

FEBRUARY/MARCH 2020

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blends

Redesigning  
events for a  
multigenerational  
audience

Five steps to a  
green meeting



# OUTLOOK 2020

Regional specialists in business travel and events are confident of riding out the stormy global economy to come up hale and hearty



# Making Gwangju Shine



GWANGJU  
MICE PARK

Where global business begins: international conferences, exhibitions, events and more

## Gwangju, Turn on Light



### The City of the Three-Winning UNESCO, Gwangju

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UNESCO Global Geoparks \_ Mudeungsan Area Geopark

### The International Conference City, Gwangju

2024 – IFAA(International Federation of Associations of Anatomists)  
2022 – IFLA(International Federation of Landscape Architects) General Assembly  
2020 – SIL(35th International Society of Limnology)  
North East Asia Standardization Forum  
2019 – FINA World Championships Gwangju 2019  
ISEA(International Symposium on Electronic Art)

# What's the new normal?



**Karen Yue**  
Group Editor

Once upon a time, one would only hear of businesspeople taking a cautiously optimistic approach during the odd challenging year. These days, cautious optimism seems to be the normal approach towards any business outlook, as world affairs become increasingly unpredictable.

Throughout 2019, the world paid close attention to the drawn-out US-China trade dispute, BREXIT uncertainties, slowing economic growth in major markets of Europe, China and India. When we thought, oh well, what more could go wrong, along came Hong Kong's fight for democracy and freedom that is lasting longer than most expect (it has been on since June 2019), and has unhinged some business event plans in the Asian business capital.

Then, as the end of 2019 beckoned, the Australian bushfires raged and attracted massive worldwide news coverage. Negative headlines and images of burning land choked tourism businesses, as travellers, believing that the entire country is unsafe, rushed to cancel trips.

As if we are living in an episode of *Lemony Snicket's A Series of Unfortunate Events*, the drama continues with a seething Taal Volcano on Philippine's Luzon island that has halted tourism business in the Tagaytay, Laguna and Batangas areas, and a mystery flu virus (later identified as 2019-nCoV, from the same family of coronaviruses with links to SARS and MERS) that has spread from Wuhan, China, to other major Chinese cities as well as other countries.

Do we have room for one more challenge? Looks like we do – the US-Iran conflict escalates and a Ukrainian passenger jet became collateral damage in January, shaking business travellers and causing a spike in travel risk reports being run by corporates and requests for alternative airlines that are perceived to be safer.

Are we surprised anymore? An unpredictable world is the new normal, and business leaders are ready for surprises. This requires a shift in mindset and processes. Annual reviews of business plans are no longer enough; evaluations at the sixth-month mark or sooner are more practical in allowing companies to spot opportunities in obstacles and to adapt swiftly.

And it is with this practical approach that business travel and MICE professionals are generally optimistic about business in 2020.



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# OKINAWA Japan

## Where inspiration meets

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**OKINAWA, where inspiration meets.**



For more information please visit <https://mice.okinawastory.jp/interview/interview>



# IT&CM CHINA 2020 EVENT HIGHLIGHTS

24 - 26 March 2020 | Shanghai | www.itcmchina.com

## BUSINESS & BRAND ACTIVATION

### IT&CM China Meets CTW China Under One Roof: 3 Unique Buyer Profiles

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Latest developments and updates by the top MICE brands revealed! Open to MICE & Association Buyers and Media.

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

### Exhibition Walk-About

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

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### Association Day Forum

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

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

## NETWORKING & EVENT EXPERIENCE

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

### MICE Innovation Hub

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

### Corporate Buyers Get Rewarded For Attending

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



**FOLLOW US ON WECHAT TODAY!**

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

## CONNECT

# TOP 5 HEADLINES THIS MONTH



▲ From left: Mount Wellington lookout in Tasmania; Taal Volcano in the Philippines; Hong Kong skyline

### Australian tourism battles its own blaze

Australian tour operators are fighting the perception that the country is unsafe for visitors and that much of its naturally beautiful environment has been destroyed.

### Planners scramble for change in plans as Taal rumbles on

Business events in the Philippines have been rudely interrupted at varying degrees by Taal Volcano's spewing of ashes early this week and the probability of a major eruption anytime.

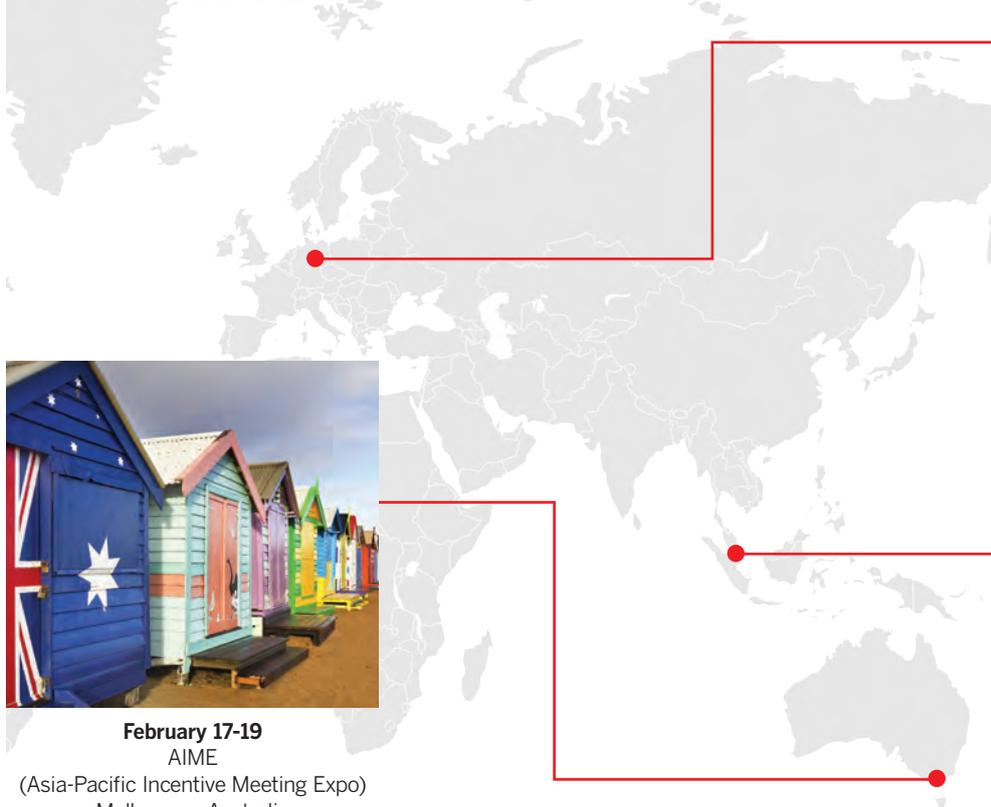
### Riots fail to strip Hong Kong of her business hub status

Despite months of ongoing protests and companies enforcing stricter travel policies on Hong Kong – to the point where some MNCs have banned business trips there, confidence in the city and its status as a vital business centre remains, according to corporate travel managers and suppliers alike.

### Thai MICE players worry in lieu of challenging year ahead

MICE stakeholders in Thailand feel that this year will be a challenging year given

## WHAT'S HAPPENING



**February 17-19**  
AIME

(Asia-Pacific Incentive Meeting Expo)  
Melbourne, Australia

## PERSPECTIVES



SAP Concur's Andy Watson believes that a slowing Asia-Pacific economy will pressure businesses to do more with less. As such, 2020 will see more companies harness technology and data analytics to deliver greater productivity, as well as bring about more solutions to better manage the complexities of the business travel and expense landscape

that a strong Thai baht, as well as global political factors such as the US-China trade war tension, will lower both inbound and outbound client budgets, pushing them to choose cheaper destinations.

### Travel suppliers get more mobile-savvy to do better in corporate travel space

Suppliers eyeing growth in the corporate travel business are relying on enhanced mobile products and services to address and engage travellers in areas such as duty of care and compliance, as well as enhance the traveller experience.

## SNAPSHOTS



### ▲ January 9

UOL Group and hotel subsidiary Pan Pacific Hotels Group unveiled the new Parkroyal Collection Hotels & Resorts brand on January 7, cementing their commitment towards sustainable hospitality.

### ▼ January 15

TTG Asia Media is out in full force at ATF 2020 in Brunei to bring you the latest happenings in the South-east Asian tourism sector.



**March 4-8**  
ITB Berlin  
Berlin, Germany



**April 6-8**  
IBTM Asia Pacific  
Singapore



### ▲ January 13

PCMA has announced two partnerships, one with Corporate Event Marketing Association (CEMA), and the other with Business Events Sarawak (BESarawak), both of which aim to educate, as well as encourage networking and knowledge-sharing.



### ▲ January 17

Yesterday evening, SingEx unveiled its refreshed suite of event offerings, and is ready to push the frontier of MICE events in the new decade. Coincidentally, SACEOS also celebrated its 40<sup>th</sup> birthday, and the association has voiced that it will continue to work closely with the Singapore government and stakeholders to keep improving the MICE industry. The future of events in the Lion City looks bright indeed!



# Positioning tech promises improved event management

Originally developed for shopping malls and warehousing, Singapore-based Drop Positioning Systems has now taken its positioning technology into the hospitality and events space, promising planners a better experience for conference and exhibition attendees, as well as help hotels become more efficient.

The company is presently supporting local hotels such as Mandarin Oriental, Singapore and The Ritz-Carlton, Millenia Singapore in areas such as luggage tracking. Mandarin Oriental also applies the positioning technology in its housekeeping inventory and room service. For instance, after a guest finishes the room service meal and pushes the cart out the door, the system will immediately notify a hotel staff to collect it so that it is not a prolonged eyesore left unattended along the corridor of a five-star property.

Ben Tang, chief technical officer of Singapore-based Drop Positioning Systems, explained that the positioning technology can benefit large-scale events and exhibitions by allowing event organisers to see attendee

dwell time (how long an attendee spends at a place) and movement speed.

Tang added that the system can also provide a heat map, among other possibilities.

In addition to tracking movement, Tang also shared that the system allows for proactive alerts. For example, if a speaker was stuck in the registration queue, the event organiser could track his position and rescue him to ensure he's on time for his speaking engagement. Or if a VVIP needed to meet another VVIP on another level (drop positioning can differentiate storeys), his assistant would be able to guide him quickly to his destination.

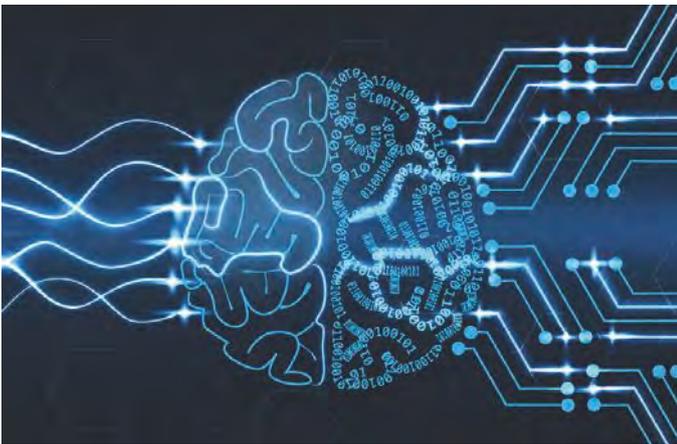
Tang said the technology requires "only needs 1mbps to support 5,000 of our tags at one go", and can even rely on home broadband.

"Also, our tags are unobtrusive, and are about the size of a dollar coin, or a thin long strip that can fit into plastic conference lanyard holders. And depending on the capabilities an event planner is looking for, prices



start at a few dollars per person, hence it's very cost-effective method (that can help event planners plan better future shows)," he said. – **Rachel AJ Lee**

# Ent-Vision harnesses AI to improve buyer-seller connections at tradeshow



Singapore-based Ent-Vision is piloting a master data platform that seeks to facilitate right connections between tradeshow visitors and exhibitors.

Ent-vision's platform uses a combination of search technology, natural language processing and machine learning algorithms, as well as attendee data which is collected, filtered and standardised into a set of information.

Tan Kim Heng, director, Ent-Vision, explained that from there, artificial intelligence (AI) can profile trade visitors, recommend the most relevant booths, and propose business matching, which in turn improves the event experience for both exhibitors and visitors. AI can also provide a tangible map of an event participants' journey at a tradeshow, thereby allowing the organiser to view the data to improve future shows.

Tan added that the platform is compatible with various event technology sources with an open API.

Citing Cvent as an example, Tan explained that Ent-Vision's master data platform can work with the event registration solution to provide event organisers with business matching and profiling capability. However, he cautioned that training is needed for every AI solution, and this would take time.

"The longer the platform is used, the better trained the AI will be, as it has been fed with all available pieces of information. Information can be gathered by the event organiser, or gathered from public domains such as job sites," he elaborated.

The master data platform has just completed a pilot test with a company in Singapore, with one more scheduled for 2020.

Looking ahead, Tan envisions expanding the product to Indonesia where it can absorb content in Bahasa Indonesia. There are also future plans to integrate more multilingual content such as Chinese, Korean and Japanese. – **Rachel AJ Lee**



# A truly good meal



Ukishima Garden in downtown Naha, Okinawa, has launched a range of stunning boxed meals designed for event attendees, in response to the rising number of South-east Asian and European visitors with dietary needs.

Building on the menu of traditional Okinawan favourites using vegetables and grains, these Japanese bentos are vegan, organic and contain no genetically modified organisms or MSG. The locally-sourced vegetables are from community-supported agriculture programmes, while the rice comes from paddy fields that have been pesticide-free for more than three decades.

All meals are halal- and kosher-certified and suitable for Buddhist vegetarians who cannot consume allium vegetables such as onion, garlic and leek. Chefs can also create gluten-free options and cater to people with specific food allergies upon request.

There are three meal types, all of which are seasonal. The ¥1,300 (US\$11.90) box offers taco rice made with speciality island tofu, and two side dishes. The ¥2,300 box includes croquettes made from rice cake flour and millet, eight varieties of vegetables, and meatballs. Diners who purchase the ¥4,000 box will get to nosh on several of the above-mentioned dishes, a hamburger made from millet, vegetable sushi and traditional sweets.

The goodness continues, as every beautifully-presented meal is packaged without single-use plastic, making it a great option for organisers seeking to reduce their carbon footprint.

## Outrigger Laguna Phuket Beach Resort grows event venue offering



The Outrigger Laguna Phuket Beach Resort, a TCEB-certified MICE venue in Laguna Phuket, has opened its newest standalone meeting and events centre.

The two-storey complex has six function rooms amounting to 1,000m<sup>2</sup> of space. The largest venue is the 448m<sup>2</sup> Similan Ballroom on the first floor, which is pillarless and boasts six-metre-high ceilings and movable partition walls. It is good for 330 guests theatre-style, or 290 in a banquet setting.

Three smaller breakout rooms are on the second floor, with the largest being the 80m<sup>2</sup> Tongfah which can hold a maximum of 70 people theatre-style. Regardless of chosen space, the entire complex is equipped with the latest audiovisual technology and complimentary high-speed Wi-Fi.

Events can also make use of a spacious pre-function area and VIP lounge, while a private entrance to the left of the resort lobby will be appreciated by event planners needing privacy for VIP guests.

There are other four meeting venues ensconced within the resort's main building, comprising the 716m<sup>2</sup> Andaman Ballroom and three smaller spaces.

Green events will also be central to Outrigger Laguna Phuket Beach Resort's MICE offering. The property has removed all single-use plastics, and depending on the meeting objectives, guests have the option of participating in CSR initiatives. For instance, Outrigger has a long-term community relationship programme with the nearby Baan Khok Wat Mai primary school.

## Radisson Blu increases footprint in Vietnam

Radisson Blu has expanded its presence in Vietnam with its latest beachfront resort at Cam Ranh Bay.

The new Radisson Blu Resort Cam Ranh is nestled on Long Beach, an 18km-long stretch of sand in Khanh Hoa province, on Vietnam's south-central coast. It is located 10 minutes' drive from Cam Ranh International Airport.

There are 292 rooms, suites and pool villas here, which range from 45m<sup>2</sup> to 140m<sup>2</sup> in size. The 36 villas also boast private pools, cabanas and alfresco dining areas.

Facilities on-site include six restaurants and bars, ranging from all-day dining restaurant Sunrise, to Waves Beach Bar, a casual beach club; a spa complete with a Himalayan crystal salt chamber and ice grotto; outdoor infinity pool; and fitness centre. Watersports activities can also be found on the beach. In addition, event planners can organise meetings or functions in one of the nine available spaces, such as the Grand Ballroom which can seat up to 385 people for a gala dinner.





## Free teambuilding sessions in Bangkok

Five hotels in the Thai capital, which make up the Bangkok Venue Collection, have come together to offer a free teambuilding session for meetings held at their properties.

The five hotels are Novotel Bangkok on Siam Square, Novotel Bangkok Ploenchit Sukhumvit, Pullman Bangkok Grande Sukhumvit, Pullman Bangkok King Power, and Swissotel Bangkok Ratchada.

The teambuilding activity, titled Amazing Chase, will take participants out of the meeting room, and immerse them in the local culture, community and neighbourhood. The activity is usually sold for 1,900 baht (US\$63) per person.

Lasting two to three hours, group sizes can range from 15 to a maximum of 500 participants. Amazing Chase can be held daily, in either the morning or afternoon, subject to the availability of resources. Drinking water for participants, a video introduction, coloured team identification apparel, facilitation in English, and fun prizes for three outstanding teams are included.

To avail this offer, meetings must be booked and confirmed before May 31, 2020, but can happen from now to October 31, 2020. This promotion can also be combined with other offers.

Contact [david.BARRETT@accor.com](mailto:david.BARRETT@accor.com) or individual property for more details.

## Hyatt debuts first Japanese beach resort

Located on a private island connected by bridge to Onna, on the west coast of Okinawa, the Hyatt Regency Seragaki Island Okinawa offers 344 guestrooms.

A Standard Room measures 38m<sup>2</sup> in size and comes with a lagoon view or ocean view, while a Premium Room, featuring a corner position, is 51m<sup>2</sup>; there are also six suites. Guests staying in a Suite or Club Access Room are also afforded access to the Regency Club Lounge.

There are five ocean-view banquet rooms on-site. The smallest, at 60m<sup>2</sup>, can accommodate 30 pax in banquet- or classroom-style and 35–40 pax reception-style. The largest is 150m<sup>2</sup>, with capacity for 80 pax in any format. A pre-function room is also available for use. Meanwhile, the 24-key Beach House across from the main hotel can be booked in its entirety for groups.

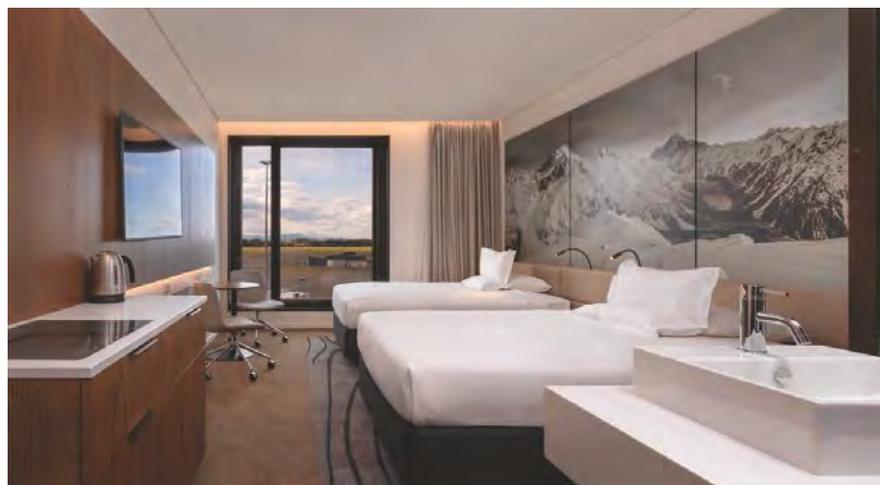
These meeting spaces are complemented by six delicious F&B options, ranging from Japanese teppanyaki to Italian cuisine. Guests can also enjoy drinks and the view at the Lobby Lounge, Lobby Bar, Firepit Terrace or Poolside Bar. Recreational facilities include an indoor and outdoor pool, lagoon, Spa Hanari, fitness centre, and activities such as morning yoga and stand-up paddleboarding.

## 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, gym, 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 audiovisual systems.



# This is how we do it

A multigenerational event audience is challenging the way conferences are executed nowadays. In Asia, this is fuelling the rise of more interactive delivery styles to capture the crowd's attention, writes **S Puvaneswary**



In many national and regional conferences in Asia, meeting organisers have recognised that attendees are demanding more interaction and engagement.

As such, this is changing the way conferences are executed, with many incorporating a meeting design that focuses on audience engagement, and sporting clear meeting objectives and desired outcomes.

Dee Dee Quah, director, Medical Conference Partners, explained: "The demographics of the audience are changing as young people enter the workforce and attend conferences. To engage with the younger audience, speakers have had to adapt and change their presentation style. Many organisers are moving away from having conferences wholly made up of traditional one-way lectures with limited time for Q&A at the end."

Quah further explained that "activity-based learning such as workshops and masterclasses have become very popular", as the audience – regardless of age – are more interested in learning from experiences as opposed to textbook reading. Another popular format is the inclusion of case studies in programmes.

"Speakers are also incorporating event technology apps such as Slido into the presentation to engage the audience during their presentation, and get live feedback," revealed Quah.

Mona Abdul Manap, founder and CEO of Place Borneo and Place Business Events, concurred that event apps have become increasingly popular over the last few years.

She elaborated: "It is especially effective in multigenerational conferences, especially in Asia. Young people are usually fearful of asking the speaker or panellists questions using a microphone when there are more experienced audience members present. With Slido and other event apps, questions can be posed anonymously."

Jay Ishak, event specialist, trainer and consultant at

**"Many organisers are moving away from having conferences wholly made up of traditional one-way lectures with limited time for Q&A at the end."**

**Dee Dee Quah**

Director, Medical Conference Partners



6E-Events – a PCO-based in Kuala Lumpur that manages national and regional conferences – shared that her company places great emphasis on the delivery of content as that is the essence of any conference.

"We always advise our clients not to have any session beyond 30 minutes, unless the speakers and their topics are very interesting or in-demand. We are one of few PCOs who will run through speaker presentations prior to the event to make sure it is not off topic, and that it can be delivered within the allocated time," Jay shared.

She added that 6E-Events will also run through the delivery styles with speakers, and advise them on various issues like how not to stereotype, projecting enthusiasm, and engaging the audience better with eye contact.

On how receptive her speakers have been to her suggestions, Jay related: "We have found that even experienced speakers are willing to adopt our suggestions and try something new which they had never done before. Ultimately, it is about ensuring that the audience benefits."

Meanwhile for Mona, she finds it a challenge sometimes, when it comes to convincing clients to use a format that is more inclusive than a lecture, such as a fireside chat or fishbowl forum.

"But once we are able to convince them and the conference turns out to be a success, they are more receptive to try new meeting concepts we propose at future events," she said.

Aside from meeting formats, Jay's clients also look for ideas on how to help their audience make the most out of the networking opportunities.

"At any conference, there are experienced delegates in their areas of expertise, less experienced ones, newbies and perhaps even students in a particular field. Many young ambitious delegates want to build their networks, but not all may feel comfortable approaching someone whom they regard as a key opinion leader in their field of expertise or senior individuals. This is a cultural thing, especially in Asia."

To get over this hurdle, Jay incorporates ice breakers and friendly contests early on in the programme or during networking sessions.

Roy Sheppard, specialist conference moderator, concluded: "Good conferences are those where the speakers and organisers know how to manage the interest, energy and engagement of everyone in the audience. Adult learning is most effective when there are elements of fun as part of the meeting design and this helps to engage the audience, which in turn increases the likelihood that they learn new things."

# Walid Wafik

SMX Convention Center's vice president and general manager, explains the value of MICE for the Philippines, and stresses the need for venues to adopt a service-oriented culture. By **Rosa Ocampo**

**SM Hotels and Convention (SMHC) is the largest builder of convention centres in the Philippines. SMHC owns eight SMX convention centres, with more to follow. What benefits does the company see in building such venues?**

We see the value of MICE. SMHC has a vision of being the leading hotel, beach and convention centre company in the country. Hence, it is building more convention centres to support and sustain the market development in the Philippines – and Asia – aligned with both the government's Build. Build. Build. programme and the Department of Tourism's MICE Roadmap 2030.

The MICE Roadmap also mentions the lack of huge convention and exhibition centres in the country. Even SMX Convention Center Manila, Philippines' biggest, is considered small, (due to) the growing trend for mega-events.

You'll be surprised that every year we turn down a lot of business because there's no available space.

One show that's expanding is Phil-construct, which combines SMX Manila and World Trade Center Manila as venues every year; they're desperate for space. We have other shows like Worldbex and Wofex that want to expand but there's no space. And we have associations that are using SMX Manila, which is getting too small for them.

**Are there plans to build bigger centres then?**

SMX Manila has no more room to grow, neither upwards nor horizontally. Every space is taken. However, we are in the very early

stages of looking at another project within the Mall of Asia; that's the only way we can expand.

SMX Convention Center Cebu, which will open in 1Q2022, will be bigger than SMX Manila in terms of leasable space. Its indoor Arena will also be bigger than the Arena at the Mall of Asia.

**What is SMX's formula for building convention centres which, noticeably, includes malls and hotels too?**

The presence of SMX convention centres next to, or as part, of an SM mall and a hotel – currently a Conrad, Radisson Blue or Park Inn by Radisson – was the vision of our late founder, Henry Sy. He wanted everything to be near each other and for them to benefit from each other. This formula works very well for us, and we want that formula – the trio of hotel, mall and convention centre – to stay.

SMXs are also in close proximity to a transportation hub or a domestic/international airport. This helps the client mount a successful event and addresses their major concerns, by contributing to the guest convenience and overall customer experience.

Sometimes, the location of an SMX is determined by sheer demand for events and whether the city is ready for a convention centre. When we opened SMX in Bacolod, we (were the ones who) started the business rolling there and others followed.

**Some planners prefer holding events in integrated resorts and hotels which are one-stop shops. What's your take on this?**

It comes down to how many people can a hotel ballroom handle; for a 1,000 pax group, it's a state of emergency. At SMX Manila, we do dinners for 14,000 people. That's the difference.

I know that hotels don't add room rental (for events), but their menus are different and more expensive. The purpose of a hotel ballroom is not to sell the venue, but to sell F&B.

For tradeshow, hotels cannot have booths that are high, or provide other services that convention centres can. Everyone has their own niche market. If a client wants a hotel, then (they should) go for a hotel. But SMX Manila has a hotel too; Conrad is our bedroom while SMX Manila is Conrad's ballroom.

**How do you think the convention centre of the future will look like?**

Considerations will include clients' ever-changing needs and requirements such as increasing size of events, technology, space flexibility, higher ceiling clearance, floor load capacity, and the number of function and meeting rooms.

Also, (there is) the need for convention centres of the future to adopt a hotel culture. Specifically, keen attention to details, presence, and interaction with event organisers and guests. These are the service-oriented things that we must bring (to the table). The hardware is already there, but we (have to) bring in the software.





## Regional specialists in business travel and events are confident of riding out the stormy global economy to come up hale and hearty, discovers **Karen Yue**

**T**he global economy is in a challenging state, faced with the threat of ‘slowbalisation’, where the world is turning against globalisation, and rising geopolitical risks, according to Andrew Staples, global editorial director of the Economist Corporate Network, The Economist Intelligence Unit.

Staples, who shared this observation at the inaugural SG Tourism Leaders Engagement Series in November, an event co-presented by TTG Asia Media, said this was an “age of anxiety, due to VUCA (volatility, uncertainty, complexity and ambiguity)”.

“On the one hand, economic growth in financial markets like the US are doing pretty well, at record levels even, and unemployment is in multi-decade lows. In terms of monetary policies, interest rates are virtually zero in most advanced economies around the world. Yet on the other hand, there is a lot of uncertainty around the world,” he said.

Closer to home, prolonged demonstrations in Hong Kong are hurting regional economic performance.

Staples highlighted that global GDP had slowed to 2.3 per cent in 2019, down from 2.8 per cent last year, with Brexit hurting investment confidence and Germany flirt-

ing with recession. “Global trade (in 2019) is expected to post some of the lowest growth rates we’ve seen in the past 11, 12 years since the global financial crises of 2007 and 2008,” he said.

Amid the dreary outlook, Staples offered a sliver of hope through data that pointed to continued economic growth in Asia, albeit at a slow pace for some markets.

India is expected to post stronger year-on-year GDP growth in 2020 at 6.7 per cent; while China (six per cent), South-east Asia (4.3 per cent) and Japan (0.4 per cent) are expected to see slower advancement.

Within South-east Asia, Myanmar (7.1 per cent), Laos (6.5 per cent) are expected to put in the strongest GDP performance, while Singapore (1.2 per cent) and Brunei (1.5 per cent) will see slight year-on-year improvements. Malaysia and Indonesia are expected to maintain their GDP growth at 4.4 per cent and 5.1 per cent, respectively.

Thailand (2.1 per cent), Cambodia (6.4 per cent), Vietnam (6.5 per cent) and the Philippines (5.2 per cent) will see slower year-on-year GDP growth.

Staples concluded: “You (tourism players) are in a really good sector. All the predicted drivers of growth – emerging economies, growing affluence, greater adoption of technology – are in your favour.”

### **Hopeful data**

Jameson Wong, Asia-Pacific business development director of global travel intelligence agency ForwardKeys, agreed that the outlook for Asia’s tourism industry is still bright.

“Asian economies are still performing and there is growing affluence (in the region). At the same time, low-cost carriers (LCCs) are expanding in Asia along with an Internet proliferation which has made travel purchase far more accessible to everyone. These factors are feeding tourism growth,” said Wong.

ForwardKeys data has recorded growth of at least 12 per cent in travel bookings issued for the period November 2019 to April 2020 for all countries, with the exception of Hong Kong and Sri Lanka. Vietnam sees the strongest forward inbound booking growth at 33 per cent, followed by Japan at 27 per cent.

“We do not foresee a decline in these numbers, as many countries are stepping up promotions and opening up new destinations for tourism. For cost-conscious travellers, Asia is always a more affordable option than longhaul destinations. Furthermore, regional business travel will remain fairly constant,” he added.

Wong believes Asian businesses will continue to be a major driver of tourism traffic in the region.

“Asia sees a lot of intra-regional business travel. Business trips have to be made in good times or bad, although companies will relook their way of travel. In the event that business class and full-service airlines are cut, this region has many LCC options to keep people flying,” he said, adding that intra-Asia travel takes up approximately 65 per cent market share of global travel annually.

Corporate meetings and events specialists are also maintaining an air of optimism around performance in this segment for 2020.

The *2020 Global Meetings and Events Forecast*, published in September 2019 by American Express Meetings & Events, found that meeting professionals are bullish about 2020, as steady growth across all meeting types is predicted for the fifth consecutive year.

Total meeting spend for 2020 is expected to rise by 1.3 per cent in Asia-Pacific, with respondents here saying they plan to do more with less in the region, while always keeping the attendee experience in central focus. Client/customer advisory board meetings and conferences/tradeshows are expected to be held most frequently in the new year, with a 2.3 per cent and two per cent growth respectively over 2019. The number of incentives/special events are only expected to grow nearly one per cent in 2020.

CWT Meetings & Events’ *2020 Future Trends Report* has projected an eight per cent growth in the US\$840 billion meetings industry in 2020 despite geopolitical and economic headwinds.

### Right attitude

Asian business event leaders emphasised that an ability to adapt quickly to challenges and see opportunities in obstacles will tide businesses through.

Antonio Codinach, regional business director Asia Pacific, at Professional Convention Management Association (PCMA), encouraged optimism among his industry peers. He said: “We are the most agile, fastest-growing region in the world. This is also a region that is the most stable and where opportunities are.”

Codinach said one’s attitude will shape one’s reaction to the projected future. “So, I choose to see the future with positive eyes. We need to be agile and adaptable to changes, and make a commitment to the industry or the destination we represent.”

Also upbeat about the future is Bruno Simões, managing director of DOC DMC Macau & Hong Kong, despite describing his business as being “in a situation” now, hurt by the social unrest in Hong Kong and soft event spend in major market China which is “locked in a trade stand-off with the US”.

His confidence is fuelled by his observation that “most corporate clients are ready for events and many associations are ready to grow (in this region)”.

He said: “Across the years, Asia’s business events industry has proven to be (strong in the face of technology disruption and crises). Hong Kong will recover very quickly, as she has done in previous crises.”

Jason Teh, managing director of Pico Malaysia, is optimistic too, due to a string of mega events happening around the world in 2020 and which Pico Group is involved in. “Most of our corporate clients are spending a bit more in the coming months. Business events is part of marketing, which will go on no matter the state of the economy,” explained Teh.

Business leaders were unanimous in the belief that the ability to turn a challenge into an opportunity will allow businesses to come up victorious.

Citing an example, Prashant Yadav, CEO, Liberty International India, said his company – which typically delivers outbound Indian events – moved swiftly to support Indian companies that have chosen to keep their events on home ground against a backdrop of a soft Indian economic growth.

“At least five companies that usually do annual incentives for 600 to 1,000 people to longhaul destinations chose to stay in the country. We turned the reluctance to leave India into a business opportunity for us and for India,” shared Yadav.

He added that some clients were also quick to capitalise on destinations in turmoil, when tourism products were offered at the best value for money.

For Simões, a business slowdown presents the opportunity to “do things we never had time to do because work in events is intensive”.

“So, now is the time for us to sharpen our weapons. There are constant challenges to business – technology disruption, talent crunch, etc. When you are busy delivering events, you barely have time to stop and think about how to deal with these problems.

This is now the best time to stop, look at what competitors and peers are doing, draw up an agenda to take the business forward, and learn,” he elaborated.

– *Additional reporting by S Puvaneswary*



“All the predicted drivers of growth are in your (tourism players’) favour.”

### Andrew Staples

Global editorial director, Economist Corporate Network, The Economist Intelligence Unit

# Asian appetite

It is a mixed bag of market projections, with Indonesia, the Philippines and China corporates still keen on longhaul destinations while others are less enthusiastic

## CHINA

China industry observers report sustained growth in 2020 for outbound business events and travel, driven largely by the need to cater to the country's millennial workforce and businesses impacted by the US-China trade war.

Julien Delerue, general manager of meetings and events procurement solutions company 1000meetings, said demand "is expected to increase", adding that companies are more inclined to explore destinations further afield or newer ones.

Delerue continued: "The trend in 2019 was already showing more demand for off-the-beaten-track destinations compared to renowned and established ones of the past. There is interest in the Mediterranean islands off Spain, or beach destinations in Vietnam such as Nha Trang, with more companies incorporating teambuilding or ecotourism elements to their meetings, incentive and conventions trips.

The number of incentive trips and conventions are expected to increase as more companies expand their businesses internationally.

"Overall, outbound is expected to grow a minimum 20 per cent, but with businesses stringent on cost management as a result of the prevailing world economic outlook," Delerue remarked.

Starry Wong, deputy general manager, Shangpin Tour Shenzhen, part of the Century Holiday Group, said "educational" trips were expected to grow rapidly in 2020, as more Chinese businesspeople saw the need to attend exhibitions to market their products.

Aggressive destination campaigning by foreign CVBs in China will "have a positive impact on outbound business", noted Vivian Zhang, director, MCI China.

However, optimism is being tempered by the US-China trade war where travel to the US has dropped, and strong currency exchange rates that have made travel to Europe expensive.

Zhang noted: "Business performance in the past year will impact event budgets for 2020. For exam-

ple, China's direct selling market, a major outbound spender, has undergone large-scale administrative reform which has put the whole industry at stake in the past year."

Wolfgang Georg Arlt, CEO of COTRI China Outbound Tourism Research Institute, said spending in 2020 was expected to grow at the same rate as travel. The corporate meetings sector would fare the best in 2020, he projected, as China was establishing many new business contacts to replace those in the US, in places like Brazil, Iran, and the European Union and in industries such as high-tech. – **Caroline Boey**

## INDONESIA

Signs of business recovery are clear for 2020, following a challenging 2019, as stability returns to the Indonesian political environment and new policies by President Joko Widodo are put in place to prioritise development.

Donny, managing director of Adonta Group, a local event and travel company, shared that client budgets will "be back to normal" this year, allowing his company to enjoy a "robust 2020 and beyond" that would be unlike 2019 when many clients cancelled their events due to political concerns.

Pauline Suharno, managing director of Elok Tour, said incentive programmes will grow in numbers, driven by infrastructure, pharmaceutical, automotive and insurance industries.

Fuelled by business confidence, Indonesian companies are turning to longhaul destinations to reward and motivate their staff and partners.

Eddy Efendy, director of Synergy Production Travel and Events, said Eastern European destinations are winning hearts with their exotic appeal and affordability compared to the more established Western European cities.

Ary Leonardo, vice president for the incentive department of AntaVaya, said the new year has gone off on a great start, with bookings for incentive trips secured until the end of 1Q2020. He will be handling a group of 20 top achievers from a cosmetics company to Greece and Turkey in March, and a 150-pax reward trip by an insurance firm to Dubai in April.

Ary observed that more Indonesian companies are favouring experiential programmes. – **Tiara Maharani**

▼ Chinese outbound incentive trips are expected to rise in 2020; Chinese travellers enjoying the moment at Marienplatz in Munich, Germany





## JAPAN

Against the excitement and shine of the 2020 Olympic and Paralympic Games in Tokyo, Japanese outbound event agencies are bracing themselves for reduced overseas activities in the new year as local companies choose to stay home and weave Games-related programmes into their incentive and teambuilding events.

Working against Japanese outbound event agencies is also a weakened event budget for 2020.

A sales representative for Tobu Top Tours, who requested for anonymity, said 2020 budget for overseas events is lower than that of 2019.

His revelation was echoed by Lucky Morimoto, president of Event Services Inc., who told *TTGmice* that budgets for 2020 are “flat.”

Destinations with a higher chance of winning these limited budgets are those with a strong reputation for safety and security, have a good selection of unique venues, and can offer a strong package of activities and experiences via local companies, he said.

Tobu Top Tours’ sales representative agrees that destinations must offer “something out of the ordinary” to score Japanese corporate movements, and pointed out that Hawaii is a firm favourite, while Cambodia and Vietnam are gaining popularity.

Morimoto predicts that Japanese incentives, ceremonies, galas and teambuilding activities will perform the best for overseas destinations. He also expects strongest business opportunities to lie in the IT, financial, insurance and automobile sectors.

– Kathryn Wortley

## MALAYSIA

Demand for outbound business events will continue to be soft in 1H2020, say Malaysian agents whose projections are influenced by ongoing trade tensions between China and the US; Brexit; a weak Malaysian currency; and other global uncertainties impacting the business environment.

Mayflower Holidays general manager, Abdul Rahman Mohamed, is expecting “smaller incentive group sizes partly because there are fewer people who were able to meet their sales targets (in 2019)”.

He also noted that clients were paying more attention to the price of the programme and not so much

▲ Japanese corporate groups are staying home this year to bring Olympic Games excitement into their incentive and teambuilding programmes

on the experience. “In the past, companies used to ask for quotations from four players, usually the ‘big boys, during the bidding process. Now, it is not unusual for them to ask from eight players as companies shop around for the cheapest offer. Travel companies desperate for business are also dumping rates.”

Budgets for incentive programmes have been cut by some 10 to 15 per cent compared to 2019, he added. As a result, fancy optionals, such as a gala dinner or a Michelin-star feast, have been abandoned.

Syed Razif Al-Yahya, managing director of Sutra Group of Companies, shares a dull outlook for 2020, as his expectations of a local economic rebound in 3Q2019 had failed to happen.

He said Malaysian companies had cut costs in 2019 due to uncertainties in the business environment as well as lower profits – an unfortunate development that he predicts will continue into 2020.

“(Besides slashing event budgets for 2020), companies are reducing the number of staff attending events, as well as being more picky with airfares and hotels,” Syed Razif said.

He added: “Sectors like insurance and financial sectors are still fulfilling their obligations to top achievers, but Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) have yet to even determine a destination for their reward trips. Some SMEs are looking at destinations in the region, while others are rewarding staff with cash incentives instead of all-expense paid incentive trips.”

Raaj Navaratnaa, general manager, New Asia Holiday Tours & Travel, has also seen a small number of SMEs opting for cash incentives, and he believes this may catch on with multinational firms in the future.

– S Puvaneswary

## PHILIPPINES

Outbound business events from the Philippines – still comprising mostly incentive travel – is expected to remain robust, influenced by several positive changes in the marketplace.

These changes include destinations like Europe becoming more affordable; NTOs actively promoting their packages; non-traditional carriers like Saudia and China Eastern providing better accessibility to far-flung destinations at affordable rates; and the advent of low-cost carriers that fly from many parts of the country.

Long-established MICE destinations of Thailand, South Korea and Japan will remain on the radar because aside from granting attractive perks to corporate groups, they also dangle the lure of new products, activities or locations.

Turkey will remain in the rat race given its jaw-dropping promotions in the Philippines, direct Manila-Istanbul flights, as well as affordable packages made possible by government subsidy for hotel operators and earnings from optional tours that cover low net rate and service fee, said Angel Ramos Bognot, owner of Asian Afro World Events.

Bognot also expects newcomer Vietnam to be one of the most-favoured South-east Asian destinations because of its extensive marketing promotions and planner incentives in the Philippines, while Malaysia is seen to follow Thailand’s lead of offering cash subvention depending on the size of the event group.

Other corporations, however, are looking for new and exotic destinations. Israel, Kazakhstan, Georgia, Armenia, Morocco, and Russia, among others, have come up on their shopping list.

Budget remains a major factor for corporate outbound and this has been factored in clients' 2020 programme. Benjie Bernal, Sharp Travel Services tour operations manager, said the event budget varies among their clients, but as travelling becomes more affordable, there are also company heads that bring along their lower-ranking staff on more focused programmes. – **Rosa Ocampo**

### SINGAPORE

As the waves of economic downturn crash onto Singapore's shores, local business confidence has taken a hit and companies are clamping down on discretionary spend, of which the MICE sector is largely considered a part. Planners and agents alike report tightening travel budgets across the board, shrinking the distance and scale of events and incentive trips.

This is compared to last year's buoyant forecasts, whereby 80 per cent of planners in Asia were found to have expanded event budgets, according to the 2019 Cvent Planner Sourcing Report Asia Edition. Now, Singapore's companies are retreating into more conservative travel spending for 2020.

Diana Ho, general manager of Royal Wings Travel, observed: "Companies are tightening their travel budgets and cutting down on longer trips. Groups that used to go longhaul are now looking at nearby destinations."

Popular destinations include perennial favourites like Thailand, Vietnam and Malaysia, while some TMCs report a growing interest in Cambodia and Myanmar.

"(Besides being accessible), these destinations have infrastructure to support mid- to large-scale events at a cost-effective price, which allows planners to achieve better return on objectives with lower investments," explained Petrina Goh, director, Singapore, CWT Meetings & Events.

Whether MICE spend and travel distance will bounce back in 2020 will depend on the status of geopolitical developments.

Goh noted: "We've noticed that the list of approved destinations for outbound business events has been shrinking. Event planners naturally want to avoid cities or countries that are at greater risk of being impacted or do not have adequate infrastructure to cope with such incidents." – **Pamela Chow**

### THAILAND

Thai MICE groups, armed with a stronger currency and therefore greater buying power, have become the darling of many destinations.

Dave Chang, managing director, Asia MICE Planner, said Japan and other South-east Asian destinations stand to benefit most from Thai corporate travel, and DMCs and hotels are "happy to offer competitive rates to attract more business from Thailand".

"While the 2020 budgets of upscale clients have remained consistent with last year's, (cost-conscious clients) are trying to save even more money," Chang observed, adding that for the latter group, travel budgets for European destinations have shrunk.



**“Event planners naturally want to avoid cities or countries that are at greater risk of being impacted (by political unrest).”**

**Petrina Goh**  
Director, Singapore,  
CWT Meetings & Events

Corporate clients are also increasingly relying on social media to make their travel decisions, although airfare and the safety of the destination remain the most critical decision influencers.

Meanwhile, Addy Ritthirong, managing director of Eventage (Thailand), is keeping his eye on political and economic developments in the world as well as new destinations in season, festivals and national grand sales, which he believes will impact 2020 outbound MICE demand for his Thai clientele. – **Anne Somanas**

### VIETNAM

As Vietnam's business event offerings continue to grow, infrastructure improves and domestic air routes expand, the domestic market has emerged as the destination's biggest source of business events.

Jackie Han, deputy director general of Hoa Binh Group, said: "The majority of events are still planned for within Vietnam. There are many new exciting destinations, venues and opportunities opening that (local corporates) want to explore."

Bruno Simoes, executive director of smallWORLD Experience, also noted an increase in domestic-driven demand. He said Hanoi remains a "trendy" destination, with the company receiving a rise in enquiries for the Vietnamese capital in 2020.

For Vietnamese firms that do consider overseas events, regional destinations are favoured.

Han said destinations closer to Vietnam are most popular "in order to meet clients' budgets", budgets which have risen slightly for 2020.

Pham Ha, CEO of Luxury Travel Vietnam, noted that outbound MICE is a "rapidly growing segment", with growth seen in 2020 compared with 2019. He added: "Big enterprises now have a combination of travel with seminars and accompanying events."

Simoes said the main factor expected to impact Vietnam's outbound MICE market in 2020 is the Chinese economy. He said: "We are quite concerned with the current economic 2020 outlook in China. The economy is slowing down and the whole world's economy, namely South-East Asia, will be affected." Ha added that the currency exchange rate may also have an impact. – **Marissa Carruthers**

# Trends to watch

Sector specialists tell **Caroline Boey** what they are keeping their eye on in 2020

## CORPORATE TRAVEL



**Akshay Kapoor**  
Senior director,  
multinational customer group,  
Asia Pacific, CWT

### What is trending?

To win the talent war, organisations recognise the need to provide a holistic employee experience. Business travel contributes to employee satisfaction and productivity, leading to a higher overall return on investment for the company.

Business travel programmes have become more focused, and many are also seeking sustainability and reporting requirements from suppliers.

### How will these trends impact the way suppliers and buyers work?

Low margins in the airline and hospitality industry, and antiquated systems have led to a need for evolution in distribution and content. For business travel, increased complexity with private channel content creates a need for buyers and suppliers to work closely across the value chain to provide a highly customised experience for the traveller while creating an efficient shopping experience.

We are seeing increased consolidation across the supply chain. With travel buyers becoming more cautious, suppliers are expected to see pricing and cost becoming a bigger priority in buying decisions.

## CORPORATE MEETINGS AND EVENT



**Milton Rivera**  
Vice president, global business development & strategy,  
American Express  
Global Business  
Travel

### What is trending?

Attendee experience continues to be a focus across the globe (and) face-to-face meetings continue to be a defining feature of activity in Asia-Pacific, with 13 per

cent of meeting planners reporting they do not use any virtual or hybrid meetings.

Sustainability is a key area of focus. Also, as companies are highly aware of managing their corporate reputation, compliance continues to be a recurring theme in countries across the region.

### How will these trends impact the way suppliers and buyers work?

With the focus on attendee experience and making personal connections a priority in the region, planners and travel buyers will have to find smarter solutions to deliver memorable events.

That may translate into decisions about different destination and/or the style of the event being delivered; smarter supplier sourcing like finding the right suppliers who share the values of the organisation; while delivering cost efficiencies without sacrificing the quality and experience of the event.

## EXHIBITIONS



**Kai Hattendorf**,  
Managing director  
and CEO, UFI

### What is trending?

The exhibitions industry continues to grow faster than the world economy. However, growth has slowed as trade barriers have gone up. This has led to growth in new markets, with a number of Asian markets benefitting.

Overall, Asia is the fastest-growing region with regards to exhibitions. While mergers and acquisitions will continue in our industry, many leaders are now focusing on customer experience and customer-centricity, leading to an ongoing evolution of the traditional trade-show business model.

### What factors are driving these trends?

Trade barriers and tariffs impact the way the world economy works. Millennials entering the boardrooms are influenc-

ing the ways marketing investments are viewed and prioritised.

The key for exhibition organisers here is to maintain – or regain – trust in their shows by being transparent about the values and ROIs that they offer. With more and more private equity investments coming into our industry, the current focus on “getting things right” is undoubtedly here to stay.

### How will these trends impact the way suppliers and buyers work?

Nothing will replace the value of face-to-face meetings and interactions. But UFI research, drawn on the global input from more than 13,000 tradeshow visitors, shows that suppliers are expected to provide more than just the trade and the conversation at their booth.

The “confex” and “festivalisation” trend means that exhibitions are also expected to (provide) a memorable experience.

## ASSOCIATION CONGRESSES



**Octavio B Peralta**  
President, Asia-Pacific Federation  
of Association  
Organisations

### What is trending?

I see three cross-cutting themes trending in the association congress space.

They are: more experiential events, developing meaningful connections, and providing sustainability, which are largely driven by technological innovation, purposeful creativity, and social responsibility, respectively.

It is about return on experience – ROE – and not only about ROI. It is not only about networking, but of connecting people for a purpose and in memorable settings. It is about being mindful about doing events that contribute to the destination’s environmental, social and economic well-being.

### How will these trends impact the way suppliers and buyers work?

More than ever, I think association buyers and suppliers need to “converge and immerse” themselves into these trends and work closely together for greater impact. Association buyers have to spell out clearly in their RFPs, what their expectations are, for example, of a green event, so suppliers can also make suggestions in terms of say, energy-efficient transportation options, farm-to-table dining choices, or reusable event materials, among others.

# Destinations on the rise

Regional destinations are satisfying Asian planners' thirst for unique, fun experiences, while longhaul players are fighting to obtain a share of the pie

## ASIA HOTS UP

The hallmarks of a hot meetings destination have shifted as demand for bleisure and unique events is on the rise, and Asia has taken centre stage. Due to increased sourcing volume to the region, Cvent last year unveiled two standalone Top 25 Meeting Destinations lists for Asia, and Australia & Oceania. The expanded list highlights Asia-Pacific's strength and growing popularity as a destination for business events.

Topping the rankings was Singapore, followed by Bangkok, Hong Kong, Kuala Lumpur, Shanghai, Tokyo, Seoul, Beijing, Bali and Mumbai. The list reflects how Asia-Pacific cities have enhanced their infrastructure and positioned their destination as prime event locations, noted Chris McAndrews, vice president of marketing for Cvent Hospitality Cloud.

"For example, Bangkok, which moved up one spot on this year's list, has elevated its MICE profile with support from the Thailand Convention and Exhibition Bureau in hosting industry-facing events such as its first Thailand MICE Forum. The destination has seen incredible investment in luxury hotels in recent years, offers great value, and the country delivers on desirable offerings including unique culture, world-class dining and shopping, vibrant nightlife, and some of the best beaches in the world," he explained.

Meanwhile, the 2020 Summer Olympics has cast a spotlight on Tokyo, which has in turn boosted its room hotel inventory and tourist facilities. While infrastructure and accessibility have traditionally been critical in pulling events, these alone are no longer enough as "event organisers are looking for different locales to deliver more memorable events and offer their delegates a truly unique experience", observed McAndrews.

Instead, next year will see demand strengthen for bleisure and unique events, which may serve to shake up the top 25 list as planners look to unexplored destinations.

McAndrews predicted: "Event organisers will now look beyond accessibility (and consider) if a particular destination can deliver a more exclusive cultural experience. For example, Pasay City in the Philippines, which is new to the list this year, could see even more traction in the years ahead as 9,000 additional rooms across hotels and serviced apartments open by 2021.

"We're keeping our eye on other cities that are new to the list this year including Osaka, Hanoi and Chiba. It will also be interesting to see if Nadi in Fiji, which came in at number 10 on the Australia/Oceania Top 10 list, will continue to rise in rank within the Australia-heavy list." – **Pamela Chow**



▲ Panoramic view of Baku, the capital of Azerbaijan

## ALLURES BEYOND ASIA

**Los Angeles** Spurred by increased connectivity and expanding attractions, Los Angeles (LA) Tourism & Convention Board has launched the LA Insider Specialist Program in Asia to equip trade agents with destination facts, products and updates.

The programme provides agents with incentives for completing courses, such as vouchers and attraction tickets, as well updates on LA's upcoming attractions.

The following years will see several new points of interest in the destination, including The Academy Museum in 2020; the LA Stadium, which will open in 2020 and host the 2022 Super Bowl; 30 new hotels in the next four years; as well as new and expanded airport terminals before the 2028 Summer Olympic Games.

To this end, Los Angeles Tourism's regional director for Australia/New Zealand Craig Gibbons' portfolio has been expanded to also oversee Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, Vietnam – in addition to Australia and New Zealand – in August 2019.

**Azerbaijan** Azerbaijan Tourism Board (ATB) debuted at ITB Asia 2019, led by CEO Florian Sengstschmid, to explore collaborative opportunities with Asia's travel agencies and encourage travellers to explore the country's rich blend of modernity and antiquity through its *Take Another Look* campaign.

In Asia, China and India are Azerbaijan's biggest visitor source markets, while South Korea and Japan have posted a strong increase in overnights. In response, ATB is set to open a marketing office in Seoul.

For South-east Asia, Singapore, Malaysia and Indonesia are on the radar for ATB.

More recently, Azerbaijan implemented a simplified e-visa procedure that is available to Thai and Vietnamese travellers. Singaporeans, Malaysians and Indonesians are eligible for visa upon arrival.

However, destination promotions are still nascent, admitted the NTO chief, as the former Soviet state looks towards tourism as a new economic revenue generator following sharp declines in global oil prices in recent years. ATB itself, Sengstschmid said, was only founded in 2018.

**Malta** Tourism arrivals to Malta have traditionally been dominated by European markets, with the UK, Germany and Italy as forerunners. However, recent economic and political issues in Europe have spurred the island to look towards the Far East to expand visitorship.

As part of its latest efforts to court Asians, Malta struck up a partnership with Manchester United Football Club as an official destina-

tion partner. The agreement, inked in September 2019, sees Malta being featured as the “players’ destination of choice” during the club’s overseas events, as the country is a popular holiday spot among the players and home to the oldest active Manchester United supporters’ club. Such a partnership would be effective in Asia, where Manchester United is a household name, and can lend its star power to the destination.

Malta has also been added to Qatar Airways’ roster of flights, which can bring even more travellers from Asia. The destination has also recently signed a MoU with four Chinese tour operators.

**Kenya** Though small in numbers, South-east Asia is a high-yield travel market for Kenya and its tourism board has taken notice.

Kenya Tourism Board’s chairman, Jimi Kariuki shared that his bureau is engaging several airlines in talks for direct flights to the region. The only destination that Kenya Airways flies to in South-east Asia today is Bangkok.



For now, Kenya is targeting the FIT market and small private groups, and showcasing its core tourism draws: its wildlife safari and pristine beaches, and its two large cities, Nairobi and Mombasa. The board is also looking at engaging local destination experts in key markets it has identified – Thailand, Singapore, Malaysia, Indonesia and Vietnam.

The year 2018 saw around 90,000 tourists from South-east Asia, a 25 per cent growth over 2017. – **Rachel AJ Lee**

▲ Three giraffes roam a protected national park in Kenya, Africa

## ibtm® ASIA PACIFIC

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# Full steam ahead



Sri Lanka is powering along the tracks to recovery following the Easter Sunday attacks, and the shake-up in national leadership presents ripe opportunities for tourism growth. By **Pamela Chow**

**T**he shadow that had been cast on Sri Lanka's MICE sector due to last year's Easter Sunday bombings is now a fading worry, as the country marches into 2020 with renewed confidence from event organisers.

Five months after the attacks, Colombo hosted mega congregation Ashara Mubaraka in September. The sermon received 21,000 members of the Dawoodi Bohra community from 40 regions and countries including South-east Asia, Australia, Middle East, East Africa, Europe, the US and Canada.

This year, Colombo is set to host a healthy line-up

of international events, including the Global Academic Research Institute's International Conference on Leisure and Tourism in March; the 6<sup>th</sup> World Conference on Women's Studies in May; and the World HR Congress in July. This uptick is an optimistic turn compared to the aftermath of the April attacks, when some 90 per cent of business events bookings for May and June were postponed, cancelled or put on hold.

Now, armed with a change in leadership from the November re-elections, the tourism trade is rallying for quality growth in 2020. Already more than 160 million rupees (US\$2.2 million) have been pumped into an aggressive promotional campaign at the World Travel Mart (WTM) London in November, and Sri Lanka is readying for visits from travel associations from Italy, Belgium and the UK in coming months.

Under newly-elected president Gotabaya Rajapaksa, Prasanna Ranatunga has been appointed as the new minister of tourism. Sri Lanka's industry players are now urging the new administration to develop a blueprint for the industry that prioritises quality tourism over quantity.

"The private companies have been working together

to promote tourism for Sri Lanka. Right now, what we need is more support from the government,” remarked Ruwan Fernando, manager – Asia, Diethelm Travel Sri Lanka.

Other industry leaders, such as Aitken Spence Travels’ managing director Nalin Jayasundera, have expressed the need for the new administration to kickstart the country’s long-belated global marketing campaign, which was originally slated to commence last November.

The campaign was aimed at promotions in India, the UK, Germany, France, Italy, China, Japan, Russia, Australia, Benelux, Poland and Ukraine. The authorities were also planning to appoint PR agencies in 13 markets to assist with market intelligence, market analysis and key stakeholder contacts.

### **Old Colombo charms**

Holding strong as the commercial capital of Sri Lanka, Colombo City has continued to draw high demand for meetings and conferences thanks to the lasting power of reputable hotels such as Hilton Colombo and The Kingsbury.

Christopher Zappia, cluster commercial director, Hilton Colombo & DoubleTree by Hilton Weerawila Rajawarna Resort, said: “In 1Q2019, Sri Lanka was doing very well, but after the attacks, business came to a screeching halt. Now, corporate business is slowly starting back up.”

Even Shangri-La Hotel, Colombo, whose main restaurant was hit by the bombings, has since retained near-maximum occupancy, with the restaurant having been given an overhaul, said its assistant manager, sales – leisure (Sri Lanka), Yohan Liyanage.

He elaborated: “Even after the chaos, demand for our hotel is very strong. The majority of our guests – about 85 per cent – are corporate travellers.”

These hotel brands and properties are forging fearlessly ahead and will present shinier offerings this year.

Hilton Colombo has scheduled phases of refurbishment throughout 2020, while the chain has seven more properties planned for Sri Lanka in the next two to three years. Meanwhile, Shangri-La Hotel, Colombo, welcomed an adjoining mall complex in October 2019 and will open two residential towers by mid-2020. Also, The Kingsbury recently completed reconstruction of its first floor, and now features a renovated lounge and a seafood restaurant.

As for Colombo, the city will welcome even more significant development in the following years.

The area surrounding Beira Lake and Galle Face will soon be populated by integrated developments featuring upscale and luxury hotels, such as the five-star local brand Cinnamon Life, The Ritz-Carlton and JW Marriott by 2024; while the raved port city with convention halls and shopping malls is slated for completion by 2025.

### **Affordable coasts**

Just 30 minutes from Bandaranaike International Airport, Negombo is often overlooked as a transit city en route to Colombo.

The sleepy seaside city in fact offers MICE groups an affordable getaway from the bustling hub, with hotels lining the shoreline of the Laccadive Sea.

Rooms and ballrooms here are lower in cost, with

unique spaces and suites affording sweeping views of the coastline. For example, the 139-key Heritance Negombo – a local brand along main road Lewis Place and popular leisure spot Browns Beach – is a large and stylish property featuring a main banquet hall for up to 250 pax, and a smaller divisible hall for up to 130 pax. Groups seeking a venue to relax and enjoy a cold bottle against the sunset can book out the See Lounge on level two of the main hotel building.

Another local hotel chain Jetwing also operates a number of properties in Negombo, such as the neighbouring upscale resort Jetwing Beach and family-style Jetwing Blue. These properties are favourable for medium-sized groups, where upper management or top performers can be placed in the more premium suites of Jetwing Beach.

Further south along the west coast, the shores of Kalutara are dotted with numerous resorts that offer a more peaceful environment, compared to Colombo and Negombo. Groups searching for privacy and sprawling facilities can consider resorts such as The Blue Water Hotel, Turyaa Kalutara and the upscale Anantara Kalutara Resort.

However, planners should note that not all hotel ballrooms and venues are fitted with built-in audiovisual systems. While some hotels can provide basic mobile projectors, presentations that require greater audiovisual capabilities may necessitate an external supplier, which can be sourced for a fee.

### **Strong incentives push**

Bespoke solutions and memorable experiences are a strong suit of Sri Lanka that industry players are marketing to incentive groups.

As expressway accessibility in the country is limited to the airport and the main cities, local operators and DMCs still play a pertinent role in providing seamless group tours, explained Rashonitha Lilendva, customer relations executive of MICE.lk.

These tours run the gamut of safaris to a 260-year-old unsolved murder mystery, and can include corporate fine touches like VIP welcome performances, teambuilding activities and other tailor-made requests. Possibly the most prolific experience is a cross-country ride in a 19<sup>th</sup>-century steam train, on which groups can enjoy dining in a luxury carriage with a view of Kandy’s rolling hills.

Even groups staying put in Colombo City can enjoy unique pre- and post-event tours. For example, Aitken Spence offers a “dodgy bar” guided tour of historical watering holes in the city.

**“Private companies have been working together to promote tourism for Sri Lanka. Right now, what we need is more support from the government.”**

### **Ruwan Fernando**

Manager – Asia, Diethelm Travel Sri Lanka



# Distinguished blends

Tokyo, Japan's top destination for business events, reinforces its appeal through strong city-wide partnerships and a tantalising blend of traditions and modernity. By **Karen Yue**

Visions of skyscrapers, trains that run on a precise schedule, dancing robots and trend-setting youths naturally come to mind when people speak of Tokyo.

Looking to change Tokyo's narrative by playing up the city's diverse nature, the Tokyo Metropolitan Government launched the campaign, Tokyo Tokyo Old meets New. It highlights Tokyo's new and traditional attractions, and suggests new and creative ways for event delegates to experience them.

To deliver a complete Tokyo experience, Tokyo Convention & Visitors Bureau (TCVB) has forged a close partnership with Tokyo MICE hubs, such as DMO Roppongi, Hachioji Visitors & Convention Bureau, and Tokyo Waterfront City Association (learn more about Tokyo's MICE hubs at <https://tokyomice.org/>).

The TCVB Business Events Team explained that while event requests are typically submitted to the national bureau, the team will "connect planners with the relevant DMOs after investigating their requests".

## Extraordinary experiences

A buzzing city like Tokyo deserves a business event programme with a passionate start, and an ice-breaker or team bonding activity involving traditional taiko drums makes a great option.

Taiko-Lab offers private group classes in its Aoyama studio in Tokyo, where lessons are led by experienced taiko drummers who perform at concerts around the world every year. An up-close taiko performance gets corporate participants in the mood, before they have a go on the drums themselves. Basic drumming techniques are imparted, and all moves are later combined to create a memorable team performance.

With energy levels running high, head to the youthful streets of Harajuku and Omotesando, where creative shops, restaurants and cafes abound. If the intricate maze of the two areas is too much to navigate over limited time, then stick to Takeshita Street where the group can return to their childhood days and have fun photos taken at a purikura photo booth

▲ Tohrinso, a historical building within Meiji Jingu, welcomes private event hires

machine club, as well as snack on pretty crepes and rainbow-coloured cotton candy. End the adventure at the Kawaii Monster Café where the interior is a colourful dreamscape populated by oversized animal heads, milk bottles, mushrooms, and candy. Servers, dressed in enormous wigs and cute outfits, double up as performers on a giant candy stage for regular shows. Venue buyouts are welcome.

Moving on from vibrant Tokyo to its quieter, more refined side, journey on foot through an evergreen forest to Meiji Jingu shrine, dedicated to the deified spirits of Emperor Meiji and his wife, Empress Shoken. A new events complex has risen in the past year on the temple grounds, giving corporate groups a chance to meet in a unique and sacred location. Forrest Terrace Meiji Jingu, nestled among 700,000m<sup>2</sup> of lush forest in the inner garden, offers three function halls, all of which look out to greenery. Banquet Hall Keyaki is the largest venue, with capacity for 96 people in classroom-style.

Event attendees can also convene in Tohrinsoh, a traditional Japanese house with tatami flooring, which is now recognised as a Tokyo Metropolitan Historic Building. It can accommodate a 52-pax banquet.

Extend the uniquely Japan experience with Monko, an unusual game of incense listening, once appreciated by ancient Japanese aristocrats. It requires patient participants to take turns to identify a unique scent emanating from a censer containing a tiny piece of incense wood warmed by a smouldering piece of charcoal.

Alternatively, an elegant Japanese tea ceremony is always a favoured activity. Indulge VIPs in the experience at Chosho-an within The Okura Heritage Wing.

#### Luxe factor

Tokyo's impressive selection of luxury accommodation was most recently updated with the long-awaited opening of The Okura Tokyo (read more on page 24-25) on September 12, 2019. The revitalised and rebranded version of the former Hotel Okura Tokyo is now made up of The Okura Heritage Wing for an exquisite traditional Japanese stay, and The Okura Prestige Tower which promises a modern welcome.

Elsewhere in the Japanese capital city, the upscale Roppongi area is a hot choice for high-end business events, particularly smaller gatherings with 100 to 200



▲ From top: Grand Hyatt Tokyo offers 16 events venues; Cutting a futuristic figure, the *Emeraldas* cruise ship offers a great way to see Tokyo's waterfront

guests. Natural draws for planners with plush budgets include Grand Hyatt Tokyo, which boast their own function facilities, as well as dedicated conference centres and unique venues such as Roppongi Academyhills, Roppongi Hills Club, and Tokyo City View.

However, DMO Roppongi's secretariat, Mariko Yamagishi, said the area's popularity extends beyond high-end events. She said: "The convenience of having nearby conference facilities, other hotels, as well as restaurants and bars that open till late makes Roppongi attractive to all types of business events."

She shared that Advertising Week Asia 2019 was held across Tokyo Midtown Hall & Conference and Suntory Museum of Art, while a Dutch marketing company and a UK consulting company conducted their events at the Nogi-jinja shrine.

And the Roppongi area will get hotter still, according to Yamagishi who revealed that the DMO is growing its inventory of event facilities. The National Art

▼ From left: Kawaii Monster Cafe is a unique venue that brings massive doses of fun to corporate events; Taiko-Lab shakes up events with passionate drum beats



## DESTINATION : JAPAN

Center, Tokyo is one of the newest venue to join the destination marketer.

“The area around Roppongi is also becoming ever more convenient and attractive, with a new development going up right next door,” she said.

The referenced development is the Toranomon-Azabudai Project, slated for completion in 2023, which will add offices, residences, a hotel, an international school, retail shops, restaurants and cultural facilities into a large section of Central Tokyo.

### Bay beats

Event possibilities in Tokyo extend to the bayfront where Aomi, Odaiba and Ariake are.

▼ Abundant daylight floods Forrest Terrace Meiji Jingu's Banquet Hall Keyaki



Today, the Tokyo Waterfront Area is known around the world for being one of the key locations of Tokyo 2020 Olympic and Paralympic Games. Among experienced event planners, the Tokyo Bay district has earned a following for being a compact and convenient MICE hub that is served by two train lines: New Transit Yurikamome and Rinkai Line.

It is home to the landmark Tokyo Big Sight exhibition center, Telecom Center Building which has rentable venues within, massive shopping malls such as Palette Town and DiverCity Tokyo Plaza, as well as hotels across different star ratings.

A great way to appreciate the bay area is by a river cruise. Tokyo Cruise operates three futuristic, pod-like ships – *Emeraldas*, *Himiko* and *Hotaluna* – from multiple piers along the bayfront. Planners can choose to charter the ships for private cocktail parties, or simply buy-out special sections onboard *Emeraldas* to seat their VIPs.

Drumming up excitement for the district is the new Tokyo International Cruise Terminal which will open in 2020, remarked Ryuusuke Ohki secretary-general of the Tokyo Waterfront City Association.

“To help event delegates enjoy the Tokyo Waterfront Area, we will be introducing a coupon in the new fiscal year to provide discounts to merchants and access to transportation in the area,” said Ohki.

### Super suburbs

Extending a meeting programme beyond Central Tokyo has its perks. The pace slows down, the vistas and attractions are different.

Over in Tama in Western Tokyo, stands the

## REVIEW: THE OKURA TOKYO

Nestled in a quiet embassy district sits The Okura Tokyo, birthed from an extensive four-year reconstruction of the iconic Hotel Okura Tokyo.

**Karen Yue** discovers that it is perfect for bleisure travellers

▼ The Maple function room sports a grand European design



### Rooms

The Okura Heritage Wing and The Okura Prestige Tower sit under The Okura Tokyo banner, adjacent to each other and connected by an indoor walkway.

The Prestige Room at The Okura Prestige Tower was my home for five nights, a 48m<sup>2</sup> expansive space with an oversized bath area and walk-in wardrobe that can be separated by sliding wood-panelled doors from the generous sleeping quarter, work area and lounge. A minimalist interior dominates, with use of warm woods, classic marble, textured fabrics and a soothing palette of white and sand. In space-scarce Tokyo, hotel rooms of this size is a dream. My room further pleases with splendid views of the city.

### MICE facilities

The Okura Tokyo was clearly designed with events in mind, with The Okura Prestige Tower positioned as the hub for gatherings. There are 19 venues spread across levels one, two, seven and 41. Some boast traditional Japanese design elements while others bear European signatures.

The Heian Room, at 1,968m<sup>2</sup>, is the largest in the collection, capable of accommodating a 2,300-pax conference or a 900-pax banquet. Perfect for international meetings, this venue comes with an overhead simultaneous translation office.

When combined with the Akebono and Chitose rooms, the entire space can take in about 2,800 guests. Located altogether on the first floor, these rooms also have their own entrance, which grants event delegates privacy.

Elsewhere, the western-style function rooms are perfect for corporate meetings, product launches and banquets.



Ishikawa Brewery whose six buildings are registered National Heritage Sites. A guided tour of the facilities allows visitors to appreciate the architecture and the established brewing process, learn about the heritage of the Ishikawa family that still resides onsite, as well as sample sake unique to the brewery.

Ishikawa Brewery offers an Italian restaurant, a Japanese restaurant and a party venue on the second floor for private events.

Yet another gem to discover in Western Tokyo is Hachioji, famed for being a post town on the ancient Koshu Kaido road that connected travellers with the old Japanese capital of Edo. Today, Hachioji on the foothills of the Okutama Mountains, offer nature getaways. Hiking up Mount Takao can be a memo-

▲ From left: Learn how sake is brewed the traditional way at Ishikawa Brewery; witness a prayer ceremony at Takaosan Yakuoin

rable experience for groups yearning for a change in environment after days of indoor conferences.

Pair that excursion with a visit to Takaosan Yakuoin Buddhist temple, where a top-notch and beautifully-plated vegetarian kaiseki-style meal awaits. Take the temple experience further by having a resident monk guide the group through the temple architecture and history, and should the stars be aligned, delegates could experience the unique fire prayer ceremony.

With so many points of appeal cutting across the modern and the traditional, the luxurious and nature's best, event planners will be hard-pressed to ever run out of fresh ideas in Tokyo.

Within a month of its opening, these venues hosted several high-profile events, such as the Rugby 2019 pre-game festival and a two-week-long VIP client event by a luxury brand.

#### Other facilities

The Okura Tokyo is an attraction itself, with beautiful public spaces rich in traditional Japanese design elements, an impressive selection of excellent dining destinations, and its very own art museum.

Within The Okura Heritage Wing are Yamazato which serves fine Japanese cuisine in a traditional ambience and offers five private rooms and Chosho-an tea ceremony room with a private zen garden; and Nouvelle Epoque, a new twist to the former La Belle Epoque French restaurant.

Over at The Okura Prestige Tower are Orchid, the hotel's cavernous all-day dining destination; Toh-Ka-Lin, which is reputed as Japan's first Cantonese restaurant managed by a hotel; and Sazanka teppanyaki restaurant.

In addition to these, the Orchid Bar and Starlight are perfect for intimate gatherings over quality libation.

Event planners can easily weave Japanese tea ceremonies, sake tasting and wine appreciation workshops into their programme, leveraging on the hotel's own tea ceremony masters and award-winning chief sommelier and network of famed wine critics.

The Okura Museum of Art, located within the hotel grounds, should not be missed. Opened in 1917 and part of the hotel's elaborate renovations, the private museum houses a valuable collection of pre-modern Japanese and East Asian artworks belonging to Kihachiro Okura.



▲ An elegant lobby greets guests at The Okura Prestige Tower

#### Service

While the physical aspects of the hotel have changed, its heart remains the same – staff are attentive without being intrusive, and come across as being sincerely welcoming. When I asked for directions to hotel facilities and the nearest convenience store, staff made the effort to walk me down the right way.

#### Verdict

It would be a shame if one visited Tokyo for a meeting and not get to experience the destination. However, should time really be lacking, The Okura Tokyo could plug that gap, with its omotenashi, authentic dining experiences and cultural activities.

#### Fast facts

Number of rooms 508

Website <https://theokuratokyo.jp/en>

Tokyo Convention and Visitors Bureau

# Endless ideas, supreme support

The Tokyo Unique Venues One-stop Service Desk makes it easy for MICE planners to create remarkable corporate events with a Japanese twist



## TEMPLE STREET DANCES TO LIFE



The charming temple street of Shibamata, located in eastern Tokyo, shed its serene cloak one evening to welcome a lively crowd of dignitaries, business people and media representatives in a private event showcasing Tokyo Unique Venues to event organisers.

In a true demonstration of the versatility of the city's unique venues, Tokyo Convention & Visitors Bureau along with 25 supportive local merchants transformed the 200-metre-long temple street into a festival that

featured traditional street performances and well-loved local dishes prepared in bite-sized portions for easy snacking.

Festival guests were invited to graze from stall to stall, where different delicacies and beverages were served, and to interact with the local merchants who supported the festival by extending their operating hours.

Some shops also threw open their doors, providing a comfortable space for guests to sit and mingle with fellow

event attendees while enjoying their meal and roving street performance.

Daikyoji Temple, at the end of the temple street, was illuminated by colourful projection lights. It was also the site for the official opening ceremony, which saw a string of welcome speeches by VIPs including Tokyo governor Yuriko Koike as well as a heart-stopping act involving locals dressed as ancient firemen performing stunts on a ladder that reached skywards.

## ONE-STOP SERVICE DESK IS THE PERFECT RESOURCE FOR YOUR BUSINESS EVENTS

Fancy holding your next business gathering on the 45<sup>th</sup>-floor observatory of the Tokyo Metropolitan Government Building with Tokyo's glittering panoramic skyline as your unbeatable backdrop, or in the idyllic compounds of Jindaiji Temple, Tokyo's second oldest temple? Accessing some of Tokyo's most outstanding unique venues is no longer a dream, as planners can now leverage support from the Tokyo Unique Venues initiative.

Launched in May 2018, Tokyo Unique Venues is a one-stop service desk that promotes more than 50 business event-ready venues in the sprawling metropolis. The initiative provides assistance and recommendations on event spaces as well as planning coordination to help planners create magical experiences.

Financial support of up to 10 million yen may be offered to qualified events at unique venues in Tokyo, to help offset set-up costs such as audio-visual equipment rental.

Tokyo Unique Venues is a joint collaboration between the Tokyo Metropolitan Government (TMG) and the Tokyo Convention & Visitors Bureau (TCVB).

Tokyo Unique Venues is the perfect resource for international planners hoping to experience Tokyo's famed

contrasting cultures, where Edo period traditions are juxtaposed with cutting-edge innovation. This priceless trait is celebrated through the Tokyo Tokyo Old meets New campaign by TMG.

The city boasts a diverse range of unique, historical and cultural venues. These include shrines and temples, noh theatres, gardens, observatories, theme parks, aquariums and museums. Of these, more than 50 venues have been introduced as Tokyo Unique Venues, as they are representative of the Tokyo culture and most of them have a standing capacity of around 100 people.

### A CITY THAT INSPIRES EVENT CONFIDENCE

All eyes are now on Tokyo, as the city gears up for the Olympic and Paralympic Games Tokyo 2020. Many international conferences and MICE events have been planned in the city.

Events that utilised unique venues in Tokyo included the Culture Evening "Tokyo Garden Night" in Kiyosumi Gardens, for the International Water Association (IWA) World Water Congress & Exhibition 2018, a charming strolling garden that dates back to the Meiji period. Event activities included a karate performance, followed by a matcha tea ceremony and koto music performance

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held at the Ryotei Lodge. Delegates helped themselves to dishes made from Tokyo ingredients at the Taisho Kinenkan Hall, which has a standing capacity of 130.

Another event, the 10<sup>th</sup> International Aquarium Congress Pre-Event Ice Breaker 2018 was held at the Tokyo Sea Life Park, where 250 delegates sipped on ocean-themed cocktails while watching aquatic animals swim around the doughnut-shaped tank.

And TCVB is holding Tokyo Unique Venues Showcase Events, each of which introduces Tokyo's varied and attractive Unique Venues, and provides opportunities to use them. Some of Unique Venues are showcased to event organisers as in the following two illustrations below.

## A TASTE OF NOBILITY

Built in 1930, the Former Residence of the Maeda Family was the family home of marquis Toshinari Maeda – the 16<sup>th</sup> head of the Maeda Clan – and state guest house of government dignitaries. Along with its Japanese-style Garden Annex, the residence has been registered as an Important Cultural Property since 2013.

However, it continues to extend warm welcomes to foreign guests to Japan – now as a unique event venue.

Last December, 50 attendees from public offices, embassies and associations were hosted to an evening cocktail and formal banquet at the Former Residence of the Maeda Family. The event showcased gastronomic delights from Tokyo and Kanazawa, where the Maeda family had originated from.

Guests were serenaded by a band that comprised of a violin, guitar and the okraulo (a vertical flute named after its inventor baron Kishichiro Okura of the famed Okura Tokyo hotel).



There was also the precious opportunity to tour the living quarters on the second floor and understand what noble life was like in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Rounding off the mansion tour, Hironobu Fujimura, director of TCVB, highlighted the organisation's one-stop service of Tokyo Unique Venues and pledged his support for organisers planning events in Tokyo.



Kazunori Noguchi, executive director of TCVB and Toshiyasu Maeda, the 18<sup>th</sup> head of the Maeda Family, opened the exclusive event with a speech and toast, respectively.

# Raise a solid foundation



The expanding ARCHIDEX 2019 chooses to stay put with Kuala Lumpur Convention Centre and became the first tradeshow to enjoy the expanded facility.  
By **S Puvaneswary**

### Hot idea

Have contingency and visitor flow management plans in place when using a new and unfamiliar venue

### Brief

Held annually at the Kuala Lumpur Convention Centre since 2006, International Architecture, Interior Design and Building Exhibition (ARCHIDEX) has grown from 7,000m<sup>2</sup> of exhibition space to over 30,000m<sup>2</sup> in 2019. It involved 600 exhibitors (1,400 exhibition stands) from over 20 countries, and attracted more than 35,000 visitors.

Last year was also the year ARCHIDEX celebrated its 20<sup>th</sup> edition. In addition, the show was also the inaugural event to be held in Kuala Lumpur Convention Centre's purpose-built and flexible 11,000m<sup>2</sup> expansion.

### Highlights

Trade visitors to the show had the opportunity to explore the latest industry trends and innovation, which included the opportunity to pilot a drone.

A new feature this year was the Innovation Hall at Hall 8, which also housed the Malaysian Institute of Architects Pavilion of Tomorrowland. It featured exhibits for the global futurist to explore the possibilities in architecture, and urban design for the future.

### FAST FACTS

**Event**  
International Architecture, Interior Design and Building Exhibition (ARCHIDEX) 2019

**Organiser**  
C.I.S. Network

**Venue**  
Kuala Lumpur Convention Centre

**Date**  
July 3-6, 2019

**Attendance**  
Over 35,000 visitors from 70 countries

Meanwhile, Artwright, ARCHIDEX's strategic partner, also unveiled the Office of Tomorrow in the Innovation Hall, which featured a concept that showcased state-of-the-art furniture aimed at utilising space and resources effectively to boost growth and productivity.

### Challenges

It was key that the various contractors involved could meet the expansion's completion date, as well as ensure the space was ready for the large-scale event.

Alan Pryor, general manager at Kuala Lumpur Convention Centre, recalled: "The completion date was also close to the start of the event, which threw up additional challenges. Particularly, the lack of preparation time for our team, the organiser, official contractors, freight forwarders and sub-contractors was limited, as the space was unfamiliar."

To get around this, Pryor shared that the team worked "intensively" with various parties to ensure deadlines were met. Pre-event planning and numerous organisational meetings were also held over seven months, which resulted in a detailed plan with several contingency strategies to ensure that all parties understood their roles and responsibilities when it came to move-in and move-out. The close collaboration resulted in a seamless move-in and move-out process.

Another challenge was that both regular and new ARCHIDEX exhibitors and visitors were unfamiliar with the new space, and hence, it was important to manage visitor flow to the expansion halls.

As such, Kuala Lumpur Convention Centre worked closely with C.I.S. Network to implement ways to drive visitors into the expansion area, which included a new visitor registration location, eye-catching directional signage strategically located throughout the venue, and interactive activities in Halls 6 to 8.

**We were delighted that the purpose-built extension could accommodate the growing magnitude of our exhibition. The additional space gave us even more options to embrace innovative ideas.**

**Vincent Lim**, president, C.I.S. Network

# Perfect Penang



▲ The Curtis Crest Tree Top Walk is the highest public viewing platform on Penang Hill and offers 360-degree views of the island

## S Puvaneswary delves into the Malaysian island's treasure trove of quirky experiences and MICE hardware, and reveals why the destination warrants a large "X" on the business events map

Smaller cities that are easily accessible and which can provide authentic, immersive experiences are growing in popularity among business event planners. Sharing how trends have changed over the years, Koe Peng Kang, senior executive vice president of S P Setia, noted: "Business tourism is no longer just about people going to a destination to attend a conference. It has become a convergence of business events and leisure experiences."

And one such destination that is benefiting from such a convergence is Penang, the business hub of Northern Malaysia. Its capital, George Town, was awarded UNESCO heritage site status in 2008, as it was one of the two "most complete surviving historic city centres on the Straits of Malacca with a multicultural living herit-

age originating from the trade routes from Great Britain and Europe through the Middle East, Indian subcontinent and Malay Archipelago to China".

And Koe strongly believes in Penang's lure, adding that the Malaysian city is able to fulfil the different interests of international delegates because of its varied product offerings.

Sadie Yeoh, general manager, Destination Asia (Malaysia), concurred: "International delegates want to be able to take home memorable experiences of the local culture, local cuisine and recreational activities that are unique to the destination. And Penang has all of that. It is a modern city, with elements of yesteryear that can be incorporated into a programme."

Some examples Yeoh gave include a trishaw ride around George Town, learning to make joss sticks, or enjoying a pre-dinner cocktail while watching the sun set at The Habitat Penang Hill – a prehistoric rainforest dating back 130 million years old that is located a 45-minute drive from the city.

In fact, because Penang has so many experiences to offer, Yeoh's company is seeing repeat business, especially from clients in Asia-Pacific.

Yeoh believes that planners are also "spoilt for choice" as the city offers several tiers of business hotels, and modern convention centres. A wide-ranging

selection of venues and spaces add to Penang's shine; from clan houses and restored colonial bungalows, to heritage buildings such as Penang's first theatre circa 1926, the Majestic Theatre, to the Suffolk House, a Georgian mansion built in the 1800s.

Presanth Chandra, managing director of Apollo Conferences, agreed that Penang is "blessed with many unique venues that can be tapped for business events purposes", and possibilities were only limited to a planner's imagination.

He recalled: "At the recent Penang International Travel Exchange in October 2019, invitees enjoyed a welcome dinner we organised on Rapid Ferry, where they saw the sights of Penang on-board a moving ferry and watched the sun set over the horizon."

Moreover, Penang is a year-round destination for business events, opined Presanth.

"Penang is also rich in festivals and there is something interesting happening every month. Some organisers take into account the local festivals when choosing event dates, (so as to allow) delegates to experience the local scene," Presanth shared.

A local festival worth noting is the annual George Town Literary Festival which is organised by the Penang Convention & Exhibition Bureau (PCEB) for the past four years. The event is said to be the largest world literature festival in Malaysia, and the first literary event in South-east Asia to receive the Literary Festival Award at the London Book Fair International Excellence Awards.

Arokia Das Anthony, director, Luxury Tours Malaysia, pointed out that the event is good for visitors who are interested in literary works and would like to meet renowned authors. Last year, Luxury Tours Malaysia sent two groups to Penang as part of a post-conference tour.

For Yeoh, she has noticed a growing interest in groups asking for Instagrammable sights – such as Penang's street art and murals – and sustainable eco-tourism experiences.



**“International delegates want to be able to take home memorable experiences of the local culture, local cuisine and recreational activities that are unique to the destination. And Penang has all of that.”**

**Sadie Yeoh**

General manager, Destination Asia (Malaysia)

Sharul Madi, director of sales at Shangri-La's Rasa Sayang Resort & Spa and Golden Sands Resort, Penang, has also noticed a growing interest in corporate social responsibility (CSR) programmes. As such, both properties have developed nature and community-based programmes to cater to multinational corporations seeking to incorporate CSR as part of their teambuilding activities.

PCEB is also providing an avenue for business events to fulfil their CSR dreams when meeting in Penang. Penang Turtle Cares was launched in December, providing corporate groups an opportunity to assist with turtle conservation efforts at the Penang Turtle Sanctuary – home to the Green and Olive Ridley turtles – on Pantai Kerachut. Study tours of the work done at the sanctuary, planting of Ambung-Ambung trees as shelter for turtles to lay their eggs under, and contributions in kind are some ways to contribute.

With so many points of appeal, Yeoh intends to market Penang to European clients, in particular those in Amsterdam, Belgium and the UK.

Aside from Qatar Airways' four-times-weekly flights from Doha to Penang making the destination convenient for European groups, Yeoh said: "With a weaker pound, I think there is potential to obtain more incentive business from the UK because of our competitive pricing, as well as our strong ties dating back to colonial times."

As for Presanth, he has seen increasing interest from the Indian Subcontinent for events in Penang.

He revealed: "Indian organisers who have already held events in Kuala Lumpur and its surrounds are looking for new destinations, and Penang fits their requirements. The destination is easily accessible, and within 30 minutes' drive from the airport, one can visit The Habitat Penang Hill, enjoy the scenic Batu Ferringhi beach, or visit George Town."

To help with business conversion, PCEB is dangling curated exclusive support and perks for planners who choose Penang for meetings, conferences or incentives. The bureau has also developed the BE Penang mobile app which packs in a meeting planners guide and calendar showing upcoming events and other supported business events occurring in the city.

▼ Riding around George Town in a trishaw is an experience not easily replicated elsewhere



# More than just a stay

Planners looking for immersive activities to enrich their meeting programme can now turn to their hotel partners, discovers **S Puvaneswary**

## G Hotel Gurney

Explore the city by renting one of G Hotel Gurney's bicycles – from tandem bicycles to sport bicycles for athletic guests who want a good workout in the process. Nearby attractions include the Reclining Buddha Temple and Penang Botanic Gardens, while longer and more scenic routes can take guests up to Batu Ferringhi. Treasure hunts on bicycles can also be arranged for groups, with the clues and answers leading to various interesting spots around.

## Shangri-La's Rasa Sayang Resort & Spa

Attendees who are food gourmands and want to sample Penang's street food can do so at Shangri-La's Rasa Sayang Resort & Spa. The property can organise a street food theme dinner on its grounds, complete with cultural dance performance or a shadow puppet show.



## Eastern & Oriental Hotel, Penang

The hotel can organise an Amazing Race activity, aimed at providing a deeper cultural experience. Participants are given clues that lead to attractions, such as the Khoo Kongsi clan house where a variety of local delicacies will be served during a traditional Lion Dance performance. Alternatively, planners can ask for a colonial theme dinner, with servers and guards decked out in khaki shorts and pith helmets, as well as a brass band to entertain guests.

## The Prestige Hotel Penang

Delegates staying at The Prestige Hotel Penang may join a walking tour run by Penang Global Tourism. The walk is led by certified guides, and starts at 10.00 every Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday from the Tourist Information Centre. The hotel can also organise trishaw rides into George Town's UNESCO Heritage Zone. Guests will be able to ride past attractions such as Fort Cornwallis, Peranakan Museum and St George's Church, the oldest Anglican church in Penang.

◀ G Hotel Gurney does treasure hunts on bicycles

# PENANG

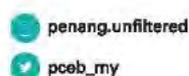
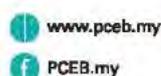
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# Double the goodness

Having both the BE@Penang conference and ICCA Asia Pacific Summit concurrently gifted attendees with enriched content, expanded networking opportunities, and more.

By **S Puvaneswary**

## Brief

Penang Convention & Exhibition Bureau (PCEB) and Malaysian PCO Anderes Fourdy Events jointly won the bid to host the inaugural ICCA Asia Pacific Summit; the summit was co-organised by the ICCA Asia Pacific Chapter. The ICCA summit was run concurrently with the fourth edition of BE@Penang, an annual conference organised by PCEB.

The idea behind concurrently running two conferences in a single venue was to provide networking opportunities and promote knowledge sharing among local and foreign delegates. It was also an effort to expose delegates to what ICCA is about and the benefits it brings to the industry.

The co-located conferences featured 40 speakers comprising industry leaders from 20 countries, and 300 delegates from the global business events industry.

## Highlights

In his keynote address, ICCA president, James Rees, conveyed the importance of ICCA as the leading voice within the meetings industry. Later in a Q&A coffee shop-styled interactive session, delegates posed questions to Rees and gained insights on how to leverage their membership in an increasingly competitive industry. Attendees also learnt about the changes and trends in the meetings industry which could, in turn, influence their business strategies.

On the morning of the second day, delegates of both conferences convened for an interactive workshop session with meeting designers from Orange Gibbon, Mike van der Vijver and Han Chiang. The takeaway from the 1.5-hour workshop was that for meetings to be effective, meeting owners had to put the audience and their needs first, and create a format that engaged the audience.

For foreign delegates who were short on time to experience Penang, co-organisers worked with venue provider Setia SPICE Convention Centre to offer themed coffee breaks and lunches that included local entertainment and an array of dishes Penang was known for.

PCEB also organised a post-tour on December 7 to the Penang Turtle Conservation and Information Centre. Located on Pantai Kerachut beach, it provided an



▲ ICCA president James Rees (left) answers questions from the floor in an interactive session entitled You ask, James Answers

opportunity for delegates to learn more about turtle conservation efforts undertaken by the centre and an example of a corporate social responsibility programme in Penang.

## Challenges

Hosting the dual conferences proved to be challenging as it involved two different organisers.

Tricia Loh, head of sales at PCEB, shared: “Good and effective communication was vital for the success of this event. Our team at PCEB worked very closely with Anderes Fourdy Events which was based in Kuala Lumpur. Anderes Fourdy Events in turn, had face-to-face meetings and provided regular updates with the ICCA Asia Pacific office based in Petaling Jaya.”

Another challenge was to obtain a good representation of delegates from Asia-Pacific, in addition to the target of 60 per cent local delegates.

Loh shared: “We marketed the event to the various CVBs in Asia-Pacific which in turn, helped market it to the travel trade in their respective countries. We also made sure the programmes had topics that were relevant and useful to all, regardless of nationality.”

## FAST FACTS

**Event**  
ICCA Asia Pacific Summit 2019 and BE@Penang 2019

**Organisers**  
PCEB, Anderes Fourdy Events, and ICCA Asia Pacific Chapter

**Venue**  
Setia SPICE Convention Centre

**Dates**  
December 5-6, 2019

**Attendance**  
300 people

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# Best of two worlds

Penang Convention & Exhibition Bureau delivered an impressive BE@Penang conference in December 2019, boasting expert speakers from around the world and a co-location with the inaugural ICCA Asia Pacific Summit 2019



# Marriott's virtuous circle

Marriott International is cutting waste at two of its Thailand properties, and discovers that the effort is a force for greater good. By [Rachel AJ Lee](#)



Hotel buffets and large-scale events such as conference lunches and gala dinners inevitably generate food waste, but two Marriott hotels in Thailand's capital are employing various tactics to reduce their operational footprints by wasting less.

For starters, the 1,388-key Bangkok Marriott Marquis Queen's Park hired sustainability manager, Michael Riley, in October 2019. And Riley's first task was to oversee and improve on the reduction of food waste at Goji Kitchen+Bar; an effort first championed by the property's executive chef Michael Vincent Hogan and senior executive sous chef Daniel Bucher.

On why Goji was the first F&B venue to be targeted, Riley shared: "It is the main restaurant that serves around 2,000 covers a day, and would bring about the most impact in terms of food waste. Aside from Goji, we also try to reduce excess food during large-scale events like gala dinners."

Hogan added that this food reduction movement began in 2018 when Bangkok Marriott Marquis Queen's

Park started supporting the Scholars of Sustenance (SOS) Foundation, a Bangkok-based organisation that collects excess food from hotels, restaurants and supermarkets, and delivers them to those in need.

In turn, SOS delivers the excess food to charities like Mercy Centre, which provides meals for the underprivileged. Founded in 1973, Mercy Centre is located in Bangkok's Klong Toei district – widely considered the city's most impoverished slum – and run programmes to cater to the area's disadvantaged kids. The complex is also a shelter for street children, has five orphanages, a hospice, a home for mothers and children with HIV/AIDs, and a 400-student kindergarten.

Meanwhile, other food waste is turned into compost for the hotel's gardens, or becomes feed for various local farms; oyster shells are ground into powder for chicken feed, for instance.

The massive property also sources ingredients such as pineapples, beef and fish locally, which helps to cut

▲ The rooftop garden at Bangkok Marriott Marquis Queen's Park is home to chickens, a bee colony, and several plots of herbs and vegetables

carbon footprint while supporting local producers.

Over at sister property The Athenee Hotel, a Luxury Collection Hotel, the same efforts are made. Its general manager, Choo Leng Goh, shared with *TTGmice*: "100 per cent of the rice served at this hotel is organic and locally-sourced, which helps to reduce our carbon footprint, and provide Thai farmers with a livelihood as we source directly from them, which in turn pushes our food costs down."

Goh plans to bring about an even greater impact on local farmers while on her quest for sustainability. Her next plan is to move into sourcing organic fruits and vegetables.

The Athenee Hotel donates excess food from private meetings or events, and allow organisers to choose who they would like to share it with, such as a church or an orphanage in the vicinity. The hotel partners with SOS too, in channeling extra food from the buffet line to hungry bellies.

When asked how the hospitality industry can be more sustainable, Goh said: "We can learn from each other's best practices (Goh and her team speaks at related forums regularly). In our business, especially luxury hotels, there is a lot of waste. Travelling itself is considered a waste for a lot of people. We cannot do zero waste, but at least we can start reducing."

Riley added that changing the mindset of hotel guests, as well as educating staff – despite a high turnover rate – is crucial.

"It is about finding the right balance that marries both business sense and sustainability because as a large hotel chain we can definitely make a huge difference in the world," he said.

These hotel-level efforts are part of Serve 360, Marriott's sustainability and social impact platform. Serve 360 passed its two-year mark in December 2019, and the hospitality giant is on track to meeting its own 2025 Sustainability Goals, which are in line with UN Sustainable Development Goals.

"In a dynamic region with over 760 Marriott International properties and a rapidly growing pipeline, Asia-Pacific presents a unique opportunity to be a force for good. With Serve 360 guiding our way, our sustainability and social impact efforts continue to evolve as we adjust to the changing needs of the communities we serve.

"We remain fully committed to doing good in every direction and will continue to have our guests and customers partner with us on our sustainability journey," said Craig Smith, group president Asia-Pacific, Marriott International.

# Catch up: Adam Kamal

Suka Travel & Tours' general manager shares more about his current role, and how he adapted to it so quickly

**You started in the travel industry more than 20 years ago. Do you see yourself ever moving into a different career?**

I was "born" into travel as both my parents were travel agents. After 20 years, I still enjoy what I do. And I can go on for another 20 years. So the answer is no.

**What do you love about your job?**

I am always travelling, exploring new destinations, staying and dining in luxury hotels and resorts, and meeting new and different people – many of whom become friends in time – while getting paid at the same time. Who wouldn't want a job like this?

**In reality, is it as good as you make it sound?**

The job is actually quite tough. I've got to deal with people from different backgrounds and cultures, and with different expectations. There's also the vast dietary requirements of a group



to consider, differing age groups and interests, budgets and a thousand smaller points to think about within a short span of time. But I enjoy the work.

**You were previously handling inbound MICE until your recent move to Suka Travel & Tours in November 2019. Was the adjustment, to handling outbound MICE now, difficult?**

Outbound MICE is not new to me. While I was still in college, I assisted my late father with the family business, Tina Travel, and helped to arrange outbound group incentives. Later in 2013, I did a short stint at Rakyat Travel where I was the general manager and oversaw, as well as escorted, MICE groups such as Malaysian ministers attending meetings overseas.

**What's your pet peeve when organising fam trips for agents and corporate clients?**

Most clients seem to be an expert of the destination. They would have Googled every hotel, restaurant and activity before they arrive, and feel that they know more than you do. What they don't see on Google are the constraints and challenges of a venue. For instance, the maximum number of people a venue can handle, as well as local holidays and celebrations, that might render venues unavailable.

**If you could change one thing in the business events industry in Malaysia, what would it be?**

The red tape involved in getting approvals and permits from local authorities and the government in order to run an event. Nowadays, with globalisation and the advancement in technology, events are planned and executed in a short period of time. Hence, bureaucracy is a hindrance that (could possibly push an) organiser to hold their event elsewhere.

**What keeps you sane?**

A good night's sleep and my family who has been very understanding and supportive of my work. I could not have done it without them. – **S Puvanewary**

## Appointments



**Carl Volschenk**



**Chikako Shimizu**



**Joey Pather**



**Lisa Hopkins**

**Carl Volschenk**

Sheraton Grand Danang Resort has appointed Carl Volschenk as general manager. The veteran started his career with Marriott International back in 2000 in Le Meridien Dubai Complex.

**Chikako Shimizu**

Veteran hotelier Chikako Shimizu has been appointed general manager of Andaz Macau, set to open in 1H2021. She was most recently director of operations at Andaz Singapore.

**Joey Pather**

Galaxy Entertainment Group has appointed Joey Pather as

the senior vice president of MICE Sector. He will be responsible for the overall vision and strategic execution of Galaxy International Convention Center, as well as develop its suite of MICE event solutions and venue management services.

**Lesley Williams**

BestCities Global Alliance has appointed Lesley Williams as managing director. She takes over from Paul Vallee, who will continue as executive consultant with GainingEdge. She brings a wealth of experience, with more than 25 years in the business tourism and events industry.

**Lisa Hopkins**

Lisa Hopkins has been appointed as the new chief executive of Conventions and Incentives New Zealand, based in Auckland. She was previously vice president and managing director, APAC for BCD Meetings and Events, based in Singapore.

**Marco Bloemendaal**

PCMA has named Marco Bloemendaal as global vice president of business development. The Dutch joins PCMA from Visit Milwaukee, where he was senior vice president of sales.

**Tracy Ng**

Tracy Ng has joined Grand Copthorne Waterfront Hotel as general manager. Prior to her latest appointment, she was general manager at Carlton Hotel Singapore.

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