

MAY-JUNE 2021

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TTGmice

Asia-Pacific's intelligent business events resource

Demand spikes
for Northern
Queensland

Singapore stays on
course

Switzerland
Tourism gets a new
SEA chief



Evolving spaces

A technology and mindset evolution is sweeping through Asia's convention centres as they race to capture online and hybrid events and win the confidence of event owners and organisers that are prioritising true partnership in their selection of venues

Peeking into the future of events



Karen Yue
Group Editor

The spirit of innovation has truly thrived amid this pandemic. We have seen major convention and exhibition centres in our region leading the charge towards venue and event digitisation, bringing onboard infrastructure that facilitates quality livestreaming and broadcasting. Along the way, hotels have joined in to offer livestreaming and broadcasting facilities, eager to be seen as a worthy supporter of increasingly popular hybrid online/in-person business events.

Venue managers that have gone on this path will soon realise that the only way to move is forward because with every online or hybrid event attendees experience, their expectations for quality content will rise. This puts pressure on event producers and planners to come up with novel ways to keep content and engagement interesting. In turn, event producers and planners will come to rely more heavily on partners that can help them easily turn ideas into reality, perhaps through the right equipment or with a collaborative mindset.

Far-sighted, savvy venues have continued to evolve and improve their digital and hybrid event offerings. They are finding audiovisual and broadcasting solutions from specialists that once catered only to television productions. No surprises there, as many event producers and planners have likened producing an online or hybrid business event today to delivering a major live performance.

Innovation is not only booming on the hardware front. The number of event software vendors across the world has expanded by 400 per cent in the past year, according to a global mapping study conducted by marketing specialist, Hoosh. You can read about this on *TTGmice.com*.

It is natural to feel that the familiar past of pre-pandemic days are more comforting than the unknown future, but the technology changes we are witnessing today are giving us a peek into a more exciting business events landscape to come, especially for conferences, meetings and product launches that could benefit from some creativity.

The combination of innovative event venues, new specialised apps to answer known and yet-unknown online and hybrid event needs, increased investments in event technology, and the consolidation of established event software players will ultimately benefit event producers and planners as well as attendees.



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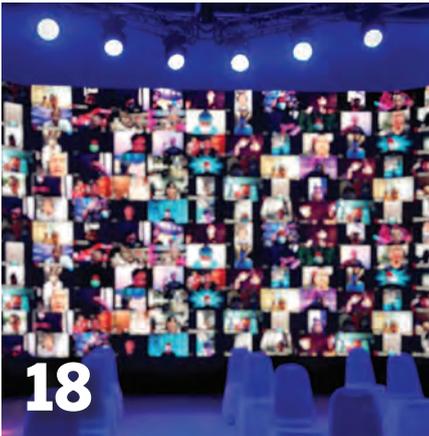
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TOP 5 HEADLINES THIS MONTH

MCB welcomes state government's long-term investment in business events

The Victorian Government has committed a long-term investment worth A\$42.9 million (US\$33.1 million) over four years to Victoria's Business Events Program, to support the Melbourne Convention Bureau and Business Events Victoria in acquiring business events for the state.

Hong Kong rolls out Convention Ambassador scheme to promote recovery

Over 100 leaders of business and professional bodies in Hong Kong have joined forces with the Hong Kong Tourism Board as Hong Kong Convention Ambassadors to promote the city as the choice for regional and global business events.

Thailand plans to waive quarantine for vaccinated visitors from October

Thailand is considering scrapping its mandatory quarantine for vaccinated visitors to its capital Bangkok and other top tourist destinations from October, as it looks to rebuild its coronavirus-battered tourism industry.

Study shows a thriving event tech landscape amid pandemic

The number of event technology vendors across the world has expanded by 400 per cent in the past year, according to a global mapping study conducted by marketing specialist, Hoosh. The inaugural study, titled EventTech 800, identifies 832 companies operating in the event technology space across 11 categories, such as Event Marketing Software, Conference Intelligence Software, Event Management Software, Virtual Event Platform, and Audience Response Software.

PEOs confident of business events happening end-2021

The global vaccination roll out is fuelling confidence in the return of in-person events towards the end of this year, with many PEOs expecting attendance to still be dominated by a domestic audience. As a result, PEOs have indicated that a virtual or online element will remain for their upcoming events. Some, based on this projection, have gone on to kick off fresh, virtual-only shows.

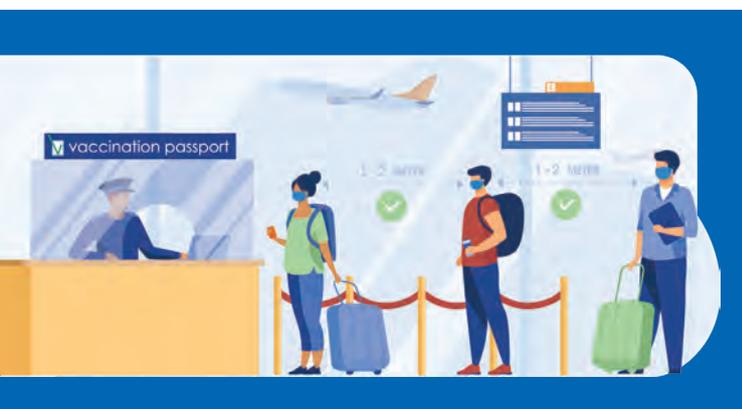
► From top: Victoria gets a fresh boost in its MICE coffers; Melbourne pictured; Hong Kong's Ambassadors are instrumental in strengthening the city's position as a best-in-class MICE hub; ongoing vaccination rollouts are a huge driver in opening up the world and enabling the return of global exhibitions



PERSPECTIVES

Industry trends in 2021: Vaccine passports, travel bubbles, and Asia as the next global events leader

Tim Hentschel, CEO and co-founder of HotelPlanner, looks at what is developing in the industry, touches on vaccines and a worldwide roll-out, and how this will affect tourism and hospitality across Asia.



Will the current crisis change corporate travel technology distribution?

Gavin Smith, director of Element, looks at the way tech is distributed in corporate travel and discusses how this will change, and what benefits it will bring for both companies and TMCs.

Passion is in our nature

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Knowledge Sessions	20
Networking Conversations	10
Booth Check-in via Virtual Exhibition	5
Exchange Contact With Any Delegate	5

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CONNECT

Q&A



▲ Damien Kitto, CEO of Adelaide Convention Bureau, talks about how staying nimble is crucial when organising events in this new environment, and stresses the need for associations to come together for one unified voice when speaking to the government.



◀ Seoul Convention Bureau (SCB) is strengthening connections with the global business events industry and building a close network for local stakeholders as it steps into the future with optimism, reveals director Eun-mi Kim.

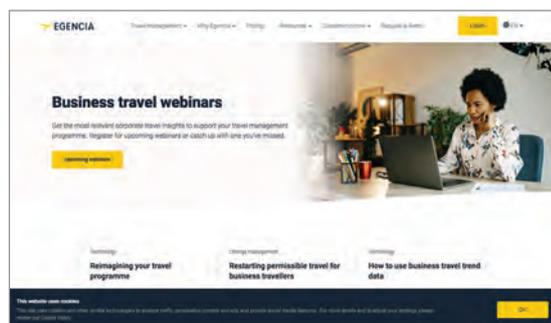
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WEBINARS

▶ SAP Concur

SAP Concur offers on-demand webinars alongside virtual events to help optimise businesses. Previous discussions include CFO Perspective: Intelligent Spend Management, and Realise Cost Savings with the Power of Digital Spend. www.concur.com.sg/webinars-and-events



◀ Egencia

Egencia regularly hosts webinars filled with corporate travel insights aimed at supporting travel management programmes. Thought-provoking topics include Restarting permissible travel for business travellers and Reimagining your travel programme. www.egencia.com.sg/en/webinars

▶ UFI

Organised by the UFI team and the UFI community, UFI connects provides a schedule of regular talks, panels, and webinars streamed globally. Recent sessions include What does recovery look like for the events industry? and Creating More Environmentally Sustainable Exhibitions. www.ufi.org/news-media/ufi-connects



Switzerland Incentive Routes.

From the cultural capital over a mountain pass to a glacier



Day 1: Arrival day, Basel

Discover the art city and modern architecture of Basel.

Welcome Evening in Basel at Restaurant Kunsthalle.

Overnight at Hyperion Hotel Basel.

Day 2: Basel, Zurich, Bad Ragaz.

09:00 Explore the rich culture and carnival traditions of Basel.

11:00 Lunch train ride to Zurich.

12:00 Explore Zurich's oldtown on foot.

13:30 Scenic boat trip on the lake to Thalwil.

14:00 Special train "Churchill" to Bad Ragaz.

16:20 Group activity "Water tasting" with a water sommelier at Grand Resort Bad Ragaz.

17:00 Discover the Tamina hot springs of Bad Ragaz, considered the most plentiful aquatic spa in Europe.

19:30 Gala Dinner and overnight at Grand Resort Bad Ragaz.

Day 3: Bad Ragaz - Pontresina, Engadin St. Moritz.

08:30 Scenic ride to St. Moritz.

12:00 Lunch at Morteratsch Alpine cheese dairy.

13:00 Workshop for the participants: Discovering ancient cheesemaking traditions.

15:00 Bike ride through the Swiss stone pine forest to Pontresina.

15:30 Meet at the Hotel Saratz for drinks and food at the pool.

19:00 Farewell evening and awards ceremony in a world of ice, 3,000 metres above sea level at Diavolezza.

22:00 Overnight in Pontresina at Grand Hotel Kronenhof Pontresina and Hotel Saratz.

www.MySwitzerland.com/meetings

Day 4: Departure day, Pontresina, Engadin St. Moritz - Zurich

10:00 Brunch at the Grand Restaurant with its neo-baroque vault dating from 1872.

12:00 Ride on the world famous Bernina Express in the Alpine Classic "Pullmann" coaches to Chur.

16:00 Individual departures.

We need to meet again.



Switzerland.

We need Switzerland.



ICC Sydney unveils dedicated space for digital events

International Convention Centre Sydney (ICC Sydney) has launched its Media Studio – a dedicated permanent studio space offering broadcast recording services, live streaming and digital event solutions.

The Media Studio features green screen technology which allows for visual integration of presenters into customisable background content. The new facility and services will be delivered by the venue's audiovisual and ICT teams who have executed more than 200 broadcast and hybrid events in the last 12 months including Online Retailer Fusion 2020, MEALIVE Awards, Stand Tall 2020 and ATA Live.

ICC Sydney's director of audiovisual services Brian Nash said the venue is proud to expand its audiovisual product suite following positive client feedback and uptake.

"We are always looking at ways to expand our products and services to meet client needs and following the success of the broadcast studios originally set up in the ballrooms, we are pleased to be able to provide our clients with a permanent media studio in response to high demand for broadcast-quality recording services, even as live events return," he added.



Anantara Chiang Mai Resort revamps multipurpose space



The Anantara Chiang Mai Resort in Chiang Mai has recently revamped and expanded its multipurpose Anantara Function Room.

The 114m² venue has been outfitted with 12 wireless video wall screens which can be connected using a computer or mobile device, as well as touchscreen monitors. There is also a separate control room where organisers can seamlessly arrange to play videos or other media from. It can host up to 75 participants theatre-style, 36 executives for a boardroom meeting, or 48 guests for a banquet.

Business and multilingual secretarial services, along with coffee breaks and luncheons can also be arranged.

Other meeting venues at the resort include the Rooftop Terrace that can host sunset cocktail receptions or a sit-down banquet for 60; The Service 1921 Lawn which can hold 120 guests banquet-style; or the restaurant's waterfront deck that can be exclusively booked for up to 86 guests.

Nestling into place

As safe distancing measures raise the profile of private dining groups and exclusive gatherings, One Farrer Hotel in Singapore has leveraged this demand to transform an entire level of suites offerings into a private dining offering.

The Nest at One Farrer, on level 20 of the hotel, comprises 13 safe dining environments that each accommodate between four and 12 diners. Guests will be able to enjoy curated set menus as part of the experience.

Since last year, the hotel has hosted several small-scale meetings, launches and classes, with the Nest providing breakout rooms with in-room smart TVs enabling live streaming of the main event hall. After the conferences, keynote speakers and VIPs dined at the Nest with five diners per room. – **Pamela Chow**



Adelaide Oval now home to a boutique hotel



Oval Hotel, Adelaide, is Australia's first stadium hotel and one of only a handful of hotels in the world aligned to a sporting stadium.

The luxury boutique hotel offers 138 rooms across two wings that wrap around the eastern facade of Adelaide Oval, each overlooking the surrounding parklands. On the ground floor, the Bespoke Wine Bar & Kitchen features a 2,000 bottle wine wall that stocks wine from across Australia, as well as international selections.

Connected to the hotel is the Adelaide Oval, South Australia's 50,000 seat home for major cultural and sporting events, as well as the state's main meetings and events offering. This includes 24 dedicated function spaces for anywhere between 10 and 2,000 delegates, with a variety of options from unique outdoor terraces to intimate meeting rooms overlooking the hallowed turf. – **Adelaine Ng**

Hangzhou's Top 10 Scenes of Digital Economy Tourism

In recent years, the digital economy industry of Hangzhou has been constantly growing. Technological innovations are on a high in emerging sectors like such as the Internet, cultural creativity, financial service, health care, and new energy.

The much-anticipated "Top Ten Scenes of Hangzhou Digital Economy Tourism" was announced, featuring world-famous technology companies or business centers/parks like Alibaba Group (China) Co., Ltd., Hangzhou Hikvision Digital Technology Co., Ltd., the Cloud Town & Hangzhou City Brain Co., Ltd., Xiaoshan Hipark, Turing Town, Alibaba Cloud Industrial Internet Co., Ltd., Inno & Entre Town, Zhejiang Dahua Zhilian Co., Ltd., Xiaoshan Robot Town, and Wasu Digital TV Media Group.

► The Smart Alibaba Center



Alibaba is a world-renowned technology company founded in Hangzhou. It offers three diverse visiting opportunities, the Visitor Center of Alibaba at its headquarters, QINCHENGLI Mall, Tai Ji Zen Garden, FlyZoo Hotel, and other unique attractions. Alibaba's Visitor Center represents the style of the company, its culture, industry, and products.

As a new retail experimental field in smart commercial space, QINCHENGLI Mall relies on the big data and AI technology to upgrade the production and circulation process of commodities and form a display of new fashions through deep integration of online, offline and logistics services. As the first smart hotel in the world, Fly Zoo Hotel boasts 290 rooms, the fitness centre of the future and other facilities. Technologies like facial recognition check-in, smart elevator, Tmall smart butler, food delivery by robot are all on offer, reflecting the latest smart applications.

► State-of-the-art Technology Solutions in Hikvision

Hikvision is an intelligent IoT (Internet of Things) solution and big data service provider, focusing on comprehensive security, big data service and smart business. It is committed to building a smart city and digitized enterprise sector through by use of Cloud and Edge services and Information Technology in all its forms.

Covering an area of 4500 square meters, the Hikvision Exhibition Center design focuses on the concept of "light". For example, the device located in the hall – which links to the big screen presenting "the dance of light" – is called "The light of heart mirror" and helps convey to the audience the philosophy of the company and the theme of the whole exhibition. It vividly paints a city empowered by high-tech, including among others smart home experience, road safety driving guaranteed by vehicle-road collaborative technology, AR smart scenic sights, "take and go" easy shopping area, efficient smart factories and urban operation centers.



► A Different Kind of Town

The cradle of picturesque towns in Zhejiang, home to Hangzhou City Brain and the permanent venue of "APSARA Conference", the Cloud Town boasts five big industrial sectors. Cloud Industry, City Brain, Intelligent Manufacturing, Space Information and Biological Medicine forge the first town in China's digital economy and tourism. Already Hangzhou's "golden name card", Hangzhou City Brain enables urban managers to better allocate public resources, make scientific decisions and improve governance efficiency.

The town offers three routes for visitors, covering Cloud Town Exhibition, Museum of Inspiration 2050, Herbal Garden, City Brain Base. The latter, in particular, presents the new mechanism in which Hangzhou government explores the

development and construction of Hangzhou City Brain and its industrial application, and the process, achievements and future of collaborative innovation among the government, enterprises and research institutions through the Innovation Base.

Diversified industry empowerment, professional collaboration and extensive research carried out between the new economic advantage industry and the conference industry are showing Hangzhou's unique strengths in different sectors, innovation, and development potential and portray it as "A Destination of the New Economy".

No rest for policy refinement

Corporate travel frequency is down but work on policy refinement remains active to make sense of constant changes to travel regulations and varied challenges, writes [Karen Yue](#)



Mounting obstacles to safe travel resumption alongside Covid-19 infection concerns have led companies to refine their travel policies to better reflect the reality of today's unusual travel landscape, even as travel is not yet possible for all markets.

Among these obstacles, according to two of Asia-Pacific's top travel management companies (TMCs), are complex and varying travel restrictions around the world, capacity challenges, and difficulty in enforcing Covid-19 vaccination and use of health passports among business travellers.

Joanne Taylor, senior director, account management & consulting, Asia, FCM Travel, said: "With government restrictions, including immigration regulations, border closures as well as quarantine and lockdown conditions, still constantly changing, this becomes a



▲ Taylor: travellers are concerned about getting stranded in a destination due to snap government decisions

challenge for travellers to monitor regularly, and have certainty on what they need to know or do in various countries. The uncertainty of movement from snap government decisions and existing border closures along with short notice on regulation change is also a big drawback for travellers as they are concerned about getting stranded in a destination."

Adding to the pain of comprehending and tracking travel restrictions is the fact that these regulations could even vary from one state or region to the next within the same country, said Akshay Kapoor, head of sales, Asia Pacific with CWT.

"That makes it difficult for organisations to get their head around their return to travel plans," he remarked.

And even when essential travel is allowed or if travellers have the confidence to travel again, Taylor said securing seats for these travellers could be a challenge.

"With cancellation or reduction of various air routes over the past year due to a lack of demand, supply has become greatly constrained as well. Lockdown and post-lockdown announcements bring a different set of challenges to gaining seat access where mass requests consume most of the supply and seat priority is given to those who are stranded in a destination," she said, adding that transit conditions bring yet another set of complications to the equation.

Meanwhile, as Covid-19 vaccines and digital health passports are made available to facilitate a safe return to travel, Kapoor said companies must now determine the extent to which they and the travel ecosystem can dictate sensitive and personal choices over the use of these products.

When asked if companies might make it compulsory for frequent travellers in their teams to be vaccinated against Covid-19, Kapoor said it was not something he has seen.

"Companies will naturally want to minimise the risk of an employee contracting the disease while travelling for work and then passing it on to their co-workers upon their return. However, while employers can actively promote their position towards vaccination campaigns and engage staff in a constructive discussion, insisting that employees get vaccinated or sign up for health passports could carry legal risks," he said.

Duty of care at the core

The current complex travel landscape has highlighted a greater need for duty of care as companies work hard to reassure their travellers and have better control over future travel plans.

Peter Koh, Asia strategic sourcing manager, travel and professional services with Corning, Inc., recalls how a race to procure PPE and other essential health and safety equipment for his frequent travellers had started in February 2020, when news of Covid-19 first broke.

"Many Asian travel managers moved early to prepare themselves (for a changed travel

landscape and heightened need for duty of care) because we knew this was going to impact our daily life for a while," Koh said, alluding to Asia's experience with the SARS pandemic.

He added that some companies have also established their own health policy to ensure that staff are fit and ready to travel.

According to Kapoor, duty of care to staff, both in terms of physical and mental well-being, has now taken precedence over cost savings.

"Customers do acknowledge that their businesses are suffering or missing growth opportunities due to travel restrictions, but the focus still remains on ensuring safety over any other priority," Kapoor told *TTGmice*.

He noted that most clients are prioritising safe reopening of their offices while encouraging remote working arrangements. Resuming in-person meetings in the same city comes next, and eventually the act of bringing back some essential domestic business travel.

"International travel, of course, still remains largely restricted," said Kapoor.

Taylor confirms that health, security, environment and community (HSEC) objectives are the primary reason for companies to refine their travel policies.

FCM Travel witnessed a surge in requests from companies to adapt or craft addendums to their travel policies when the Covid-19 pandemic first reared its head in early 2020, with changes focused on addressing new health, safety and sanitation requirements, increasing visibility of travellers, and adopting stricter approval processes to ensure greater compliance.

"A large portion of these changes took place between March and June 2020, of which March and April saw the largest volume of uptake for the Asia region. The majority of our customers adapted their travel policies rather than a complete revision from June onwards," she revealed.

Between then and now, alterations to travel policies have been few, "as travel bubbles and green lane arrangements have not been as easy and successful in stimulating greater business travel volumes".

But with vaccination programmes gaining momentum across major cities around the world, Taylor expects another surge in travel programme refinement later this year.

Koh said travel managers would be keeping close tabs on vaccination progress. He said: "We have many questions about how travel restrictions might change as more people get vaccinated. For example, will vaccinated individuals get to skip mandatory quarantines, especially at destinations they frequent for meetings? What vaccines will be recognised by which governments? We have been posing questions to various embassies but are not getting clear responses yet."

In addition, Koh expects the rollout of various health passports to also shape travel policy changes, and expresses grave concerns about additional complexities should differ-

ent health passports be adopted by different governments and airlines.

Help needed

It comes as no surprise that TMCs have observed a spike in client requests for assistance to make sense of these obstacles, and they have responded with data-driven solutions.

FCM Travel developed the Traveller Hub in June 2020, an interactive resource providing extensive up-to-date Covid-19 travel information to help clients keep up with the ever-changing travel requirements and restrictions.

CWT has also introduced a series of data-powered solutions, such as the Return to Travel dashboards that provide latest information on Covid-related risks and travel restrictions; and CWT Travel Essentials search tool that gives travellers easy access to information on applicable restrictions, procedures and travel requirements based on their specific travel itinerary.

Besides needing assistance in visualising post-pandemic travel policies and planning for action needed in the coming months, CWT's clients are also looking to add suppliers such as PCR testing labs and Covid-19 travel insurance providers into their travel programme.

"They are also thinking about how they can strike the right balance between an efficient and well-scrutinised travel approval processes," shared Kapoor.

CWT hopes to find that balance through its new ECO framework, launched September 2020 to help companies look beyond compliance and cost management, and build more balanced travel programmes that also aligned with other important objectives. It is believed that through this approach, business travel becomes an avenue through which companies can simultaneously create an engaged and motivated workforce, reduce their environmental impact, and manage costs more effectively.

A China case study

China's ability to contain the Covid-19 pandemic sooner than other parts of the world, enabling the resumption of domestic travel, has made her the "beacon of hope for global travel", remarked Kapoor.

A McKinsey & Company report in October 2020 noted that demand for domestic travel had approached pre-pandemic levels by the end of August. ForwardKeys made similar observations, noting that domestic seat capacity had returned to pre-pandemic levels by August 2020 and eight per cent more seats were added in 4Q2020 to cope with rising demand. While Chinese airlines had to slash 23 per cent of seat capacity in February 2021 due to Chinese New Year travel restrictions, they brought back 19 per cent more seats in March 2021 compared to pre-pandemic levels.

Albert Zhong, general manager, China, CWT, confirms that the majority of his clients in China had resumed pre-pandemic levels of domestic business travel by the end of 2020.

While occasional new cases of Covid-19 infections in some cities would impact traffic,



▲ Koh: vaccination and use of health passports will lead to more corporate travel policy changes

Zhong said overall demand for domestic business travel across China is recovering steadily.

Like companies elsewhere in the world, Chinese employers have made duty of care and traveller health and safety their prime focus over the past year.

"We are increasingly seeing Chinese companies requiring employees to secure pre-trip approvals not only from their line managers, but also from the human resource department, so that their trips can be tracked in a timely and efficient manner. In many cases, local governments are also issuing travel advisories, rules and regulations," shared Zhong.

"As a result, reporting and traveller tracking capabilities have become a key criteria for companies when selecting a TMC to work with," he added.

Chinese companies have also grown to lean more onto their TMCs for pre-travel information, such as government-imposed travel restrictions, Covid-19 testing and quarantine requirements, as well as hotel and airline operations.

He acknowledges that travel arrangements continue to be complex "due to the sheer unpredictability of the current environment and how quickly things can change".

As such, every party in the travel ecosystem must "play its role to the best of their expertise".

"For example, from a TMC's perspective, we have had to increase our capability to communicate and connect with our clients and their travellers, including providing pre-trip advice, safety and security alerts, and traveller tracking. Last year, CWT in China published hundreds of travel-related news articles and alerts on WeChat for our corporate clients. We also organised a number of webinars, including some with airlines and hotels, to provide industry updates to our customers. All these actions were highly appreciated and recognised by our clients in China."

Zhong opined that TMCs have to think differently in offering value to clients in such unusual times.



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New Zealand's centres of attention



Clockwise from above: Artist impressions of NZICC, Tākina, and Te Pae

While international conferences have been on hold, New Zealand has been busy working on something new: three new, city-centre convention centres

The new purpose-built venues in Christchurch, Wellington and Auckland will showcase the capability and increase the capacity of New Zealand to host exceptional business events.

Tourism NZ general manager domestic & business events Bjoern Spreitzer says: "This growth in business events infrastructure underlines both the importance of this industry to New Zealand's economy, and recognises the networking and business benefits which international conferences and events will bring."

The first new venue, Te Pae Christchurch Convention Centre, will open its doors later this year.

Its name, 'Te Pae' draws inspiration from several phrases in New Zealand's indigenous language, te reo Māori. Te Pae Maunga means our mountain views, and Te Pae Whenua means the vast plains we inhabit. These iconic elements of the region's landscape are echoed in

the building's design, where shapes and lines represent the contours of the Southern Alps and braided rivers of Canterbury. Te Pae Tangata means a place to meet and converse, highlighting Te Pae Christchurch's role as a gathering place for the city.

Managed by international venue management company ASM Global, Te Pae combines the manaakitanga (warm welcome), culture and knowledge of Christchurch with world-class infrastructure, technology, and connections.

Its 28,000m² of flexible space includes: a 1,400-seat tiered auditorium, divisible into two 700-seat venues; a 1,000-seat banquet space overlooking the beautiful Avon River; plus extensive meeting space and expandable exhibition halls.

The venue will be built to a New Zealand Green Building Council (NZGBC) Green Star 5-star rating,

representing New Zealand excellence for environmental sustainability.

Next in the pipeline is Tākina, the new Wellington Convention and Exhibition Centre, opening in 2023 in the middle of New Zealand's capital city.

Tākina means 'to invoke, to summon, to connect, to bring forth' in te reo Māori. The building's concept draws on the summoning of Wellington's wind as a means of expressing the shift of knowledge, moving things forward, and carrying ideas. It will be a place of welcoming, thinking, learning, and sharing, with its sculptural exterior housing modern, light-filled, flexible event spaces.

Tākina can be customised to accommodate a plenary of up to 1,600 delegates, with two divisible plenary halls on separate levels which can be easily combined; plus a 1,800m² exhibition hall with adjacent space to boost capacity; stand-alone meeting rooms; and fully integrated best-in-class AV and ICT systems.

It will also be built to achieve a 5-star certification in accordance to NZGBC's guidelines.

Meanwhile, work continues on the New Zealand International Convention Centre (NZICC) in the heart of Auckland city, scheduled for completion in 2024.

This vertically stacked, modern building will be a hub of innovation and positive exchange. A glazed facade and adjacent laneways will provide delegates with a connection to the vibrancy of the city, while allowing views of Auckland's natural beauty, from the Waitakere Ranges to the Waitemata Harbour.

Its flexible convention and event space can cater for up to 4,000 people across 32,500m². The configurable spaces over 4 levels present opportunities for a wide range of events including theatre capacity for 2,850 and up to 33 meeting rooms.

The NZICC will operate as a carbon neutral venue, the only one of its kind in Asia-Pacific.

Spreitzer adds: "We look forward to welcoming international conference delegates back to New Zealand, with new venues and new opportunities for learning and collaboration."



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Exiting comfort zone key to better association management

Regardless of industry, leading and managing associations this year will require boards and secretariats to think differently by making greater use of technology to engage members, diversifying revenue streams for financial stability, and capitalising on opportunities to innovate and strengthen good governance.

Those were the key takeaways from a March 25 webinar, organised by Glue Up and featured speakers in charge of associations in advertising, childcare and professional membership organisations based in Hong Kong, Australia, the Philippines and India.

Sharing an example of how The Association of Accredited Advertising Agencies of Hong Kong (HK4A) had adopted greater use of IT during the pandemic, executive director Onie Chu said member engagement had transitioned from working on desktops to notebooks, smartphones, Zoom, Microsoft Team, Google Meet, etc. Doing so allowed “members (to) know where we are here” to continue to help them find solutions, Chu noted.

In the case of MSME Business Forum India, director Ravi Sinha said technology was used to sustain two-way communication and required the training of “those who had to adapt to something new”, give them time and to show them the protocols to “make life easy and not complicated” for its micro, small and medium size enterprise members.

Sinha commented: “We had to show that it was easy to use and it increased productivity.”

Australian Childcare Alliance (ACA) New South Wales, CEO, Chiang Lim, who has a technology background, added it was important for the association to recognise and embrace IT.

ACA, he said, was “already Cloud-based”



▲ Clockwise from top left: MSME Business Forum India's Ravi Sinha; The Association of Accredited Advertising Agencies of Hong Kong's Onie Chu; Philippine Council of Associations and Associate Executives' Bobby Peralta; and Australian Childcare Alliance New South Wales's Chiang Lim

and just had to “scale up and train members to be Cloud-safe”. It introduced an online AGM and “Coffee Roulette” conversations to rebuild connections.

Bobby Peralta, founder and CEO, Philippine Council of Associations and Associate Executives (PCAEE), described IT as “a great enabler for membership engagement” and is producing an e-letter and organising virtual meetings.

He also highlighted the importance of a reserve fund, saying: “No money, no mission.”

“The association did not only rely on

membership dues. Diversifying led us to providing training, career development and consultancy services,” he continued.

Emphasising on the need to identify opportunities to excel during times of adversity, Lim shared how ACA picked up the government's signal for collaborators to stimulate the economy. It responded with a proposal to help the government address “the fear of the cost of childcare”.

“There was massive panic when 90 per cent of parents took their children out of childcare because of the pandemic. We had to show members we were working in tandem with the government...to shore up financial support during the pandemic,” Lim said, pointing out that there are now more clients in childcare than before the Covid-19 outbreak.

On HK4A's part, it chose to host a hybrid student awards event, even though the main awards were cancelled, in order to continue nurturing talent. The association also kicked off a Create for Good initiative, partnering selected NGOs, Chu said, because it wanted to put itself in the shoes of members who believed it was something worthwhile despite business being slow and because “we need to show a positive outlook”.

To ensure association longevity, Peralta shared that the 44-year-old PCAEE had developed a corporate culture where it is always “all about purpose” and “to lead by example by practicing good governance, fairness, accountability and transparency”.

He shared that the secretariat's team of eight is committed to nurturing teamwork and family culture, and celebrates birthdays in the office or virtually.

BestCities, IAPCO publish guide to hybrid congresses

BestCities and the International Association of Professional Congress Organisers (IAPCO) have come together to help associations articulate hybrid congress guidelines in a new resource. The complimentary bid guidelines template articulates new requirements that PCOs and CVBs need to be aware of, such as consideration of destination selection, appropriate software choices for streaming, capturing content and security, facilitation of networking, the cost for attendees, and promotion of the event. The template is available for download on IAPCO and BestCities websites.

Noor Ahmad Hamid to exit prominent meetings industry association

The International Congress and Convention Association's (ICCA)



regional director for Asia-Pacific, Noor Ahmad Hamid, leaves his role on June 4, 2021, after having spent 12 years serving the association, supporting its members across the region's meetings industry, and lifting the profile of the meetings profession. He will start a new chapter in his career in the public sector.

Blockchain associations birth a consortium for South-east Asia

Six blockchain associations in Asia-Pacific have joined forces to form the ASEAN Blockchain Consortium in a bid to foster and drive cross-border collaboration in promoting blockchain technology. The MoU was inked by Asosiasi Blockchain Indonesia, Blockchain Association Singapore, Distributed Ledger Technology Association of the Philippines, Labuan International Business and Financial Centre, Thailand Digital Asset Operators Trade Association and Blockchain Australia.



Yokohama's iconic view, Yokohama skyline

YOKOHAMA CONVENTION AND VISITORS BUREAU

Yokohama's hybrid approach sets standards for MICE safety

Successfully hosting the 2020 summit of the Asia-Pacific chapter of the International Congress and Convention Association has demonstrated that the Yokohama Convention and Visitors Bureau is firmly placing the coronavirus health crisis in the past and moving ahead with MICE events that are both meaningful and memorable.

The health of participants was of the utmost importance, yet the situation did permit PACIFICO Yokohama to create an inclusive hybrid environment that brought together in-person and online participants.

Safety first

Hosting a major international event during a global health crisis posed a range of new problems to the challenges already associated with such an important occasion. The health and well-being of all the participants and

staff was the top priority and PACIFICO Yokohama was swift to pioneer advanced safety measures to ensure that the venue was in compliance with government and industry protocols.

In collaboration with local health experts, additional protocols were

Event

ICCA Asia-Pacific Summit 2020

Venue

The PACIFICO Yokohama North, Yokohama, Japan

Organiser

The ICCA Asia Pacific Office and the local hosting committee for the ICCA Asia Pacific Chapter Summit 2020, composed of the City of Yokohama, the Yokohama Convention & Visitors Bureau and PACIFICO Yokohama

Dates

December 15-16, 2020

Attendance

170 in person, 124 virtually

devised specifically for Yokohama and the venue, including a contact tracing system via a smartphone app and the use of a QR code registration system to minimise contact.

Other measures included temperature screening, enforcement of social distancing, the provision of hand sanitiser throughout the facility, effective ventilation, advanced cleaning protocols and contingency planning.

The most challenging component surrounded networking and social events as well as meal times - which are also arguably the most important part of this kind of event. The utmost care was taken during coffee breaks and at meals, with individual meals served in "bento" boxes and cookies individually wrapped. Participants were given plenty of space and invited to not speak during the meal but only after finishing and putting a mask on.

An emergency plan was put in place that involved the prefectural health authorities - but the preparation and precautions proved effective as there were no reports of any participants being taken ill.

PACIFICO certification

The PACIFICO Yokohama complex has gone through the rigorous process required for GBAC STAR accreditation, a performance-based validation benchmark for the cleanliness of facilities created by the Global Biorisk Advisory Council. Certification ensures that protocols across 20 different areas are being effectively implemented and, as well as covering best-practices for cleaning and disinfection, provides a framework for leadership, strategy, planning, accountability and documentation.

Facilities and features

Already recognised as one of the top convention centres in the Asia-Pacific region, with more than 90 meeting rooms and 144,700m² of floor space, PACIFICO Yokohama is also at the very heart of the historic, cosmopolitan and friendly port city that has been the gateway to Japan for more than a century.

Yokohama has nearly 100 hotels with more than 18,000 guest rooms across all budgets, with the convention centre within easy walking distance of many of the city's hotels and its must-see attractions, including shops, restaurants, museums, art galleries, waterfront spaces and sporting and nightlife venues.

Unique venue, unique entertainment

Mindful of the need for an outdoor venue with plenty of space, but also the participants' desire to communicate with colleagues and enjoy a meal and entertainment, the organisers' solution was to secure the services of the Nippon Maru Memorial Park. The facility is alongside the stunningly preserved former Japanese sail training vessel, which is permanently docked at what was once a Mitsubishi shipyard but is now, due to the rapid development of Yokohama, surrounded by skyscrapers.

Originally launched in 1930, the ship survived a world war, trained 11,500 cadets and sailed the equivalent of more than 45 times around the Earth.



Clockwise from top: an evening reception at Nippon Maru; plenary and breakout sessions adopt a hybrid format at PACIFICO Yokohama North; hygienic bento box meals for delegates feature sustainably sourced seafood

Retired in 1984, the sailing ship has never before the focus for such an event, but there are high hopes that it will serve as a unique venue again in the future.

The organisers ensured that participants had ample space for distancing and see-through dividers were positioned on tables. Tents set up on the dockside were well ventilated but also heated to keep guests comfortably warm.

Traditional Japanese cuisine was served in individual *bento* boxes, including sustainably sourced seafood, while the lively dinner show was provided by the *Yokohama Sisters*.

"After all these months of the industry being at a total standstill, we were able to have this beautiful social event - it felt like clouds of darkness and depression were lifted," said Keiko Nishimoto, deputy chair of the ICCA and treasurer of the Asia-Pacific chapter.

"For the first time in months, I could look around and see this event and I thought - we can do this! It's possible."

Commitment to sustainability

The summit also pioneered sustainability measures, becoming the very first associations meeting to purchase offset credits under the Yokohama Blue Carbon Offset System. Established by the city, the scheme offsets carbon emissions through funding initiatives linked to the ocean, such as planting seagrass that absorbs CO₂ and supports a sustainable harvest.

Under the scheme, five Euros from every delegate's registration fee was set aside to offset the carbon footprint of the event.

YOKOHAMA JAPAN'S FIRST PORT OF CALL

For more information on Yokohama and ideas on how you can elevate your next business event in the city, visit <https://business.yokohamajapan.com/mice/en/>, write to mice@ycvb.or.jp or call (81 45) 221 2111

Evolving spaces

An evolution is sweeping through Asia's convention centres as they race to capture online and hybrid events and win the confidence of event owners and organisers that are prioritising true partnership in their selection of venues. By [Karen Yue](#)

Convention centres with a permanent broadcasting facility were a rare find pre-Covid-19, but they are today an expanding breed.

In the face of cross-border travel and crowd restrictions, online/in-person hybrid events have become an ideal solution for organisations looking to maintain their communications, be it for knowledge exchange, customer engagement or business networking.

While the business events community continues to debate the longevity of online event elements and depth of application once face-to-face interactions are no longer restricted, convention centres across Asia-Pacific have lost no time in transitioning their infrastructure towards digitalised events.

The International Convention Centre (ICC) Sydney in Australia was among the first in the region to lead that charge, having launched its virtual event offerings in March 2020 when the pandemic was still in its early passage through the world. These offerings continued to evolve, and today the venue boasts ICC



Sydney Connect, which promises end-to-end virtual and hybrid event solutions.

Not far behind was Marina Bay Sands (MBS), Singapore, which opened the doors to its hybrid event broadcast studio at Sands Expo and Convention Centre in August 2020. The studio offers broadcast-quality live-streaming capabilities and hologram functionalities, and has space for a live studio audience. Clients can weave Virtual Reality, Augmented Reality and Extended Reality features into their events with the help of the venue's technical team.

Along the way, more venues have stepped in with hybrid event capabilities.

Most recently in May, Kuala Lumpur Convention Centre in Malaysia unveiled an interactive virtual tour capability, enabling clients to review the venue from the comfort of their seat, anywhere in the world. This joins its suite of on-line and hybrid event solutions that were launched in January 2021.

Its general manager, Alan Pryor, said: "Realising our dream of virtualisation has put us in the forefront of digital transformation of the business events industry, not only in Malaysia but regionally and globally."

Earlier in the year, Pryor expressed expectations that hybrid and virtual events will continue to gain traction through 2021 and "remain a primary choice", due to uncertainties in regional and international travel. He added that event organisers were now prioritising venues with hybrid events capabilities and that can offer expertise and guidance on event execution.

Indeed, Manish Chandak, president and CEO of Ungerboeck Software International, had predicted back in October 2020 that convention centres' technology know-how would facilitate high levels of collaboration with event organisers, and demonstrate their ability to move from large-scale physical gatherings to smaller scale online or hybrid events at short notice. Ultimately, such capabilities would feed customers' confidence to move forward with events plans even amid uncertainties.

Technology push

Audiovisual and broadcasting technology and solutions that were once applied mostly in television production have spilt rapidly into business events, noted systems specialists.

"Although video switching and production systems are more commonly associated with broadcast television, we have seen many convention centres augment their facilities. We have seen them

adopt video conferencing solutions and television-style studios with live streaming functions," noted Fintan McKiernan, CEO of Ideal Systems, Asia's leading systems integrator for broadcast, cloud and professional audiovisual equipment.

While live event professionals and operators have been using image and screen management systems with full screen presentation switchers to produce high quality visual experiences pre-pandemic, event organisers in general are now provided with more virtual options, such as virtual studios, observed Gan Ta Loong, managing director, Southeast Asia and vice president, immersive experience, with Barco APAC, a specialist in visualisation and collaboration technologies.

As event attendees gain greater exposure to online and hybrid events, they will come to expect even higher content and production quality. This puts pressure on event producers to deliver a more impressive event than the last, and on event venues to keep upgrading their audiovisual tools and event solutions to stay competitive.

In fact, the explosive adoption of audiovisual technologies and solutions in the business events space throughout the pandemic has driven Barco and Ideal to come together to expand their business in Asia-Pacific.

Established in mid-April, the partnership enables Barco to extend its reach and coverage of broadcasting markets in the region with Ideal's broadcast and collaboration offerings, while complementing Ideal's solutions with Barco's advanced visualisation technologies.

Both companies are working closely to develop innovative solutions with IP video technologies to craft new designs that will increase the functionality and usability of their solutions.

"Additionally, the Barco-Ideal partnership aims to address the massive uptick in the need for innovative corporate audiovisual solutions in hybrid workspaces and meeting rooms, while providing a more compelling customer experience," shared Gan.

When asked what modern venues should provide at the very least to support high-quality online and hybrid events, McKiernan said reliable laser projection and visual display screens are important to enable a supreme mobile viewing experience, while Gan believes that a holistic screen management system to capture various sources and content inputs without downtime should be a basic offering.

Gan said: "Audience engagement is one of the most persistent challenges



"A venue that pushes the boundaries with ideas and makes sure you get the most for your budget as a client is the one you want to work with."

Rod Vowell

Director of operations,
Huddle Agency, Australia

associated with running virtual productions in 2021. For example, one challenge in audience engagement is virtual burnout. Thus, it is critical for event organisers to reduce downtime as much as possible while livestreaming to ensure everything runs synchronously. Screen management devices also have the ability to serve as backup solutions for inputs, reducing the odds of black screens or empty backgrounds with automatic failover functions. Screen management devices should ensure close to zero disruptions, scalable and have flexibility capabilities to adapt to all event configurations, even virtual ones."

Going forward, McKiernan said convention centres, as well as business event producers, should keep an eye out for Network Device Interface (NDI) systems, which he described as a "hot technology in the pro-audiovisual video infrastructure space".

"NDI systems are easier to manage and require less specialised resources to set up and manage. NDI native switchers enable easier management and switching of Zoom and Teams calls in live events, such as keying them into mosa-

ics on a large LED on stage video walls to support interaction between remote participants and the on-stage moderator and panellists,” he explained.

Meanwhile, Gan recommended the Barco Infinipix NP100 for event organisers to get the most out of their LED content, as well as the cloud-based Barco Projector Management Suite for enhanced projection management, allowing users to diagnose and solve issues at a reduced cost, and ultimately reduce downtime during an event.

True partnership

However, convention centres cannot rely solely on a technological shift to prove their relevance in a digitised events world. According to industry leaders, venues must understand their role in bringing people together and to become true partners with event owners and organisers.

Ong Wee Min, vice president of conventions and exhibitions, MBS, explained that the search for new ways to transact business and knowledge through events have forced a change in the role of venues.

While venues were a “real estate solution” in the past, they must now provide a “platform for clients to drive their content to an audience much wider than before and in a bold and exhilarating way like never before”.

“The interactions we had with our cli-

ents (pre-pandemic) were passive. They tell us what they need, and we recommend this ballroom and that menu. In the current world, that has changed,” said Ong, adding that venues ought to establish a proactive and collaborative partnership with clients.

In preparing for Geo Connect Asia 2021, Singapore’s first large-scale hybrid tradeshow for the year, Montgomery Asia’s managing director, Chris McCuin, discovered new meaning to the term ‘partners’.

“In the past, people in our industry used to say, oh, we are all partners. That statement was really about having some form of relationship. Now, if it wasn’t truly a partnership, the event wouldn’t work,” remarked McCuin.

A true partnership for him was demonstrated through the way MBS’s audiovisual and technical experts stepped in to guide his team on online event requirements, as well as the assistance rendered by the venue’s events specialists in writing the tradeshow’s Safe Management Measures (SMM) plans.

“Without (the audiovisual and tech team), we would still have delivered the event but the journey would not have been as smooth. Similarly, we couldn’t have been able to get through the long list of SMMs without the MBS team. We would have gone in blind. Event organisers need the venue to write their SMM plan with them,” he said.

The need for a true partnership with

the venue operator is echoed by several other event owners and organisers.

Cheryl Tan, head of TTG Events at TTG Asia Media, explained that the “mammoth undertaking” that is the production of a “true hybrid event” requires venue partners today to provide “the necessary equipment and tools, staff know-how and networks, and a compelling inclusive package that would ease a lot of the guessing and ambiguity concerns organisers would have”.

She said: “Just managing the in-person aspect (pre-pandemic) was no mean feat that kept organisers, suppliers and partners running into long days and late nights in the lead-up to the event. Now throw in a concurrent virtual component that offers its own unique set of programming, logistical and technology challenges, and it is easy to see why true hybrid events can be exceptionally daunting. Venues that have managed to use last year’s down time to re-navigate their infrastructure, know-how and networks to support this would have a competitive edge.”

Venues that are able to offer a plug-and-play approach to enable the delivery of a hybrid event will get priority attention, Tan added.

Daruntham Termkietpaisarn, CEO and founder of Bambirtue Marketing Consultant in Thailand, which has been producing a slew of online and hybrid events since the pandemic hit, has new expectations of venue vendors.

She said venues should function as an enabler of such events, such as by providing suitable planning tools, high-speed Internet that supports broadcasting, access to necessary production equipment via a convenient in-house rental option, and pricing that reflects current needs.

For Rod Vowell, director of operations at Huddle Agency, Australia, the venue’s ability to function as a partner is now a top requirement. Coming in second is the venue’s ability to provide flexible backend capabilities to deliver an online or hybrid event.

Vowell added that “a great venue must also look to achieve the same end goals we’re targeting”.

“As an event producer, with so many virtual events being organised at the moment, it’s really important to be working with a venue that is forward thinking. The virtual events space is so competitive that providing the same experience as everyone else is just not good enough,” remarked Vowell.

– Additional reporting by
Adelaine Ng and Suchat Sritama.

“Audience engagement is one of the most persistent challenges associated with running virtual productions in 2021. For example, one challenge in audience engagement is virtual burnout. Thus, it is critical for event organisers to reduce downtime as much as possible while livestreaming to ensure everything runs synchronously.”

Gan Ta Loong

Managing director, South-east Asia and vice president, immersive experience, Barco APAC



Hybrid event facilitators



Coex Convention & Exhibition Center

Rolling with the pandemic punches in 2020, Coex Convention & Exhibition Center in Seoul, South Korea began a digital transformation of its facilities and services to enable business continuation as the events world shifted to hybrid and online gatherings.

In November 2020, Coex joined hands with NexTech AR Solutions, a specialist in virtual and augmented reality (AR) experience technologies and services, to enhance event experiences for its clients that are venturing into online and hybrid event formats.

The partnership saw NexTech making its virtual event platform available to events booked at Coex, granting organisers access to some best-in-class technologies such as AR for 3D product modelling, human holograms and enterprise scale streaming services.

The venue also brought onboard of the best streaming companies in the country to offer clients an in-house webcasting and event streaming service, labelled as COEX LIVE.

In yet another partnership forged to the benefit of clients, Coex teamed up with Frame Rental System to make the Spanish AV DROP system available to clients looking to create stunning stage and conference backdrops, event photo walls, branded virtual studios, and more.

These initiatives are backed by 10G high-speed Internet service throughout the venue's collection of exhibition halls and meeting rooms, as well as a team of Digital Event Strategists-certified staff. The Digital Event Strategists (DES) certification is designed by the Professional Convention Management Association to help planners effectively plan, produce and measure the results of the live stream and digital engagement events.

"Coex is currently the venue with the most number of DES-certified employees in South Korea. We can offer a dedicated DES-certified project manager for all hybrid conference and convention bookings to not only assist with the integration of the latest digital event technology, but also steer (clients) through monetising their virtual events and reaching wider audiences with tailored customer experiences," said Amy Cha, the venue's marketing team representative.

These efforts are paying off, as Coex's new abilities are drawing the interest of many event owners and planners.

According to Cha, Coex has been able to maintain a busy calendar of events in a challenging year. The 19th International Anti-Corruption Conference (IACC) was hosted virtually in December at Coex, with its opening ceremony, plenary sessions and other programmes produced on-site. It was a notable event for the country, as it was the first IACC to be hosted by the South Korean government.

Throughout the year and into 2021, Coex went on to welcome various small seminars and large conferences, such as the Korea FoodTech Conference 2020, Korea Institute of Registered Architects Training Session 2020, EU Commerce Policy Seminar 2021, and Korea Society for Environmental Analysis Conference 2021.

Recognising a sustainable interest in hybrid and online events, Coex is preparing to launch its own broadcast studio this September, revealed Cha. The state-of-the-art facility is expected to attract "a large number of clients" who will utilise Coex for offline filming and event streaming.

– Karen Yue

Akasaka Intercity Conference Center

For Akasaka Intercity Conference Center, pivoting towards hosting online and hybrid events has proved a way to help the bottom line amid Japan's ongoing restrictions related to international and domestic travel as well as event capacity and social distancing.

The Tokyo facility, which comprises an amphitheatre, a boardroom and small- and medium-sized rooms spilt over two floors, has attracted new clients and helped stem revenue loss primarily via its new technology offering and expert staff.

In response to a decline in in-person events and demand for online and hybrid events, the venue set up a dedicated webinar support team in October 2020. The team supports the hosting of online events, such as internal company meetings or webinars, and train conference coordinators via study sessions in how to run webinars and troubleshoot any problems that might occur.

Venue spokesperson Tina Tsubota said staff have been "studying about equipment and streaming" to adapt to what is now the "new standard" offering in event hosting. The webinar support team members also go on to teach their colleagues how to manage hybrid and virtual meetings.



Meanwhile, Akasaka Intercity Conference Center has launched two new technology plans. One is light, featuring use of a 15-inch display, video camera, video/audio switcher and private Internet line (NURO), all of which clients operate themselves. The other is a full-support streaming plan that includes all the required equipment as well as dedicated operators. Video streaming service partners or subcontractors are available as additional services.

While Tsubota said that the venue has hosted "many hybrid and virtual seminars every month" since the launch of its technology team and packages, she was unable to share the names of any events or clients.

– Kathryn Wortley



A natural attraction

Travel confidence is returning with the rollout of vaccines and reopened state borders. With with most international borders shut, northern Queensland events stakeholders are realising that their natural surrounds are a big draw for local corporate groups. By [Adelaine Ng](#)

Things are looking very good at the Sheraton Mirage Port Douglas Resort in northern Queensland, never mind that Australia's international borders are still closed. The phones have been ringing off the hook with prospects, and more staff are being hired to keep up with enquiries for corporate event bookings.

Even more remarkable is that booking numbers are better than pre-Covid, perhaps due to a combination of pent-up demand and Australia's ban on overseas travel, forcing local companies to book domestically for their events.

"We're seeing unprecedented demand for our property from the domestic corporate group bookings market," said Nathan Gadd, the resort's director of sales and marketing,

"Especially throughout February and March, we

▲ Sheraton Mirage Port Douglas Resort is seeing "unprecedented demand", primarily due to its picturesque location

began running at occupancies that we normally wouldn't have seen pre-Covid and we can't find enough staff in our regional areas to keep up with demand. We're out there waving our arms for anyone in Australia that would love to come up for a change and work with us in one of the best resorts in the country," he continued.

Signs of a healthy recovery seem to be echoing elsewhere in northern Queensland, which offers a more nature-based experience that includes the Great Barrier Reef and some of the world's oldest rainforests.

"It's almost like somebody switched a light on," said Rosie Douglas, general manager of partnerships and events at Tourism Tropical North Queensland.

"With Covid vaccines rolling out and the fact that we're managing hotspots a lot better, everyone wants to get out and places like Cairns are doing extremely

well. Our enquiries are going through the roof and with very short lead times from two to six months, which is starting to become a bit challenging,” she mused.

A key part of northern Queensland’s appeal is also its relative isolation with low population numbers and no Covid cases since March last year. It’s also a great destination in Australia’s winter months, where temperatures peak in the mid-20 degrees. With an abundance of palm trees, interstate visitors can almost fool themselves into thinking they were in Bali or Fiji, especially at a resort-like the Sheraton which features two hectares of lagoon pools on its sprawling 200-hectare property.

Harmonising with this offering, Business Events Cairns and Great Barrier Reef’s recent re-branding for its educational campaign is working to give business tourists exactly what they need as confidence returns in the industry.

“Our new branding with the BE Immersed programme is ‘Work Great, Leave Greater’,” said Douglas. “The connections that people make through conferences are really strong. By coming here, collaborating and getting away from the rat race of your own environment, you’ve got the space to be able to clear your mind and think creatively, really building on the natural assets of the destination.”

Adding to the momentum is the re-opening of Cairns Convention Centre. After being closed since April 2020 for a full renovation of its arena and auditorium, the venue welcomed its first event of the year on May 12, the Australian Banana Industry Conference.

A second phase of the A\$176 million (US\$136 million) reconstruction is now underway to provide more than 10,000m² of meeting and exhibition space.

Over in the Gold Coast, large-scale business events are also returning, with two domestic conventions this month at 2,500 and 4,000 delegates attending respectively, and the future pipeline is “looking solid”.

“The Destination Gold Coast team (is) continuing to work with international corporates and associations to secure future business events,” shared Destination Gold Coast’s CEO Patricia O’Callaghan.

“We recently secured the World Federation of Chiropractic Biennial Congress, expected to attract up to 1,000 delegates in March 2023. This highlights the importance of continued engagement internationally as we move more actively into recovery,” she said.



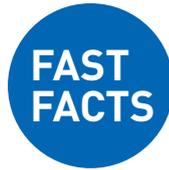
“With Covid vaccines rolling out and the fact that we’re managing hotspots a lot better, everyone wants to get out and places like Cairns are doing extremely well.”

Rosie Douglas

General manager of partnerships and events, Tourism Tropical North Queensland



▲ A rendering of the plenary hall at the upgraded Cairns Convention Centre



30,000

The number of attendees at a truck show at Brisbane Convention & Exhibition Centre in May 2021 – the largest indoor event held in Australia in the past 15 months

43,000m²

The total amount of meeting space at Cairns Convention Centre when the second phase of renovation works is completed in 2022

350

The minimum number of delegates required to qualify for the Queensland government’s new National Business Events Program to help cover event costs. Terms include a minimum two-day stay

Back in Cairns, Douglas is also preparing for the eventual return of international clients. “We’ve just spent about five hours looking at our business plans for next year,” she told *TTGmice*. “Obviously New Zealand will be coming back but that’s a fairly small market.”

“We believe the Asian markets may open in 2Q2022 and we are very focused on that. We are doing some work behind the scenes with airlines about direct services, (because) for events I think the biggest challenge is going to be aviation capacity. Japan will probably be our first real conversation, followed potentially by South Korea,” she added.

Staying the course

There is a setback in Singapore's journey towards business events recovery due to a new wave of infections, but her tourism board is pressing on with efforts to bring the industry back to life through digital transformation and pilot B2B hybrid events. By [Rachel AJ Lee](#)

For the past year or so, Singapore was perched on the brink of business events recovery, with the successful staging of several large-scale hybrid events and the launch of the Connect@Singapore controlled inbound and meetings initiative.

Improved pandemic controls allowed community restrictions to be cautiously lifted, individuals to return to their workplaces, business meetings to be conducted under Safe Management Measures (SMMs), and new event wins to be celebrated, such as the inaugural Global Esports Games scheduled for December 2021.

However, at press time in late-May, Singapore stepped back into a partial lockdown due to a spike in community cases, including unlinked infections. The current Phase 2: Heightened Alert restrictions differ from last year's tough lockdown, as business events are still allowed to proceed but with capacity reduced to 100. Pre-event testing is also compulsory for meetings with more than 50 people.

The precarious state led several high profile inter-

▼ Singapore is prioritising the safety and well-being of all events stakeholders as well as the local community when a B2B event is held; Singapore's Central Business District pictured

national meetings to either cancel or postpone their upcoming plans in Singapore. These impacted events include the World Economic Forum and the Shangri-La Dialogue, both of which have been cancelled; and the 7th Architecture & Building Services 2021, which has been moved from June to November.

Large-scale hybrid events on trial

Despite the setback, Singapore Tourism Board (STB) is persisting with phased reopening of the country's business events industry.

Edward Koh, STB's executive director, conventions, meetings & incentive travel, said the "calibrated manner" of reopening will "prevent new clusters from forming and reduce transmission risk".

The careful stance taken by STB includes "rigorous protocols and innovative solutions for the end-to-end visitor journey", with measures constantly reviewed and enhanced through various pilot events, such as TravelRevive in 2020 and Geo Connect Asia 2021. Findings and data from these events are helping STB





“We remain committed to our recovery efforts, as well as building capabilities for the future. This is to ensure that Singapore can emerge stronger from the crisis as a top destination when international travel resumes.”

Edward Koh

Executive director, conventions, meetings & incentive travel, Singapore Tourism Board

to refine SMMs and best practices for future events.

For example, meeting pods, which enabled one-to-one meetings between exhibitors, representatives and attendees during TravelRevive in November 2020, were well-received. Larger pods were then piloted at Geo Connect Asia 2021. These were double in size to facilitate more productive discussions among four people, with two representatives from each company.

He pointed out that the resumption of more business events depends on the success of the pilot events, and the ability and readiness of event owners and organisers to apply SMMs effectively. These SMMs have to span an attendee’s entire journey, before, during and after the event.

“We will also continue to actively work with stakeholders and the Singapore Association of Convention and Exhibition Organisers and Suppliers, to develop robust SMMs and best practices to guide the industry and support a successful recovery,” said Koh.

Helping hands

Besides laying the groundwork for the safe resumption of business events, STB also facilitates events take-off with grants through the Business Events in Singapore scheme and extra support services through the Singapore MICE Advantage Programme.

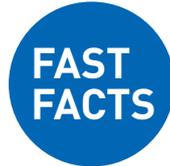
While Koh said tourism revenue will inevitably shrink this year, the “fundamentals that make Singapore a key MICE hub and attractive location for business and leisure events remain unchanged”. This will put Singapore in a “good position” to emerge stronger after the pandemic ends.

Another positive step is the national vaccination programme, where the government’s target is to vaccinate the local population by end-2021.

Meanwhile, Koh pointed out that digital transformation is extremely crucial for the industry, and that includes hybrid events that have become the norm.

To support businesses in their digital journey, STB’s Business Improvement Fund will help business event owners pivot, upskill and build up technology capabilities. The fund encourages technology innovation and adoption, as well as the redesign of business model and processes in the tourism sector to improve productivity and competitiveness.

William Lim, director of operations, MICE Depot, told *TTGmice* that his company has benefitted from the Business Improvement Fund. “It accelerated our digital technology adoption and development of our digital solutions. It supported the development of immersive digital experiences for our customers. We



85

Since the announcement of STB’s Safe Business Events Framework in July 2020, Singapore has piloted about 85 business events, hosting close to 13,500 attendees

34,000

Pre-Covid-19, the business events sector supported more than 34,000 direct and indirect jobs with a value-add of S\$3.8 billion (US\$2.9 billion), or 0.8 per cent of Singapore’s GDP

1,400

As of April 2021, STB has issued more than 1,400 SG Clean Quality Mark certificates to tourism-related premises, including event venues

will continue to embrace change and stay flexible to evolve quickly in this rapidly changing environment and will continue to adopt new technologies to address our customers and attendees’ needs,” detailed Lim.

However, STB’s focus on the digitalisation of the business events industry has met with disapproval from Kenny Yong, founder and group CEO of Fireworks Trade Media.

Yong pointed out that not every event organiser benefits from digitalisation and the shift to hybrid online/in-person events.

“Every bonafide organiser knows that you can’t monetise digital expos as much as you can from a physical event,” Yong remarked.

“I think STB could do more to map out ways to allow more attendees (at in-person events) and (have) more certainty in rules and regulations pertaining to shows. We are facing massive challenges (in informing) our exhibitors that footfalls would be limited in compliance with local laws and (that we are) not certain when shows could be staged. (This is) detrimental to shows in 2020 and 2021.”



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Batiste Pilet

The new director for Switzerland Tourism South-east Asia hails from China, where he last led the organisation's thrust into Greater China. He talks to [Karen Yue](#) about his next new challenge

Are there any observations of the Chinese long-haul traveller that will come in handy when developing South-east Asian arrivals for Switzerland?

One important take-away is that, in an ever-changing environment, you have to embrace change and adapt for survival. China approved outbound travel to Switzerland in 2004, and in 2019 it became our third top foreign source market. To tap this potential, our marketing strategy has constantly evolved – channels have gone digital and media have gone social. Along the way, the travel trade has consolidated and, most importantly, our customers have changed from group to individual travellers and their destination pursuits have shifted from attraction discovery to deep experiences.

Since entering South-east Asia in 2012, the number of overnights has doubled. The region is now Switzerland's top 10 foreign source markets.

Switzerland is now a well-established destination. To pursue growth, we have to diversify our customers by identifying high-potential niche segments for which Switzerland has a unique proposition.

Switzerland has always been considered to be a friendly destination for the Chinese. How does Switzerland fare in terms of friendliness for South-east Asian travellers, which are so diverse in demographics?

The legendary Swiss hospitality was, since the

beginning of modern tourism, a decisive factor for choosing Switzerland as a travel destination. Guests want to feel heartily welcomed. Our customers want to see the beautiful sights and have an immersive experience with the culture and people of the country they visit.

Such soft factors seem to be especially important for guests from South-east Asia. In a recent study, many guests choose “warm-hearted people”, “family-friendliness” and “pleasant atmosphere” as the main reason to travel to Switzerland.

Travel confidence is improving on the back of a global vaccine roll-out. How does this impact Switzerland Tourism's destination marketing for long-haul Asian markets?

Incentive travel planners will promote destinations that are clean and safe. This means Switzerland needs to showcase our proven track record of having successful tourism safety concepts, and to communicate that the population is vaccinated and travel in Switzerland is safe and possible again.

We will showcase this through familiarisation trips, several workshops in South-east Asia hosted together with the embassies, promotions with the media, and communications with corporate clients and travel planners.

Is Switzerland Tourism stepping up on South-east Asian MICE trade engagements this year to prepare them for a resumption in long-haul travel and events?

Yes, we have maintained several activities to keep MICE trade partners informed and ready for the time when travel is possible again. We have conducted several hybrid events to showcase Switzerland and they have resulted in additional business in our pipeline.

For 2H2021, we have prepared a whole bouquet of activities for incentive planners, but we will not reveal too much just yet.

For South-east Asian incentive planners looking for something fresh in Switzerland, what top three ideas would you recommend?

Well, that depends on the season. Incentive planners can experience nature differently in Switzerland throughout the year.

In Spring or Summer, I would recommend that groups take our newly renovated steamboat, *Stadt Luzern*, down lake Lucerne and enjoy visions of cherry blossoms.

Autumn is the best time to appreciate the grape harvest in the vineyard terraces of UNESCO World Heritage Centre, Lavaux.

Come Winter, make a beeline for the Jungfrau region for a ski experience. Incentive winners can also touch the snow at the Top of Europe, which the Jungfrauoch railway station is known, as it sits at 3,454m above sea level and is the highest point in the continent.



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Appointments



Dave Baswal



Erwann Mahe



Joanna Flint



Kimberley Roberts-Salee



Kimberley Wood

Dave Baswal

The Ovolo Group has expanded Dave Baswal's role to managing director ANZ. Previously, Baswal has been leading the Australian arm of the business since 2016. He has over two decades of hospitality finance and real estate management experience under his belt.

Erwann Mahe

Best Western Hotels & Resorts has appointed Erwann Mahe as managing director – Asia, taking over from Olivier Berrivin. Mahe's prior roles range from managing large-scale Accor hotels to holding executive-level positions, including chief operations officer at Red Planet Hotels and executive vice president of Hotel Investment at The Erawan Group.

Joanna Flint

Mandarin Oriental Hotel Group has appointed Joanna Flint to the newly-created role of chief commercial officer. She will oversee the development and execution of the group's commercial strategy, and is responsible for all aspects of Mandarin Oriental's customer experience.

Kimberley Roberts-Salee

Canberra Convention Bureau has appointed Kimberley Roberts-Salee as head of marketing. In this new role, she will guide her team to position Canberra as a world-class conferencing and events destination. Roberts-Salee possesses over 10 years of experience in the Australian tourism and business events industry.

Kimberley Wood

Canberra Convention Bureau has appointed Kimberley Wood as head of sales. With over 20 years of experience in the business events sector, Wood's career spans multiple sales roles at Sydney Convention and Exhibition Centre, including business development manager – international.

Leslie Chiyoma

Grand Park Oturu has welcomed Leslie Chiyoma as general manager of the hotel. He has more than 20 years of hospitality experience, having held leadership appointments with luxury hotel chains and select service hotels in Japan, Asia-Pacific, Middle East, and Africa.

Liz Ortiguera

The Pacific Asia Travel Association has appointed Liz Ortiguera as its next CEO, succeeding Mario Hardy. Ortiguera is a senior executive with over 25 years of global experience and expertise in general management, marketing, business development, and partner network management.

Michael Foster

Dorsett Hospitality International has appointed Michael Foster as the general manager for Dorsett Gold Coast – the group's debut hotel in Australia, set to open in 4Q2021. Foster has over 15 years of hospitality and management experience, including pre-opening, overall hotel operations, and sales and marketing.

Michelle McKinney Frymire

CWT has appointed Michelle McKinney Frymire as CEO. She joined CWT in 2019 and has over 20 years of travel industry experience. Previous roles include CFO at Starwood Vacation Ownership and Delta Technology (a division of Delta Airlines), as well as Continental Airlines and Delta Air Lines.

Wayne Duberly

Centara Hotels & Resorts has appointed Wayne Duberly as area general manager of Centara Grand Mirage Beach Resort Pattaya, and Centara Sonrisa Residences & Suites Sriracha. The British national started his career with Centara Hotels & Resorts in 2011 as general manager of the Centara Anda Dhevi Resort & Spa Krabi.



Leslie Chiyoma



Liz Ortiguera



Michael Foster



Michelle McKinney Frymire



Wayne Duberly