinners at the Eco Dome; while large-scale performances or speeches can head to the Expo Hall which can seat 1,200 comfortably."

Elsewhere in the city, the Taipei Nangang Exhibition Center Hall 2 (TaiNEX 2) began operations on March 4 this year, expanding the city's MICE infrastructure. The US\$240 million venue features 30,240m<sup>2</sup> of exhibition space, a 6,100m<sup>2</sup> Sky Garden (opening in November), and 14 conference rooms – where the largest can hold 3,600 guests.

Just across the road, TaiNEX 1 has 45,360m<sup>2</sup> of exhibition space, a 22,680m<sup>2</sup> column-free Sky Dome, and nine conference rooms. When combined, TaiNEX is the country's largest exhibition venue.

"It is very convenient to hold events here, as within a five-minute-drive radius are six hotels, and in 2022, there will be an additional hotel and shopping centre nearby," revealed Philip Huang, executive director of TaiNEX 2.

When asked how Taipei's MICE business has fared over the years, project manager of ABLY Conference and Exhibition (part of Taiwan Tour DMC), Lilly Lee, shared that she has seen the city's business event sector grow year-on-year, since the company started handling such events around a decade ago.

"But competition is pretty tough," she opined. "While Taiwan may be cheaper than South Korea and Japan, we are more expensive than Bangkok."

Hence, she stressed that during a pitch, they focus on Taiwan's unique points and cultural attractions. One new way to sell Taipei was through gastronomic adventures, thanks to the inaugural Michelin Guide Taipei which launched in 2018, featuring a total of 110 dining establishments.

For instance, groups can arrange to dine in a private room at three-Michelin-star Cantonese restaurant Le Palais, the only restaurant to be bestowed with three stars. Delegates can also go on a gastronomic hunt for the 10 street food vendors listed in the guide during the evenings after a long day of meetings.

"We are also working closely with private stakeholders like PCOs, to identify the best chances of bringing in



**{ Pre/Post }****Up, up, and away over Taiwan**

Located within the Breeze NanShan shopping centre in Taipei's Xinyi District is the 5D simulator ride i-Ride Taipei. Event planners with limited time can reveal to delegates Taiwan's many facets and diverse landscapes, from its towering mountains and blue oceans to its deep valleys and bustling urban areas. Lasting for about 15 minutes, the indoor ride combines visual, auditory, olfactory, tactile sensations and motion special effects. As delegates "fly" over the entire island, they can expect to see destinations like Kaohsiung, Tainan, Taroko National Park and Jade Mountain. Ticket prices start from NT\$480 (US\$15.30), and the attraction is open every day.

**Follow the food trail**

Night markets are synonymous with Taiwan and are an integral part of Taiwanese culture, where travellers will be able to sink their teeth into a dizzying array of street cuisine ranging from stinky tofu to flame-torched beef cubes and oyster omelettes to chicken cutlets bigger than one's face. In Taipei, Shilin Night Market and Raohe Night Market are two of the most popular.



Shifen

**Day trip to outlying villages**

The charming old towns in Keelung, Jiufen and Shifen, are easy to visit on a day trip from Taipei. A typical itinerary will start with a drive to Shifen to decorate a paper lantern and make a wish as it floats lazily into the sky. The next stop will then be the cobbled alleys of Jiufen, packed with small stores serving piping hot bowls of braised pork rice and local taro desserts, as well as souvenirs.

**Priceless artefacts from yesteryears**

The National Palace Museum in Taipei is where you can marvel at a staggering collection of more than 650,000 cultural relics belonging to the Chinese imperial court. Among its most popular exhibits are the life-like Jadeite Cabbage and glistening Meat-shaped Stone, which are displayed alongside an intricately carved olive pit, monochrome lacquerware, and silk tapestries.

**The mountains are calling**

Taipei is surrounded by mountains, and a highly-developed transport system makes it easy for delegates to get out from the bustling city into the mountains. Yangmingshan National Park in northern Taipei City, is easily accessible from downtown. Meanwhile, not far from the Xinyi shopping area is the Four Beasts Mountains. The trail up to the top of Elephant Mountain – providing a million-dollar view of Taipei 101 and the city – is probably the most popular, but veer off the beaten path and one will find far less hackneyed hiking opportunities.



Yangmingshan National Park

an international meeting," Lee Jerchin, deputy managing director, Taipei MICE Office, shared.

The ultimate goal, he pointed out, was to "bring Taipei's name to the international masses", as "we want to be the top business event city in Asia", acknowledging that it is going to be a tough road ahead. Currently, Taipei sits at sixth position on ICCA's 2018 city rankings.

However, the destination is making strides. A recent large win was the Rotary International Convention 2021 which is expected to bring 40,000 people to Taipei, and generate NT\$4 billion (US\$219 million) for the economy. Organisers say it is the largest meeting of its kind in decades.

Before that, the World Trade Centre Assembly 2020 is expected to bring in another 300 delegates.

Tetsuya Sakai, professor and head of department, department of computer science and communications engineering, Waseda University, organises an

annual computer science and information retrieval conference for 800 pax, and shared he was pleased with Taipei's offerings.

He elaborated: "As the conference attracts students, academics and professors, I need a destination that has a wide range of choices in terms of accommodation and food. For example, students will be able to stay in cheaper hotels and explore night markets for cheap eats, while professors may be able to eat at restaurants and stay in star hotels."

Meanwhile, professor Rindit Pambayun, department of agricultural technology, Palembang-based Sriwijaya University, talked about how halal-friendly Taiwan is, and is a great destination for conferences with a Muslim majority.

"There are halal-vending machines and prayer rooms in convention centres, while I was surprised to find a Koran in my room at the Howard Taipei. My dietary needs was also adhered to. This shows that the government is putting in the effort (to attract Muslim visitors)."

**{ Need to know }****1 When best to visit**

Spring and autumn are the most comfortable seasons to visit Taiwan as the weather is cool and comfortable; a bonus in spring are the cherry and plum blossoms. Winter is generally mild, but during the summer, the weather becomes hot and muggy.

**2 Easy air access**

Taiwan Taoyuan International Airport is the largest airport in Taiwan, and is directly connected to more than 130 destinations in 30 countries. The destination's two major international airlines are Eva Air and China Airlines.

**3 Pillar of support**

Meet Taiwan ([www.meettaiwan.com](http://www.meettaiwan.com)) provides a one-stop resource for advice and support in planning, promoting and staging association meetings. Aside from providing general information, Meet Taiwan can also provide subventions and support letters from the government.

# Going from strength to strength

The 10<sup>th</sup> edition of the International Conference on Materials for Advanced Technologies remains a crowd-puller, despite increasing competition, writes **Caroline Boey**

## Event brief

Launched in 2001, the biennial International Conference on Materials for Advanced Technologies (ICMAT) is an iconic series in Singapore's events calendar. The event is organised by the Materials Research Society of Singapore (MRS Singapore), a not-for-profit organisation founded in 1999.

ICMAT's objectives are multifold, but its primary purpose is rallying materials science research and expert members from Singapore and overseas to network, learn from each other and, explore potential collaborations.

ICMAT 2019 was expecting more than 3,000 delegates, including four Nobel laureates, from more than 50 countries.

Conference highlights included 45 technical symposia in over 50 parallel sessions, nine plenary lectures including four by Nobel laureates, two Nobel Laureate Public Lectures, an Editor's Forum, a Young Researcher Forum, and a Forum titled 'Why So Few Women in Science Engineering and Technology?'

This year's ICMAT was opened by Singapore deputy prime minister Heng Swee Keat, displaying the government's continued support of the event – previous editions were opened by senior ministers of Singapore too.

According to B V R Chowdari, MRS Singapore president and conference chair, organisers utilised as many as 52 meeting rooms for parallel sessions, a single large room to accommodate over 3,000 delegates for the Nobel laureate lectures, as well as a conference banquet and spaces for networking, coffee breaks and mealtimes.

## Challenges

ICMAT is a six-day event and its success hinges on the quality of its programming and quantity of attendees. Chowdari said: "With 45 technical symposia, the total number of both national and international symposia chairs was as large as 225 members."

Managing that sizeable crowd both in real time and e-space was not easy, he admitted.

Other challenges were having to attract the same crowd of similar research interests to the recurring event, as well as keeping the conference truly international, Chowdari said.

He added: "We also had to compete with a large number of conferences being organised by other professional societies and private organisations, and plan how to make the event financially viable in light of rising costs



of organising a conference." Rising hotel rates aside, an upfront financial commitment of S\$1 million was also required for this year's event.

## Solutions

The doubling in size of ICMAT over the last decade, alongside an improvement in the quality of speakers, helped in easing the challenge of attracting the same delegates to Singapore again, according to Chowdari.

To keep the conference truly international, each symposia featured Singapore scientists from various local universities and institutes, co-chairing with their overseas counterparts.

Several technical symposia were co-organised with members of other materials research organisations from around the world, thereby increasing international participation.

With conference participants seeking authenticity and quality, as well as the opportunity to network with high-profile researchers, the presence of Nobel laureates at every ICMAT event has become a real drawcard.

Apart from governmental endorsement, the backing of similar professional societies

played a key role in participants picking ICMAT over events run by private organisations.

Chowdari shared: "We managed to attract a large crowd by keeping the registration fee relatively low and providing significant financial assistance to needy participants through sponsorships from various universities and institutes, where the conference fit into their research interests and there was significant interest among its students and faculty."

"We also kept in mind the need to minimise organisational costs without compromising on our hospitality."

## Key takeaways

According to Chowdari, ensuring a high-quality programme, a sizeable attendance, and the financial sustainability of ICMAT were critical factors in organising a successful event.

He said: "Our continued success in motivating the reputed scientists to be part of the organisation, and attracting the best speakers, encouraged higher participation rates. It was also important to join hands with similar organisations without losing one's own identity."

## Event

10<sup>th</sup> International Conference on Materials for Advanced Technologies

## Organiser

Materials Research Society of Singapore

## Venue

Marina Bay Sands, Singapore

## Date

June 23-28, 2019

## Number of participants

3,092 from 56 countries

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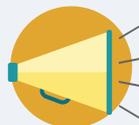
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