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# A case of too little too late?



**Karen Yue**  
Group Editor

There is a growing frustration among travel, tourism and events industry colleagues about the state of crisis we have been languishing in for many months.

Intensive health and safety protocols have been established to calm worried hearts of travellers and event attendees. Business pivots have been made to ride out this unnatural suppression of travel and meeting demand. Operations have been altered to make the most of the domestic market – the only source market now available to many stakeholders in this industry. Efforts have been spent to keep team spirits up and our people employed.

However, against the backdrop of a persistent pandemic caused by a virus that has shown evidence of mutation and without an approved vaccine, industry players' intensive effort at staying afloat does not bring equal yield.

Falling back on government bailouts is not a solution, as many have recognised.

It cannot be said enough: borders must reopen soon, with clear and consistent travel requirements across governments, with sensible health and safety measures in place so that both travellers and local residents feel protected, with sufficient air access and capacity so that travellers would not have to spend more time than needed in a destination to get work done.

And at the same time, governments and their people must be serious about eliminating infections.

Here in Asia-Pacific, infection resurgence has spooked some country leaders into reinstating tough lockdown measures, further delaying reopening possibilities and dashing desperate hopes for a return of even just a sliver of international business.

While Singapore has stoked recovery hopes with more reciprocal green lanes for business and essential travel forged with South Korea and Brunei in August, joining earlier arrangements with selected Chinese cities, the reality isn't so rosy. As long as complex visa application requirements, compulsory quarantines and costly Covid-19 tests remain, opportunities for a real travel revival will be thwarted. Tackling these hurdles are only worthwhile for business-critical trips, and there just aren't enough of them to lift hospitality suppliers out of this predicament.



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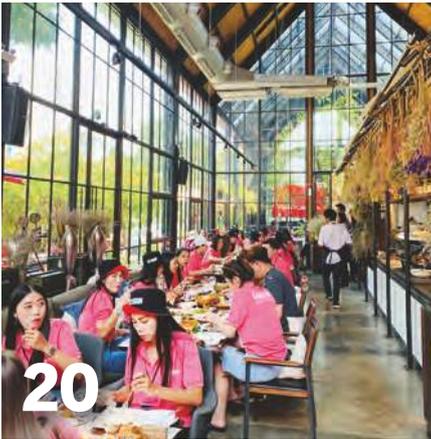
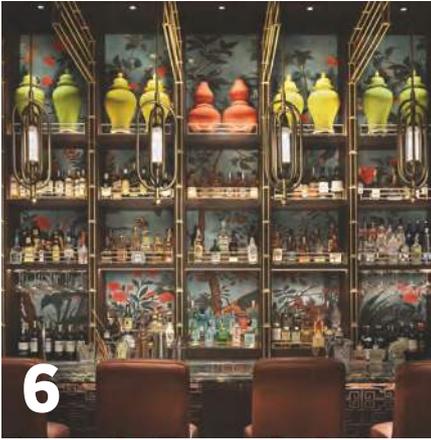
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**BPA** TTGmice, endorsed by the Asian Association of Convention and Visitors Bureaus, is published by TTG Asia Media Pte Ltd, and is mailed free-of-charge on written request to readers Asia-wide who meet a set of predetermined terms and conditions. Annual airmail subscription charges are US\$70 (Asia) and US\$90 (elsewhere). All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced in whole or in part without written permission of the publisher.

MCI (P) 057/08/2019  
KDN PPS1888/02/2017(025626),  
ISSN 0218-849X  
Printed by Times Printers Pte Ltd  
16 Tuas Avenue 5, Singapore 639340

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## TOP 5 HEADLINES THIS MONTH



Clockwise from above: Several European carriers are restarting flights to Shanghai (pictured) and Beijing; Singapore is allowing applications for business events with no more than 250 attendees from October 1; Indonesia International Furniture Expo is one of three exhibitions to spur Indonesia's tradeshow recovery

### China relaxes visa restrictions for European citizens

Business event companies in China are optimistic about the resumption of new visa applications for European citizens, suspended since March 28 due to the Covid-19 pandemic, and expect the move to herald the return of international travellers.

### Singapore to gradually resume business events

Business meetings, incentives, conventions and exhibitions can soon resume in Singapore, as the Singapore Tourism Board will open applications to organisers from October 1, 2020.

### Australia's MICE sector to benefit from FIFA win

Australia and New Zealand will host the FIFA Women's World Cup 2023. Following the success of other major sporting events including T20 Women's World Cup, Gold Coast 2018 Commonwealth Games, 2018 Invictus Games and Sydney 2000 Olympics, Australia's business events sector is set to gain even more recognition given the likely legacy from the FIFA tournament.



### Indonesia to kickstart exhibitions recovery with massive event

Indonesian exhibition organiser Dyandra Promosindo will be organising Dyandra New Adventure (DNA) in October, an event that will comprise three exhibitions and a music concert happening concurrently at the Jakarta International Expo.

### Consistency key to air travel resumption: aviation leaders

As the aviation sector readies for take-off again, experts assert that authorities must implement a consistent system of protocols and policies across borders, or the rate of travel recovery will be significantly stifled.

## PERSPECTIVES



### Five things to consider when consolidating your travel programme

Akshay Kapoor, CWT's senior director, multinational customer group, Asia Pacific, acknowledges that consolidation will be a complex move with many variables to consider, but assures companies that the results will be worth their while.



### The technology TMCs are spending their budgets on this year

As the emphasis on duty of care and expense management increases in this new normal, Gavin Smith, director of Element, encourages TMCs to invest in technology that helps to manage business policy and guidelines, and provide advice when business travel restarts fully.

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## Q&A



PCMA's managing director APAC Karen Bolinger reiterates why the association's role is important in this current climate, and goes in-depth about its myriad trade efforts in helping MICE professionals focus on the future.

Clear directions, innovation and concern for staff are deemed necessary for riding out the business event's biggest crisis in modern times, notes Uniplan's chief of Greater China, Geraldine Chew.



## WEBINARS

▶ TTG Asia Media has launched the 5 Questions video series that see industry leaders in business events and corporate travel tackling a specific hot button issue in every 15-minute episode. Launching September 1, a new episode will be broadcasted every Tuesday. [www.ttgmice.com](http://www.ttgmice.com)



◀ The Exhibition and Event Association of Australasia is hosting a series of webinars to address the current and future market conditions for the exhibition and business events industry. Each session will feature a panel of key sector representatives and have a Q&A section, with topics ranging from CovidSafe updates to government support. <https://eeaa.com.au/event/eeaa-sector-by-sector-industry-update-webinar>

▶ PCMA offers a range of webinars for the general MICE public (some of which are members-only), which delve into topics such as redesigning one's event for the virtual world, creating a digital event strategy, and how to help one's team transition into a digital event role successfully. [www.pcma.org/coronavirus-business-events-professionals-need-to-know-faq/](http://www.pcma.org/coronavirus-business-events-professionals-need-to-know-faq/)



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Photos by Owen Reagatt

The dining destination comprises Letterpress, a tea-house by day and cocktail bar by night; Iron Needle, a dumpling and noodle shop; Black Powder Red, a restaurant offering a modern twist on Szechuan cuisine; and Paper Duck, a luxury Cantonese roast duck venue.

During the day, the four different spaces meld together as one for breakfast. However, there are many hidden panels around, allowing the four venues to either connect or disconnect as needed, which is a boon for event planners.

The versatile, individual zones, or the entire space, are available for corporate events such as a networking session or meeting. Minimum spend for the private dining room is IDR 3,000,000 nett (US\$205), while minimum spend to book the entire space is subject to the event.

For a delegate's peace of mind, health and safety initiatives are also in place, ranging from the mandatory temperature check, and the implementation of social distancing.

# Understated elegance

Like its namesake inspired by four Chinese inventions – the letterpress, compass, paper and gunpowder – The Chinese National within the Swissôtel Jakarta PIK Avenue can be divided into four speciality venues when the sun sets.

## MBS unveils hybrid event broadcast studio



Marina Bay Sands (MBS) in Singapore has launched a state-of-the-art hybrid event broadcast studio at its Sands Expo and Convention Centre.

Designed to accommodate a live studio audience with a maximum capacity of 50 persons at any one time, the hybrid broadcast studio offers broadcast-quality live-streaming capabilities and hologram functionalities.

The studio's centrepiece is a three-dimensional stage fitted with an immersive backdrop and floor that can be reconfigured. Replacing the conventional green screen backdrop are two six-metre by four-metre right-angled LED walls which can show high-resolution 360-degree visuals, while a plexiglass LED floor to display floor projections.

The three-dimensional stage is designed to provide presenters with a better perspective of their surroundings, helping them to visualise and deliver their presentations in a more immersive environment. Stage lighting systems can be customised, designed and operated to fit an event's needs. The studio is also able to beam someone from a different part of the world 'live' into Singapore through a holographic presence.

Nha Trang, Vietnam



## Explore Vietnam with A&K

Abercrombie & Kent in Vietnam has launched a series of corporate teambuilding and incentive tours for groups of 10 people or more, with special rates for Vietnam residents.

Each tour includes hotels, private guides, vehicles and access to personalised meeting and event services.

For example, corporates can visit Con Dao for two nights, where the package includes a private guide and airport transfers. There is also an optional island-hopping in Con Son Bay or mangrove wildlife discovery at Bay Canh Island.

Another package that heads to Phan Rang and Nha Trang, is three-nights long with transfers from Ho Chi Minh City included. It includes excursions to the Phan Rang sand dunes and Cham Poklong Garai plus speedboat tour to Yen Island, spice shopping at Dam Market and an option to explore the Diep Son archipelago.

Other packages head to other parts of Vietnam, such as Da Lat, Mui Ne, and Ha Tien.



# Life of the party

Japan is now home to a MICE Theme Party Showroom, set up by business event management company Event Services.

Located in the Tokyo Bay area, the facility showcases a huge variety of backdrops, displays, props, decorations and other themed paraphernalia suitable for events ranging from award galas to welcome receptions. The showroom and adjacent meeting room have also been designed to offer a one-stop-shop for event planners, allowing them to get an instant sense of the décor before rental.

Popular items include Japan-themed painted backdrops, starting at 39,000 yen (US\$643). These include iconic scenes like historic Tokyo, Mount Fuji or Katsushika Hokusai's iconic "The Great Wave," as well as traditional motifs such as cherry blossom or flying cranes.

Large props include five-storey pagodas, samurai armour, ninja cutouts, portable shrines, and mini nebuta floats. There are even inflatables, like sumo wrestlers, daruma dolls and lanterns, priced from 39,000 yen, that can be inflated in three minutes, thereby reducing the length of time required for event set-up.

There's also LED cocktail tables and benches available in seven colours and can work for up to 12 hours, while the LED egg light can be customised with a company name or logo. Custom-build requests are also possible. - **Kathryn Wortley**



# IHG opens two Crowne Plazas in Australia

InterContinental Hotels Group has opened a Crowne Plaza each in Hobart and Adelaide.

Both hotels will offer the brand's new Plaza Workspace offering, a co-working space for guests who can expect wireless phone chargers integrated into tables, as well as access to free high-speed Wi-Fi.

The new-build Crowne Plaza Hobart offers event planners six versatile meeting and event spaces, which includes a ballroom with natural lightning. It will have 235 rooms, alongside facilities such as a Club Lounge, a fitness centre, and two F&B options – the all-day Core Restaurant and Bar, and the farm-to-table eatery The Deck.

The Crowne Plaza Adelaide meanwhile, offers 329 high-tech rooms furnished with a digital in-room compendium, Bluetooth-streamed music, and a 55-inch LCD TV. Other amenities include the Luna10 bar; Pan-Asian influenced eatery Koomo, gym, outdoor infinity pool, and four meeting and conference spaces on level two.

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Meetings are essential, even in times of operational disruption. The Protection-C Package offers planners greater peace of mind in planning business events by adapting existing service offerings to create a safer guest and meeting experience

### Highlights of the Protection-C Package (starting from 2,700 baht/person)

- Designated sales manager to provide planning assistance, with consultation from doctors specialising in infectious diseases
- Dedicated events coordinator for each delegation
- Pre-event communication to attendees via emails on health and safety protocols
- Venues equipped with air filters and ozone air-conditioning, with meeting rooms disinfected before and after each event
- Private buffet setup or individual lunch box options available
- Buffet setups manned by station servers to minimise cross-contamination
- Menus feature organic or locally sourced food ingredients
- Hybrid event facility available (Free setup of up to 20 pax)
- Quarantine and isolation facilities available onsite with round-the-clock nurses on duty
- Special rates are available for extended stays and meeting organisers
- Hand sanitisers are provided in all public areas and wearing of face mask is mandatory



### Prevent and Protect programme

Other than at meeting venues, the Prevent and Protect programme is also extended to all other facilities, including check-ins. Detailed information on the programme can be found at [https://www.royalcliff.com/upload/EN\\_RCHG-MICE-Precautionary-Measures.pdf](https://www.royalcliff.com/upload/EN_RCHG-MICE-Precautionary-Measures.pdf).

Royal Cliff is accredited with the "Amazing Thailand Safety and Health Administration: SHA" certification issued by the Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT), for developing and implementing health and safety measures in line with directives from World Health Organization and Centers for Diseases Control and Prevention.



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# Long return to travel

It is a long road to recovery for corporate travel, and how the journey pans out is dependent on government restrictions, confidence in travel suppliers, access to information and company directives. By [Rachel AJ Lee](#)



Jo Sully, vice president APAC, American Express Global Business Travel (AMEX GBT), agreed: “We are already seeing evidence of this demand in the business sector with an increase in domestic travel in countries including China, Australia and parts of Europe.”

FCM Travel Solutions’ *State of the Market Survey* also showed encouraging travel intentions – 70 per cent of participants agreed or strongly agreed that they expected to increase business travel gradually over a period time with consensus peaking in business travel returning domestically in one to three months (40 per cent), and internationally in six to 12 months (32 per cent).

FCM Travel Solutions’ general manager, Bertrand Sallet, stated that the speed to recovery was dependent on government regulations around border restrictions and quarantine measures.

“In Asia-Pacific, we already see great traction on domestic routes in most markets and particularly in China and Australia. International travel remains extremely limited,” he added.

For business hub Singapore, where domestic business travel consumption is non-existent, rebound is dependent on four key factors.

James Chua, general manager of Singapore’s Global Travel, said: “These concerns include the reopening of borders, lifting of quarantine measures, airlines resuming their flights, and travellers regaining their confidence to fly.

“The quarantine of 14 days in the destination of visit will certainly be a deterrent to corporate travellers. Only if this is lifted or when a cure for Covid-19 is found, demands will be at a minimum at least for the next six months.”

## New considerations

With health and hygiene factors a top priority now, corporate travel manag-

Corporate travel in 2019 was on an upwards trajectory, and growth looked set to continue this year, with Global Business Travel Association (GBTA) predicting that global corporate travel spend would grow to an estimated US\$1.6 trillion in 2020.

That prediction was tossed out with the onset of Covid-19 in early March and resulting border closures and restrictions. Worldwide airline capacity has fallen 80 per cent compared to 2019 levels; and almost 90 per cent for international flights.

## A sliver of hope

At press time in September, green shoots of recovery have started emerging in markets with a large domestic base.

Greg O’Neil, president Asia Pacific of BCD Travel, expects the return to air travel “to be gradual and slow, starting with the domestic markets”.

In a survey conducted with 100 travel buyers by BCD Travel, essential business travel is slowly resuming (73 per cent), with 25 per cent of respondents indicating they would recommend direct flights to minimise risk.



## “Airline schedules, processes and entry rules can change at a moment’s notice in response to local government actions.”

**Jo Sully**  
Vice president Asia-Pacific,  
American Express Global Business Travel

ers are expecting all travel suppliers – not just airlines – to provide reassurance of their safety and cleanliness protocols.

Another research with 1,260 business travellers that BCD Travel conducted revealed that top concerns included quarantine measures after travel, followed by social distancing and cleanliness of their environment during trips. Nine in 10 also rated frequent enhanced disinfection of airport and aircraft as extremely or very important, followed by new boarding procedures and empty seats on airplanes to accommodate social distancing.

The FCM survey found that 59 per cent of respondents regarded traveller and supplier health and hygiene factors as top priority. When asked what would trigger the prompt resumption of business travel, the easing or lifting border restrictions came in tops with 93 per cent of respondents saying it has significant or some impact.

However, the second trigger is the employer’s travel direction, with 89 per cent of respondents saying that they would travel if their “organisation deems it safe to travel and this is reflected in our travel policy”.

For those that are willing to travel now, Chua opined they will have ex-

pectations such as “wanting to know the safety measures that the airline has put in place, and wanting to be updated on new travel requirements for the intended destination including transit”.

Sully shared that her recent conversations with travellers found that “demand is strong”. In fact, most would still consider travelling this year, but would want “to be armed with the right information at the right time”. This is because “potential for disruption is now a constant”.

“Airline schedules, processes and entry rules can change at a moment’s notice in response to local government actions. We have already seen a government quickly responding to risk with the stopping and starting of travel most recently in Melbourne, Australia,” she said.

To keep travellers informed, AMEX GBT developed Travel Vitals, a source of information for use before, during and after a journey. It draws data from hundreds of sources, including governments, airports, airlines, risk management partners and hotels, to provide advice on travel restrictions, and identify Covid-19 infection rate spikes and hot spots.

Similarly, BCD Travel also developed the Informed Traveler, where

users will have access to real-time information such as destination risk alerts, airline and hotel policies, ground transportation protocols and travel restrictions.

FCM Travel Solutions has its own information resource too, in the form of Traveller Hub.

### Two-way communication

Airlines are doing their part to keep TMCs updated, as well as provide as much flexibility as they can.

Chua shared that his airlines partners were supplying flight restoration updates, travel health advisory, and Covid-19 checklists.

Saillet added: “While airlines are making a lot of changes for air travel in future for all travellers, we are seeing some airlines add specific measures to ensure their corporate clients are being looked after. For example, certain airlines are offering free name changes.”

AMEX GBT’s Sully has also received regular communications from airlines that address the increased measures they are taking, ranging from new cleaning processes and contactless check-in procedures to change fees waivers and unlimited booking changes.

O’Neil noted: “Airlines need to think now how they reposition and market themselves as the industry re-emerges – messages showing a clear commitment to safety (and) hygiene will determine the winners.”

He further opined that for corporate air travel to reach pre-Covid volumes, recovery would probably take two to three years.

“Meanwhile, TMCs must reinvent themselves, adopt new technologies, and increase productivity to stay relevant as the landscape has evolved and will certainly involve further,” Chua added.



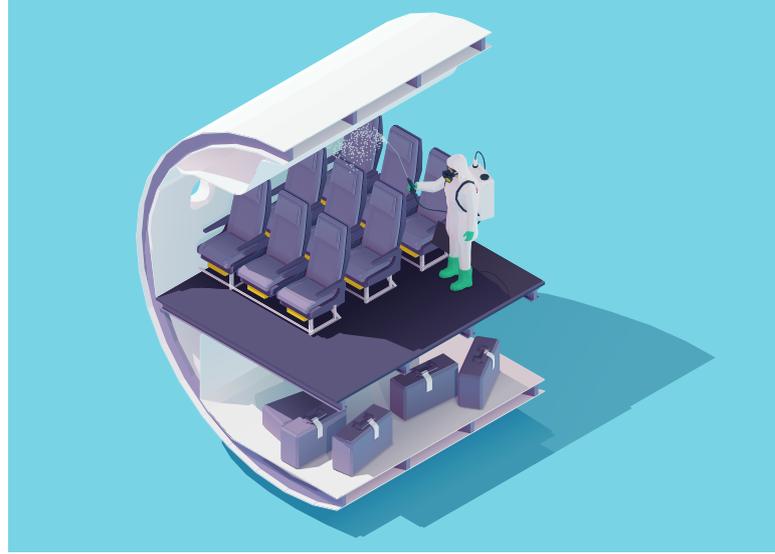
## “Past disruptive events have never delivered drops in capacity this steep or potentially this sustained or as global.”

**Greg O’Neil**  
President Asia Pacific,  
BCD Travel



# Flying safely

Airlines are getting serious about safety and hygiene to regain travellers' confidence



## All Nippon Airways

All Nippon Airways (ANA) has introduced vinyl curtains at check-in counters and lounge receptions. Hand sanitisers are available at self-service check-in machines and self-service baggage drop machines, while social distancing markers are in place. Machines and wheelchairs are disinfected regularly.

Passengers will be asked to pick up and scan their own boarding passes, and temperature checks are also in place at most airports. Boarding for both domestic and international flights will be according to seat, starting at the rear, from window to middle to aisle, moving to the front of the plane.

On flights, staff will wear masks and gloves. Passengers will be asked to refrain from leaving their seat and keep conversations to a minimum. Tables, armrests, TVs, controllers and toilet doorknobs will be disinfected after every international flight and after every night for domestic flights.

In ANA Lounges, food and drinks will be individually wrapped and some services will be suspended. – **Kathryn Wortley**

## Cathay Pacific

Cathay Pacific first requires all passengers to answer health screening questions upon check-in. Passengers are also required to wear face coverings in most situations such as at security lines and baggage collection areas.

A two-metre social distancing rule is enforced by staff at check-in, during boarding, in-flight, and during disembarkation.

Onboard, quality air is ensured by HEPA filters which remove 99.9 per cent of airborne contaminants and fresh air recirculates every two minutes. Crew have to don masks, gloves and goggles, and are under strict layover orders to have no contact with the local community in destinations they travel to.

All Cathay Pacific lounges outside of Hong Kong, with the exception of Shanghai Pudong International Airport, have been closed. Those that are open have taken additional precautions by temporarily modifying dining options. – **Prudence Lui**

## Emirates

Customers flying with the Middle Eastern airline from now until October 31, 2020, can claim medical expenses of up to €150,000 (US\$174,000) and quarantine costs of €100 per day for 14 days, should they be diagnosed with Covid-19 during their travel. Applicable across all fare classes and destinations, this cover is valid for 31 days from when a passenger flies the first sector of their journey.

On the ground, chauffeur services for First Class and Business Class customers have resumed. All drivers will wear masks and gloves, and all cars will be cleaned and disinfected at the end of each shift. Upon check in, passengers will receive complimentary hygiene kits comprising masks, gloves, antibacterial wipes and hand sanitiser.

At Emirates' lounge in Dubai International Airport, food is served in hygienically sealed meal boxes, while single-serve bottles of beverages are just some of the modified amenities to ensure safety.

All cabin crew on board will wear personal protective equipment. Magazines and printed reading material have been removed indefinitely, and comfort items such as mattresses, pillows, blankets and headphones are hygienically sealed.

Aircraft have been fitted with HEPA air filters which remove 99.9 per cent of viruses and eliminate dust, allergens and germs from cabin air. Upon arrival in Dubai, each aircraft goes through an enhanced cleaning and disinfection process. – **Rachel AJ Lee**

## Qantas

Qantas introduced a Fly Well programme in June, which includes a range of measures such as enhanced cleaning, minimising points of contact and individual packs of sanitising wipes and masks for each passenger. Customers are sent information before their flight so they know what's expected and are encouraged to use contactless check-in methods and self-serve bag drops.

The airline has also installed hygiene screens at airline customer service desks and made temporary changes to the Qantas

Lounge which encourage social distancing.

Onboard, passengers are provided with masks, sanitising wipes to wipe down their seating area themselves as an additional measure to the airlines' already enhanced cleaning of high-contact areas including armrests, trays, seat belts, overhead lockers and air vents. Sequenced boarding and disembarkation are also operated to minimise crowding.

Qantas' planes are already fitted with hospital-grade HEPA filters.

– **Adelaine Ng**

## Singapore Airlines

Singapore Airlines (SIA) and its sister airlines are currently providing Care Kits that each include a surgical mask, anti-bacterial hand wipes and a hand sanitiser to all passengers.

The airline has migrated all of its seatback literature to the SingaporeAir mobile app, on which passengers can also navigate the inflight entertainment system. Crew don face masks throughout the flight, eye goggles when interacting with customers, and gloves during the now-limited meal service.

Meal services have been suspended for flights within South-east Asia and services to China. These are replaced by snack bags. On longhaul flights, a single tray service has been introduced in First Class and Business Class in place of a table layout service.

Every aircraft under the SIA Group undergoes fogging procedures that follow regulatory requirements; as well as a wipe-down using strong approved disinfectant of common surfaces and areas. Reusable amenities, like headrests and pillows, are also washed and replaced after every flight.

Aircraft are equipped with HEPA filters, while almost all lavatories in SIA aircraft feature contactless faucets and have anti-bacterial hand wash. SIA is also trialling an ultra-violet light cleaning procedure for its lavatories before every flight.

At SilverKris Lounges, cleaning procedures have been stepped up, and customers now order meals from a menu instead of picking off a buffet line. – **Pamela Chow**

# Evolving expectations

Face-to-face events are back, but complexity around decisions for post-lockdown gatherings means CVBs must now be an accessible information consolidator, discovers [Karen Yue](#)

**B**usiness event specialists in Asia-Pacific are starting to see a revival of face-to-face event interest, with some likely to take place before the end of the year.

Despite “massive amount of apprehension about groups and how big they can be”, Ian Cummings, global vice president, commercial, CWT Meetings & Events noted that clients were starting to consider events from now until the end of 2020.

Cummings suggested that this was possible, as governments in certain countries have allowed events to resume, subject to some health and safety restrictions.

Francis Cheong, co-founder and group CEO of Malaysia-based Aavii Worldwide, is preparing for domestic face-to-face events that will come alive from late-September, with most of the interest stemming from pharmaceutical and insurance companies.

He has also just completed “an extremely rare” pitch for an international incentive programme in 2021.

“Multinational clients in Malaysia are starting to look for (overseas event) alternatives because it has been more than four months of business inactivity in Malaysia. (However), clients are only looking at 2H2021 and are still very cautious with decisions,” Cheong told *TTGmice*.

## New selection criteria

With the return of RFPs, event planners have observed a different set of considerations when evaluating potential destinations and event vendors.

Unique activities, exciting venues and appealing attractions in a destination now sit lower on clients’ checklist, according to Petrina Goh, commercial director of CWT Meetings & Events in Singapore. The destination’s track record in coping with the Covid-19 outbreak, safety standards and availability of good hospitals are deemed more important today.

BCD Travel now runs through a comprehensive set of questions, on behalf of their clients, when deciding on a destination or supplier.

According to company spokesperson Agnes Heng, the checklist includes policies on surgical masks and other personal protective equipment (PPE) for employees, guests and event attendees; updated capacity charts with social distancing measures in place; crisis management plan; and the availability of an infection mitigation coordinator onsite; among others.

And with event plans likely to be disrupted by sudden infection resurgence, event planners and their clients are also scrutinising attrition clauses, minimum spend requirements and cancellation or postponement policies.

▶ **Local face-to-face meetings are resuming with new considerations**



## CVBs as information consolidator

The current complexity around event decision-making, frequent changes to travel and activity restrictions, as well as differing health and safety regulations across destinations, have led event specialists to advise CVBs to be more informative.

Cummings said: “There are some CVBs that we are just not hearing from at all and therefore have no information on their destination. TCEB (Thailand Convention and Exhibition Bureau) is a great example (of an Asian CVB that is doing it right). I get three or four pop-ups a day on LinkedIn on TCEB initiatives, things that are happening in this industry, and updates on (Thai) airports and airlines particularly their routes and pricing, etc.

“Another important piece of information is incentives (for companies to meet in the destination). Some incentives or special treatment for groups will help with decisions.”

He believes that CVBs should now act as communication hubs – an effective consolidator and disseminator of relevant information from various sources across the country.

“We used to think that (destination) information overload for our clients isn’t great, but it is now better to have more information (as that can help improve clients’ perception of a destination),” opined Goh.

She said that in addition to looking to planners for advice, clients also turn to CVB websites in hopes of getting information on attraction reopenings, venue capacity limits, and new pricing structure of event products, especially if rates have been changed to accommodate social distancing requirements and capacity limits.

And if done right, CVBs could well sway clients’ decision with their messaging during this business crisis.

Cheong said: “CVBs will play an even more important role now than ever. They need to think differently about how to inspire travel intent during such unusual times. Their content for training and destination updates need to be revolutionised, such as by focusing on what can be done in the destination before and after a vaccine is available. For example, CVBs can play up faraway yet unique spots and outdoor glamping ideas in remote places.

“CVBs can also work with national carriers to come up with special chartered flights to destinations that are remote yet exciting enough for eager but weary event attendees,” Cheong added. – *Additional reporting by Rachel AJ Lee*

# Francis Teo

S P Setia's head of convention centres acknowledges the global business events industry is stuck in a rut, but he is determined to see the crisis through by improving and innovating. By [S Puvaneswary](#)

## What challenges are Malaysia's meetings and exhibitions stakeholders facing?

The business events industry, as well as the travel and tourism industry, was one of the first sectors hit by the pandemic and will be the last to recover.

A key challenge is how businesses will be able to sustain through this period. It is a tough time for everybody in the travel and business events sector, but when we come out of it, we will be a stronger industry. I have no doubt about this.

Another challenge is restoring public confidence by assuring visitors that venues are complying and enforcing government standard operating procedures (SOPs), and that it is safe for them to attend live events.

There is a greater need today for industry stakeholders to collaborate and support each other to maximise all available resources.

## How has Covid-19 impacted and changed the way S P Setia does business?

Both Setia City Convention Centre in Selangor, as well as Setia SPICE Convention Centre in Penang, have been deeply impacted by the pandemic.

Since the government allowed the resumption of business events on July 1, we are hitting around 25 to 30 per cent of our original targets. However, organisers of big events have either postponed their events to next year, or they have changed the format to a virtual event.

Due to reduced business activity, we have also taken a hard look at our venue operations in Penang and Selangor, and cut down on unnecessary expenditures to lower our operating costs.

We are in the midst of reinventing the way we do things according to the current needs of our clients. We know one of the things they want are reassurances that safety and security protocols set by the National Security Council are being followed and this includes health checks and physical distancing. Hence, we have provided reassurance

by publishing a checklist on our website to which we abide to.

We have also used this downtime to create innovative meetings and conference packages that are suited for the current market conditions.

For instance, we developed a hybrid annual general meeting package that provides a live feed, as this can accommodate shareholders who are participating off-site. We have also launched the Grab and Go Conference package, which offers packed meals at very attractive rates to meet the demand of budget-conscious organisers.

## How is the company managing its human resources during this downtime?

We are facing low demand for our venues, yet we have to keep our staff engaged with work and their morale high. We have deployed about 30 per cent of our idle manpower to other business units within the S P Setia Group that are still doing well, so they can contribute their talents effectively to the Group.

## How are event requirements different from previous ones?

We hosted a lot of big events in the past. It is different now, with events having 250 people or less.



It is a tough time for everybody in the travel and business events sector, but when we come out of it, we will be a stronger industry.

## SPOTLIGHT

Organisers are unaware of the latest changes in the SOPs set by the National Security Council, for instance, group sizes are no longer limited to a maximum of 250 people per event. Bigger groups are allowed, provided venues are able to cater to the numbers with social distancing in place. Thus, we are constantly educating and updating organisers on the latest government SOPs.

With new normal parameters in place such as physical distancing, events not exceeding four hours and packed meals instead of buffet lunches and tea breaks, we are in constant engagement with event organisers to find out their event objectives and how we can help them meet these objectives within the new parameters.

### What is your projection for recovery?

We expect the domestic market to slowly recover by the end of 2020 and we hope regional markets will return by mid-2021.

The Malaysian government is holding talks with foreign governments in the region to create travel bubbles. I think it will take at least six months after the commencement of such travel bubbles before we can see the resumption of regional events.

### There has been much talk about hybrid events and their longevity. What are your views?

I think it is here to stay. It will not die completely after a vaccine for Covid-19 is found. Instead, it will



▲ Setia SPICE Convention Centre in Penang

complement live events but the percentage of hybrid to live participation will vary depending on event profiles.

For an organiser, having a live event is the best option. It also allows delegates to meet face-to-face and network. However, hybrid events have the advantage of attracting participation from speakers and attendees who may not be able to attend the event in person. There are also ways for organisers to generate revenue streams from hybrid events.

We are certain that hybrid events are not a short-term fad and we are looking at increasing bandwidth in the near future at both our convention venues as high-speed Internet is required for a successful execution of hybrid events.



ADVERTORIAL

Hangzhou Municipal Bureau of Culture, Radio, TV and Tourism

# A City of the New Economy

On the afternoon of August 7, Hangzhou Municipal Bureau of Culture, Radio, TV and Tourism launches the “Linking Hangzhou” international roadshow online, in a bid to enhance the global influence of Hangzhou as a “new economy conference destination.” While presenting a new chapter of the cosmopolitan metropolis, it also envisions the



revival of Hangzhou’s cultural and tourism industries in the post-COVID-19 era. The event leverages live-streaming platforms and online video conferencing technology at home and

abroad, and simultaneously promotes Hangzhou’s MICE resources to buyers worldwide for the first time. It not only demonstrates the vitality of Hangzhou as a “new economic conference destination,” but also showcases the infinite potential of Hangzhou, a historically and culturally famed city with ever-lasting charm, as it embraces the future. At the same time, the event also invites 37 Singaporean MICE buyers to join Hangzhou-based enterprises in online business negotiations in an endeavor to promote the city’s new image and attract more international conferences.



# Cruising in a changed world



Several cruise lines that deal with corporate accounts in Asia tell [Rachel AJ Lee](#) how they've been using this hiatus to shore up their offerings and prepare for event cruising post-pandemic

The global cruise industry, like many tourism sectors, was growing year-on-year, with more planners discovering the ease of using cruises to elevate delegate engagement and event experience. Unfortunately, extensive news coverage of Covid-19 infections onboard cruise ships in the early days of the outbreak has hurt the industry's reputation.

Yet, cruise lines have continued to forge on, keeping in touch with industry colleagues, relooking their strategies, and preparing to win customers back with top-of-the-line health and safety protocols.

## Staying in touch

Angie Stephen, managing director, Asia Pacific, Royal Caribbean Group (RCG), shared: "During this downtime, we are staying connected to the (business events) community and keeping them updated as and when we introduce new protocols for when sailings return. That way, they have all the necessary information on hand to prepare and educate themselves and their clients.

She added: "We are also encouraging planners to focus on the individual incentive travel segment, as that will likely bounce back before large group travel."

Similarly for Simon Yip, vice president sales Asia at Silversea cruises, keeping incentive partners updated on the latest developments is top of his to-do list. Silversea has also been helping planners move their impacted voyages, and assisting them to mitigate losses while postponing programmes.

"We have also been working collectively with our sister brands, having conducted surveys and webinars to stay in touch during these challenging times. Strengthening our communication and partnership during these times has been never been so important," he noted.

For Genting Cruise Lines, its president of Dream Cruises and head of international sales, Michael Goh, shared that the company has organised a number of online social events and virtual trade fairs.

Aside from maintaining an open line of communication, Goh pointed out these online events are where "travel trade partners can network and share insights on the best practices for (business events) in the post-Covid era".

He added: "We have also recently launched a mobile app in the India market, through which travel trade partners have real-time access to fleet information to facilitate their event planning, such as cruise schedules

and details on event venues on every cruise ship in our fleet.”

### Health and safety paramount

Health, sanitisation and safety protocols will be front and centre when more ships start to traverse the oceans again.

On that front, Stephens indicated that RCG is “prepared to meet, and exceed these expectations”.

“We have (also) used this downtime to prepare for a public that will be more focused on health and safety (see next page) than ever before,” she stated.

In addition, RCG has partnered with Norwegian Cruise Line to unveil a Healthy Sail Panel (see sidebar below) that focuses on enhanced cruise health and safety standards in response to the global pandemic.

To further raise the bar, RCG recently appointed Calvin Johnson as the company’s global head, public health, and chief medical officer. In this newly-created role, Johnson will lead the group’s global health and wellness policy, manage its public health and clinical practice, and determine the strategic plans and operations of its global healthcare organisation.

All these efforts, Stephen said, are because RCG understands that when the ships return to service, “they will be sailing in a changed world”.

Goh agreed: “Travellers have not only developed higher awareness with regards to the safety and preventive measures of cruise ships, they also have new expectations for innovative event formats that allow greater flexibility and control, as they work to navigate ongoing developments surrounding the outbreak.”

In response, Genting Cruise Lines has reviewed its health and safety protocols and devised a new set of enhanced preventive measures, which is set to become the new norm for preventive standards for the fleet.

### Planning for the future

Cruise lines are looking into other aspects of their operations, working on their products that would appeal to planners and their clients in the new normal.

According to Yip, Silversea has been using the downtime to “bring innovation to our cruise offering, reviewing and enriching our itineraries around the world”.

Silversea has also released a content campaign named To the Curious, designed to entertain and inspire guests with written and video content, as well as a series of initiatives to support their trade partner community through virtual visits and Cruise with Confidence polices, which offer protected commissions for travel advisors, as well as flexibility for travellers.

As for Genting Cruise Lines, Goh revealed that the team is pursuing a technology track. “We are keen to introduce advanced technology into our products, through which we can curate hybrid experiential events that...can be enjoyed with a total peace of mind,” he said.

He notes that as the world continues to make progress in pandemic control, business events will gradually shift from virtual-based to a hybrid of online and offline events, where companies can connect colleagues internationally via webinars, while allowing locally-based participants to enjoy travel domestically.

And this format can be applied to cruising as well.

“MICE cruising will likely involve shorter itineraries, reduced passenger capacity, alongside the heightened health and safety protocols.”

**Angie Stephen**  
Managing director, Asia Pacific,  
Royal Caribbean Group



“Take *Explorer Dream*’s new Island Hopping itineraries in Taiwan for example. It is a domestic cruise that takes travellers to scenic local destinations and caters to their need for destination travel. This concept of domestic cruising can be adapted by (corporate groups), complimented by the usage of technology to engage international participants,” Goh elaborated.

As more countries relax their travel restrictions, Goh expects a gradual expansion into “cruise travel bubbles between regions that have the pandemic under control”.

Meanwhile, Stephen opined that moving forward, “(Corporate) cruising will likely involve shorter itineraries, reduced passenger capacity, alongside the heightened health and safety protocols”.

She maintains that a cruise provides a unique platform for a business event, and hopes that this value-for-money experience will “remain an attractive option to our (business events) partners”.

## Cruise giants form Covid-19 task force

Royal Caribbean Group (RCG) has teamed up with Norwegian Cruise Line Holdings (NCLH) to assemble a panel of leading health experts who will oversee the development of enhanced health and safety protocols for cruise lines.

The Healthy Sail Panel is co-chaired by former Utah state governor Mike Leavitt, who also served as secretary of the US Department Health and Human Services; and Scott Gottlieb, former commissioner of the US Food and Drug Administration.

The duo will work alongside top experts in public health, infectious disease, biosecurity, hospitality and maritime operations to develop Covid-19 public health protocols for cruise lines to safely resume operations.

The expert panel has been working for nearly a month and will offer its initial recommendations by the end of August, according to a press release. The cruise lines said in the release that its work will be “open source” and could be freely adopted by any company or industry that would benefit from the group’s scientific and medical insights.

RCG chairman and CEO, Richard Fain, and NCLH president and CEO, Frank Del Rio said they initiated the panel to assure the plans they will submit to the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and other regulators apply the best available public health, science and engineering insights. The work of the panel will be shared with the entire industry and regulators.



# Clean lines

Cruise companies typically invest large amounts into hygiene, safety and environmental processes even without a pandemic to prod them along. **TTGmice reporters** find out that the commitment remains strong and processes are now enhanced

## Bhaya Cruises

In response to Covid-19, Vietnam-based Bhaya Cruises has increased the cleaning frequencies of its 17 vessels and included Cloramin B disinfectant in its cleaning protocol as recommended by the World Health Organization.

Before embarking, passengers are required to have their temperatures checked at the cruise centre, and those with a reading above 37.5°C will be barred from boarding. Passengers are also provided with masks to use on their cruise.

All frontline staff also don masks and disposable gloves.

## Genting Cruise Lines

In April, Genting Cruise Lines introduced a series of enhanced measures for its Dream Cruises and Star Cruises fleet, with tightened health-screening processes and precautionary measures set to become the new norm.

These include online check-in with designated arrival times for guests, staggered boarding and disembarkation timings with additional waiting areas, infrared fever screening at the ship gangway, increased frequency and levels of sanitisation and disinfection across all public and crew areas of the ship, and reduced capacity of onboard venues.

The F&B experience is also set for reform. Debuting with the new Taiwan island-hopping itineraries on board *Explorer Dream*, the Flexi-Feast dining concept will give passengers a wider pick of venues and timings at which to dine, easing bottlenecks at certain venues and providing social distancing across all restaurants.

Self-service buffet will also be suspended in lieu of dishes being served by crew members wearing face masks and disposable gloves. Stringent procurement guidelines will be enforced and product sourcing from highly affected regions will be strictly prohibited.

In the event of sickness, the guest's cabin will undergo thorough cleaning and disinfection with hospital-grade disinfectant and fogging. Isolated wards will be available in the Medical Centre, where staff are required to don Personal Protective Equipment.

Prior to arriving in Taiwan, *Explorer Dream* was the first cruise ship in the world to attain Certification in Infection Prevention for the Marine industry, accredited by international accredited registrar and classification society DNV GL.

In accordance with Taiwan's regulations, the crew of *Explorer Dream* completed 21 days of isolation and passed Covid-19 testing, as well as participated in an outbreak simulation drill

under the guidance of the Taiwan Centers for Disease Control and with consultation by medical experts from the Taiwan Public Health Association.

Despite the pandemic, Dream Cruises remains committed to its high standard of environmental responsibility, through measures that increase energy efficiency, conserve fuel and water, reduce solid waste generation, increase recycling, protect marine life and prevent oil pollution. The cruise line is also exploring LNG solutions for its future newbuilds.

## Heritage Cruises

Vietnam-based Heritage Cruises has deployed doctors onboard all its river sailings since the outbreak, to provide immediate medical attention to guests in need.

This comes in addition to a requirement for all guests to provide a health certificate ahead of their journey. Hand sanitisers are also supplied on board and in every suite.

With its boutique cruise ships designed to accommodate an intimate group size, every vessel promises abundant common spaces and numerous dining venues to ensure privacy and safe distancing.

## Royal Caribbean Group

Prior to the pandemic, Royal Caribbean International had developed an Outbreak Prevention Plan for aversion and response to spread of illness on board, employing strict hygiene practices such as intensive shipboard cleaning and rigorous passenger screenings.

In addition, every ship in its fleet has a dedicated medical facility staffed with contract medical doctors and nurses. These facilities are available to both guests and crew in the event that onboard medical treatment is necessary.

As the pandemic throws into relief issues regarding sustainability and climate change, the cruise line continues its focus on energy efficiency and sustainability. Under its Above and Beyond Compliance initiatives, the company has committed to programmes such as



▲ The *Au Co* vessel, part of Bhaya Cruises, offers three-day long cruises in Halong Bay, Vietnam

Save the Waves, a company-wide effort launched in 1992 that focuses on waste management, recycling, repurposing of cargo and operational waste and wastewater purification.

Its ships are built and continuously retrofitted for greater efficiency and smaller environmental impact, from sleeker hulls to engine configuration. Vessels are also equipped with Advanced Emission Purification systems, or scrubbers, which remove around 98 per cent of sulphur dioxide from exhaust, reducing demand for distillate fuels.

## Silversea Cruises

Silversea Cruises will maintain and enhance its rigid sanitary protocols, with updated precautions to uphold physical distancing guidelines when sailings resume. Cleaning procedures will be performed at an even greater frequency, with more specific details to be announced when the Healthy Sail Panel – comprising 11 world-leading health experts – have shared its findings.

The cruise line asserts that it, as well as the cruising industry as a whole, continues to commit to sustainable and ecologically compatible growth.

Its newest ship, *Silver Origin*, is built entirely with the environment in mind. It will feature a dynamic positioning system that will allow the vessel to maintain its position without dropping anchor, protecting the sea floor.

Guests will be gifted a metallic reusable bottle to use with in-suite purification systems that convert seawater into drinking water; bathroom amenities will include bottles of 100 per cent recycled plastic and biodegradable products; reef-safe sunblock will be made available. The ship also has an advanced wastewater treatment plan allowing it to discharge in designated areas, meeting stringent regulations.

Silversea Cruises participates in conservation projects and channels financial contributions into causes such as the Floreana Island Ecological Restoration Project, SOS North Seymour Project and the Silversea Fund for Galapagos.

In the Galapagos, the company employs 125 Ecuadorian crew members, who are required to attend training conferences throughout the year about conservation and the nature of the islands. There, it has also launched a programme aimed at sourcing all possible food products from local producers.



◀ Dream Cruises' automatic hand washing station



# Back on the move

Taiwan gives a peek into what she's doing to resume business events during these challenging times, without solely banking on the return of international travel. By [Rachel AJ Lee](#)

In 2019, Taiwan was coming into its own as a choice Asian MICE destination. Its capital Taipei established a dedicated MICE office in March, around the same time Taipei Nangang Exhibition Center Hall 2 (TaiNEX 2) started operations.

Due to Covid-19, MEET TAIWAN admitted that Taiwan's MICE industry has been severely impacted, with numerous international exhibitions, corporate meetings, and incentive tours cancelled. To help Taiwanese event companies cope with the crisis, the agency has been providing financial relief.

## Turning its attention inwards

Although the global pandemic has put a damper on international arrivals, Taiwan's domestic meetings industry has seen some green shoots.

A number of events had taken place after restrictions on domestic meetings were lifted on June 11. All events must abide by strict guidelines set by the authorities to ensure the health and safety of delegates.

▲ TaiNEX 2 is one of Taiwan's largest event venues

The Taiwan External Trade Development Council (TAITRA) – Taiwan's main PEO and official trade promotion agency – has also been consistent in its messaging, informing the larger MICE community that Covid-19 is well under control in the destination. The government agency has been updating the safety levels of its MICE environment and travel policies, and is actively sharing its experience in working to overcome the pandemic.

During a webinar organised by the Asian Federation of Exhibition & Convention Associations in July, TAITRA addressed the growing trends in Taiwan's MICE industry, such as the rising popularity of virtual reality (VR) exhibitions.

Online business matching are also proving to be more crucial than ever for trade personnel, particularly in the absence of face-to-face meetings. Industry players have recognised that organising virtual events will not be supplementary, but a necessity in the post-pandemic era, leading to the rise in hybrid events with both physical and online components.



Taiwan Bio Industry Organization



### Adapting quickly to change

Reflecting Taiwan's adaptability and responsiveness to industry trends, her MICE stakeholders have made a quick pivot to meet the new online demand.

In late September, some 20 international exhibitions are scheduled to take place, such as the Taipei Intelligent Machinery & Manufacturing Technology Show (iMTduo) and SEMICON TAIWAN 2020, all of which are hybrid events. These shows will benefit more than 3,500 manufacturers across a range of industries.

One of Taiwan's largest international exhibitions, COMPUTEX 2020, is among the first to transition from physical state to online.

Its 2019 edition hosted 1,685 exhibitors from 30 countries and attracted 42,495 visitors from 171 countries, and 2020 was set to welcome even more delegates. With international travel severely curtailed, COMPUTEX was at risk of losing that momentum.

Hence, Taiwan moved quickly to launch a series of online events to keep the global technology community connected with COMPUTEX. The first-ever COMPUTEX virtual event debuted on June 2, where its live-stream was watched by over 400,000 viewers.

During the event, key executives from tech companies such as Intel, Nvidia, and Qualcomm addressed the latest trends on artificial intelligence and 5G. In addition, the event also saw 30 VIP buyers from 14 countries meet with Taiwanese suppliers, while startups had a chance to showcase their new products via Taiwan Trade Show's YouTube channel.

Soon to come on September 28 is a platform that will display and promote exhibitors' products and services.

Organisers hope that the physical show will return next year, with dates currently scheduled for June 1-5, 2021.

▲ The 2020 Bio Asia-Taiwan hybrid conference in session, with social distancing measures and safety checks in place

## FAST FACTS

### Looking to the future

As Taiwan's MICE industry rebuilds itself, infrastructure developments have continued in earnest, with several new event venues on schedule to open this year and into 2022.

They include the Taipei Music Center (September 2020), Kaohsiung Music Center (end-2020), and two convention centres located outside of capital city Taipei – the Tainan Convention & Exhibition Center (2021) and Taichung Shuinan International Convention Exhibition Center (2022).

Despite the bleak situation, MEET TAIWAN told *TTGmice* that the destination has not lost sight of its global market, and the appetite to attract international business events has certainly not been diminished.

"With the partial reopening of domestic MICE, a full reopening is soon to follow. We warmly welcome event planners from all over the globe to Taiwan, and will wholeheartedly support them before and after the borders reopen," MEET TAIWAN stated.

**707**

The number of MICE-related events Taiwan hosted in 2019, which generated roughly US\$1.6 billion in trade revenue

**23**

Taiwan's ICCA global ranking in 2019, in terms of number of meetings

**156,700m<sup>2</sup>**

The exhibition space that Taipei Nangang Exhibition Center Hall 2 offers, alongside 14 conference rooms and a 6,100m<sup>2</sup> Sky Garden

# Internal strength

Thailand turns its attention inwards, encouraging would-be corporate travellers to make the most out of its domestic cities. By [Anne Somanas](#)



Even as Thailand's once thriving business events industry takes a harsh beating from the Covid-19 pandemic, the Thailand Convention and Exhibition Bureau (TCEB) has remained in the thick of the action to ensure the Kingdom maintains a presence in the minds of decision-makers.

In the last few months, the convention bureau has implemented a Covid-19 Information Centre to help keep industry professionals up to date on government measures, infection count in Thailand and worldwide, and other critical developments; launched a MICE Venue Hygiene campaign backed by industry associations to certify venues; and unveiled initiatives such as Virtual Meeting Space and Covid-19 Free Meeting projects to help bring events online and equip suppliers with appropriate technology.

▲ The AirSpace Khao Takiab in Hua Hin is a brightly-lit space that welcomes corporate clients

To further stimulate the industry, TCEB has additionally unveiled a new marketing campaign, *1M PEOPLE FOCUSED*, that gives event organisers access to US\$500,000 worth of financial support and an equivalent value in complimentary products and services from participating partners.

The campaign is underpinned by the *EASE UP* Recovery Campaign, which will also include up to five million baht (US\$158,843) in grants to industry members.

At press time, domestic business events are gradually resuming, instilling a sense of cautious optimism among industry players who have made changes to operations to ensure a safe return of activities.

Vitanart Vathanakul, CEO of the Royal Cliff Hotels Group, which owns four hotels and the Pattaya Exhibition and Convention Hall, is encouraged by the resumption of domestic events across the country and at his properties.

"We had to lock down temporarily like everyone else in Pattaya (during the height of the pandemic) for health and safety reasons, but we used that time to prepare ourselves.

"Now, we have launched the special Protection-C meeting package to conform to hygiene standards, and we are encouraged to see the confidence our clients have in us to resume events at our venues," he elaborated.

Herman J Ehrlich, general manager of Conrad Bangkok, said domestic meeting planners can be assured of cleanliness standards – pegged Hilton CleanStay and HiltonEventReady – that Hilton has implemented.

Ehrlich also highlighted the launch of the Thai Chana app which helps to track the spread of Covid-19.

"(It) is an excellent initiative that is easy to use. The entire country has embraced the efforts to combat the spread of Covid-19 in an exemplary fashion which in itself is comforting and inspiring to visitors," he remarked.

While Thai event planners and hoteliers will only have the domestic market to serve for the time being, until international borders are reopened for all travel purposes, and it is positive to note that both the capital, and its surrounding regions, offer numerous options for small corporate meetings and teambuilding sessions.

## Creative dining in and around the Thai capital

Post-lockdown, Bangkok is humming again with many wonderful dining experiences, suitable for smaller-sized team gatherings or company meetings.

These include Neo-Indian fine dining restaurant and urban farm Haoma, suitable for groups that are looking for a sustainable eating experience; as well as the Local Aroi dining experience by Local Alike.

Local Alike is a collaboration between Bangkok chefs and chefs from local communities around Thailand that hopes to inspire visitors to visit other regions in the country by tempting them with delicious food. Its eight-course meals are hosted in private local community venues and suitable for groups of 20 or less.

The bordering provinces of Bangkok also have much to offer.

For instance, the province of Nakorn Pathom, 2.5 hours away, is worth a look. In Nakorn Pathom – which means first city – domestic visitors can view the world’s biggest Buddhist stupa and have a feast at the epic street food market next door; as well as visit the European-style Sanam Chandra Palace.

Groups can also choose to stay at, or pay a day visit to Suan Sampran organic farm, which offers numerous sustainable and group-friendly workshops for teambuilding purposes.

### Cultural heritage in Pattaya

Pattaya is more than a worn beach and party scene, as the coastal city is also home to some fascinating local experiences.

With Hivesters, visiting groups can delve into the area’s coconut industry by visiting the Takhian Tia community, located in the Bang Lamung district of Chonburi, approximately 30 minutes from Pattaya’s city centre.

There, visitors can bike through the local coconut plantation, pick coconuts from coconut trees, try their hand at breaking open the freshly-harvested fruits, and sip coconut lattes while chatting with the farmers who know the fruit inside and out.

The Takhian Tia community is also home to the Hundred-Pillar House, a cultural site that preserves the community’s history. Workshops such as vegetable and herb gardening, as well as the making of a *mahotara* (a hanging bouquet made of kite or coloured paper used to decorate temple and houses), can be arranged.

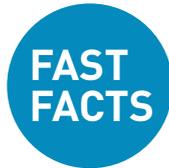
Also not to be missed is the Sanctuary of Truth Museum. The gigantic all-wood construction, created by Thai craftsmen without using a single nail, stands at the Rachvate Cape of Naklua in Pattaya City. All these open-air experiences are social-distancing suitable.

### Moving further afield Hua Hin

Hua Hin has risen to popularity post-Covid as a self-drive destination that travellers can easily reach from Bangkok.

Although it is known as a gentle resort town housing the Klai Kangwon Palace, the city is also a suitable meeting destination, offering the Holiday Inn Vana Nava Hua Hin which features 950m<sup>2</sup> of flexible event space, including five function rooms and a large ballroom, all named after marine animals in Thai. The property also works for business guests with families, as it is linked to the Vana Nava Water Park and offers a kids’ club.

Also in Hua Hin is Air Space Khao Takiab, a restaurant that pays tribute to the aeronautic heritage of the beachside town. Prince Purachatra Jayakara,



**17**

The number of international conventions and tradeshow that have applied for TCEB’s Virtual Meeting Space project, which provides support for organisers in shifting their events online

**30%**

The percentage of TCEB-supported events cancelled due to Covid-19. Out of the 122 TCEB-supported events, 36 were cancelled while 86 were postponed

**US\$650,000**

The combined amount of financial support that TCEB is offering to international meeting organisers through both its I M PEOPLE FOCUSED and EASE UP financial support programmes

► Haoma is an urban farm and zero-waste restaurant in the heart of Bangkok



King Rama V’s 35<sup>th</sup> son, was the first Thai to fly on an airplane. He founded the air transportation system in Thailand, and also built the first hotel in Hua Hin and the famed Chatchai Market.

Today, a wooden model of the airplane he built – reminiscent of the Wright brothers’ creation – hangs from the ceiling of the restaurant. The greenhouse-style venue allows lots of natural light, and is a suitable bookout venue for corporate lunches and meetings.

Hua Hin also sits next to Keang Krachan National Park, the country’s most extensive national park, which would appeal to more adventurous groups. Activities such as river rafting can be arranged, to foster teambuilding and work off lockdown-imposed steam. There are epic views to be had from the top of Keang Krachan Dam.

Accommodation-wise, Keang Krachan offers many riverside hotels and resorts which are suitable for small corporate groups.



TTG Travel Trade Publishing is proud to be the travel trade media partner of the ASEAN Tourism Competitive Committee, working together to support the ASEAN Tourism Marketing Strategy and promote ASEAN destinations for tourism and business events.



# A pirouette of vitality

New Zealand is still navigating through Covid-19 waters, but the energy put into getting the MICE sector going is intoxicating. By [Adelaine Ng](#)

If there was a country that promised the exceptional experiences that come with corporate events but in a Covid-safe environment, New Zealand would easily tick those boxes.

Having managed the Covid-19 pandemic reasonably well, the country is in a better position than most to receive business groups when its borders reopen.

“There’s an absolute eagerness to get back on the radar for business events globally when it makes sense to do so,” said Lisa Hopkins, chief executive of Conventions and Incentives New Zealand (CINZ).

“Everyone’s prepared to be part of the journey and we’re working hard with our partners to bring visitors back into the country through our BE Reconnected event in December, which will be the only business events tradeshow in New Zealand this year and possibly the only one of its kind globally for international buyers”.

Auckland will be the focus as the host city for BE Reconnected but Christchurch is also attracting much attention, where CINZ, New Zealand’s annual business events showcase, will be hosted for the first time in 13 years next May.

“Following the completion of key urban regeneration projects in Christchurch, New Zealand’s most

▲ Auckland is home to more than half of the country’s top 200 tech companies

walkable city is now home to brand new business, shopping, arts and entertainment precincts,” said Ross Steele, general manager of Te Pae Christchurch Convention Centre. “It puts Te Pae within easy reach of more than 2,000 hotel rooms, and some of the city’s best restaurants, bars, galleries and markets.”

Meantime, Hopkins’ said her previous experience working in Singapore has made her aware of the importance of safety for Asian clients.

“Asia is a risk-averse market but the way New Zealand has handled itself during this crisis will give comfort that visitors’ health and safety sits at the heart of our response and how we conduct business moving forward. This includes the Covid Code, an industry initiative designed to amplify health and safety measures at events, but also tracking and tracing,” she elaborated.

## Christchurch: city on the rise

The South Island’s largest city has shaken the dust off its last major earthquake nine years ago to emerge as the country’s newest business events destination, complete with brand new meeting spaces, inspiring public art, and restored heritage venues.

Christchurch is also described as New Zealand’s

future-focused city, leading in its strategic strength sectors it calls “Supernodes”, in areas such as global health tech, aerospace and future transport.

The much-anticipated opening of Te Pae Christchurch Convention Centre early next year will be its crown for conference meetings, located 20 minutes from the international airport.

Te Pae will offer 24 meeting rooms, a 1,400 seat auditorium divisible into two 700 seat spaces, and a 200 booth exhibition hall. It will be operating the new VenueShield environmental hygiene programme as a member of the ASM Global group.

Christchurch is also a doorway to many of the South Island’s stunning array of options for pre- and post- event touring. These include visiting vivid turquoise lakes in Mackenzie, thermal spas in the resort town of Hanmer Springs, and Kaikura three hours north of Christchurch, where visitors can find the country’s leading eco-tourism destination and whale-watching capital.

### **Auckland: a seasoned, buzzing metropolis**

New Zealand’s largest and internationally most accessible city offers the sophistication of a big metropolis without compromising on the experiences the country is famous for.

Playing host to the 36<sup>th</sup> America’s Cup next year, Auckland is also an innovation and technology centre with 60 per cent of New Zealand’s top 200 tech companies based here.

There are several themes to choose from when it comes to experiences that may be incorporated as part of a business event or conference. For instance, bucket list adventures can include oyster-shucking on Waiheke Island, an America’s Cup Sailing Experience, or a seafood cooking masterclass at Auckland Fish Market.

High adrenaline experiences are also on offer, where options such as eco-ziplining, luxury helicopter transfers, a seaplane ride or a climb on the Auckland

Harbour Bridge are on the table.

Groups can also combine Kiwi culture with a culinary experience at the Maori Kitchen, which serves indigenous food cooked the traditional *hangi* way that uses heated stones in a process that takes six hours to prepare.

Auckland’s showcase convention centre, the New Zealand International Convention Centre is scheduled to open in 2023. But there are several other venues that can host more than 3,000 delegates, such as the Vodaphone Events Centre and ASB Showgrounds.

### **Queenstown: small town big on experiences**

This famous resort town is a perennial favourite for visitors with good reason. Queenstown is synonymous with stunning landscapes and adventure-rich activities where nature does the heavy lifting for wow experiences.

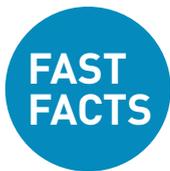
Ideal for groups of up to 400 at a time, the town will be able to incorporate more experiences in a shorter itinerary with new products like the Oxbow Adventure Company, scheduled to open this year at the iconic Nevis Bluff. Guests are promised quite a ride with a world-exclusive jet sprint boating experience, 4WD off-roading and clay bird shooting on offer all in one place, function space included.

Also new and unique to Queenstown is the ability to rent handmade nordic tipis from Sweden to create distinctive, rustic glamour style pop-up settings for events and further increase event capacities.

This town is especially suited for small incentive groups with access to great wine growing regions, several international standard golf courses and diverse ski areas. There’s even the opportunity to fit in a flight and crayfish trip where visitors can also take in views of Lake Wakatipu and glaciers of the Forbes Mountain range.

Queenstown’s largest single function space is the Coronet Peak Base Building which accommodates 600 people in a theatre setting.

▼ Queenstown will appeal to smaller corporate groups that love the great outdoors



## **NZ\$400 million**

The budget for New Zealand’s Tourism Sector Recovery Plan, equivalent to US\$262 million, which includes a transitions programme for affected businesses and a public-private taskforce to lead policy recommendations

## **300,000**

The number of flight cancellations because of Covid-19 on Air New Zealand

## **53**

The percentage of domestic corporate planners expecting reduced budgets for events, according to research by Tourism New Zealand



# Percolating sustainable ideas

Rosa Ocampo discovers how the City of Dreams Manila advocates the growth of the local coffee industry, which results in positive community impact



◀ Sourcing locally and ethically helps COD Manila control the quality and social sustainability of their coffee beans

The City of Dreams (COD) Manila has in place a holistic and sustainable approach to every cup of joe that it serves in its hotels and restaurants.

It all starts with sourcing the beans from local farming communities. Working in collaboration with the Philippine Coffee Board, the beans are obtained from different parts of the Philippines, such as Lipa in Batangas, Atok in Benguet, and Bukidnon in Mindanao. And COD Manila is actively exploring other potential sources from Philippines' other regions to expand its variants and blends.

The coffee beans are then roasted using a state-of-the-art Probat machine – one of few in the country – by a team of skilled baristas at The Roaster Cafe in The Garage VR Zone and Food Park, within COD Manila's grounds. Their blends are then disseminated to all restaurants operated by the integrated resort.

COD Manila's chief operating officer, Kevin Benning, explained the objectives behind the coffee programme: "We believe in putting the spotlight on the Philippine coffee industry, whose premium produce can compete with some of the best coffee beans from around the world.

"By supporting local coffee producers and procuring from local small and medium enterprises (SMEs), we are gratified by the opportunity to help boost the economic development of local communities".

COD Manila's efforts do not stop there. In fact, nothing goes to waste as used coffee grounds are repurposed and recycled.

Gathered daily from the different kitchens and outlets, the grounds are brought to COD Manila's vermicomposting area to be churned into organic fertilisers.

Around 60kg of used coffee grounds, together with 20kg of fruit and vegetable peelings, and 5kg of eggshells, become organic fertiliser for the greenhouse nursery, garden and ornamental plants sprawled across the 6.2-hectare property.

And instead of ending up in landfills, used Nespresso coffee capsules from the rooms of COD Manila's three hotels – Nobu, Hyatt Regency and Nuwa – are turned over to a recycling partner to be mixed with other recycled aluminium before being transformed into raw materials again.

Some used coffee capsules are also given new life at the Negrense Volunteers for Change (NVC) Foundation. Artisans upcycle the capsules, and create items like trinkets and ornaments which are then sold at bazaars and fairs. Profits benefit the artisans

and the communities supported by the NVC foundation.

Meanwhile, coffee grounds from the used Nespresso capsules are turned over to local farmers, which serve as natural compost in lieu of chemical fertilisers and pesticides.

Benning explained that these wide-reaching efforts help to "lessen our impact on the environment and conversely, strengthen our initiatives to practice responsible and sustainable procurement".

"That we would generate some savings in the process is an added benefit, though it is secondary to our main objective to promote sustainability in our operations and be an agent to propel the growth of SMEs," he added.

**"... we are gratified by the opportunity to help boost the economic development of local communities."**

**Kevin Benning**

Chief operating officer, COD Manila



# Catch up: Andrea Teo

This Singapore-based business events specialist is passionate about the industry, even if it comes with the occasional eyebrow-raising request

## What do you like and dislike about your job?

It's insanely dynamic and there's always something new around the corner; be it a trend, emerging tech or concepts. We're in the business of creating experiences and many a time, the very nature of our work gives us the exposure and experiences that money truly can't buy.

It's not necessarily a 'dislike' because working across borders and timezones has massive advantages since something is always churning somewhere. When all parties are in sync, you'll see this beautiful and highly efficient progress. But at the same time, timezones can also be the bane of our lives. Feels really bad when someone has to be the one staying up late or getting up early!

## What is the most memorable event you've organised?

Changing destinations for an outbound event within three weeks due to a natural disaster. We pretty much had to



re-plan the entire programme! The new destination was an emerging one, tourism products there did not cater to an international crowd, and resources were scarce. But the team pulled through with grit and determination and we received many words of thanks after the programme concluded.

## What are two of the most outrageous requests you've received in your line of work?

I have quite a list but I shall pick two that left the deepest impressions.

A client wanted us to bring elephants into Gardens by the Bay to create a jungle atmosphere, but mainly because the Singapore Zoo is such an icon and they couldn't be there. We didn't agree to that.

The second one happened at the beginning of my career and 14 years later, it still amuses me. It was big anniversary dinner that we were planning for and the client wanted the event décor to emulate the streets of various metropolitan cities. The kicker was... there shouldn't be any audible footsteps while people walked on those "streets". It certainly raised a few eyebrows as the tactile and sound aspects should be part of the experience too. We eventually found middle ground, thank goodness!

## Do you think you'll retire in this industry?

I hope so! After 14 years and countless bonds formed, the industry is more than just colleagues and acquaintances. There are also many aspects to the work that we do and plenty of opportunities.

## Is it difficult to explain what you do for a living?

It used to be difficult to explain the nature of my work since it's never a fixed task, but after all these years of seeing happy and tired faces in our event photos, they're now able to grasp the idea. I'd also invite my family to the event if possible. Nothing beats an experience!

– Rachel AJ Lee

## Appointments



**Julie Avenel**



**Lau Wai Meng**



**Monica Lee-Müller**



**Ramlan Ibrahim**

### Julie Avenel

American Express Global Business Travel has appointed Julie Avenel as vice president, global business consulting. In her new role, Avenel will lead GBT's global consultancy division and report to chief commercial officer, Drew Crawley.

### Lau Wai Meng

Lau Wai Meng has been placed at the helm of the Macao Trade and Investment Promotion Institute as president, taking over from Irene Va Kaun Lau. He is also the secretary-general of the Committee for the Development of Conventions and Exhibitions.

### Lily Agonoy

Jebsen Holidays has appointed Lily Agonoy as managing

director. She oversees all existing Jebsen Holidays teams – Virtuoso, Leisure, Cruises, MICE and Inbound.

### Mandy Tran Thi My Dung

Mandy Tran Thi My Dung has joined The Anam Cam Ranh as director of sales and marketing. She makes the move from Hyatt Regency Nha Trang, where she was the property's director of sales and marketing for a year.

### Marco Groten

Grand Hyatt Bali has welcomed Marco Groten as general manager. He will also take on the role of area vice president of Hyatt Indonesia, replacing Peter Stettler who held the position for the past 25 years.

### Monica Lee-Müller

The UFI Board of Directors has elected Monica Lee-Müller as president of UFI for the 2021/22 period. Lee-Müller has been the managing director of Hong Kong Convention and Exhibition Centre (Management) since July 2012, and has been active in UFI for many years driving developments especially on diversity and sustainability projects.

### Ramlan Ibrahim

Ramlan Ibrahim has been appointed the chairman of Malaysia Tourism Promotion Board. He entered the Administrative and Diplomatic Service of Malaysia in 1983.

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