

JANUARY-FEBRUARY 2022

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Stay close, stay safe

Companies are eager to return to exciting overseas events and face-to-face engagements, but traveller safety and fluid travel restrictions are keeping domestic programmes and hybrid events in demand



Hello 2022, what will you bring?



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TTG Travel Trade Publishing is a business group of TTG Asia Media

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Our exit from 2021 came with the promise by more governments to live with Covid. That, along with rising global vaccination rates, improved scientific understanding of the virus and leadership assurance that the harsh lockdowns implemented in 2020 and 2021 are a thing of the past, has allowed businesses to harbour more hopes about recovery in the new year. My last editor's note in *TTGmice* expressed much optimism.

The decision to live with Covid is practical and the only way forward for the world because it is unnatural to be gripped by fear for prolonged periods and to be forever socially isolated, especially when many more variants are to be expected. However, the thing about this statement, living with Covid, is that it can mislead one into thinking that life would return to pre-pandemic state, where there is ease and convenience in all aspects of our usual activities, including travel and event attendance. Low national infection incidents and a high vaccinated population function as a double-edged sword, feeding both complacency and that disbelief.

Life will never be the same again. Business for our industry, which is centred on people and bringing people together safely and fruitfully, will also never be the same again.

And yet, living with Covid should not be an endless chain of disruption, confusion, complexity and hopelessness, as some of the Omicron measures taken by anxious governments have made people feel. For instance, if the local population is almost fully double-vaccinated and boosted, should capacity limits still apply, should restricted interaction at public and private events still be required, should costly quarantines upon arrival still be necessary, and would sudden curfews still make sense?

A recent commentary by *Financial Times'* Martin Sandbu suggested the need for "predictable emergency responses", not knee-jerk reactions by anxious governments and leaders, so that people are prepared to shift from normality "to a crisis regime at the flick of a switch, when contagion intensifies".

Sandbu likened the ideal Covid response to "fire and safety drills, military war games, police playbooks for anti-terrorism operations".

If governments could agree on a similar – single would be too hopeful – Covid emergency response that is built on science and practicality, people could truly live with Covid. With more certainty and less fluid travel restrictions, people and organisations would be more willing to resume their travel and event plans, and put our industry on the proper track to recovery.

CONTENTS



To our readers

2 Hello 2022, what will you bring?

Connect

4 What you missed online

Cover story: Events appetite

8 Stay close, stay safe

Report

12 The future of experiential events

Sector spotlight

14 Corporate travel: Into the unknown

15 Exhibitions: A new year of growth potential

16 Incentive travel: Incentive cravings

17 Association meetings: Positive turns ahead

19 Air travel: A sustainable take-off



Intelligence

20 Yearning for a business travel restart

21 Asia has longer to wait for returning US incentives

Destination: Japan

22 All things bright and green

Destination: Malaysia

24 Looking to a new dawn

Destination: Australia

26 Sydney's resolute presence





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TOP 5 HEADLINES THIS MONTH



▲ From left: Singapore has imposed a stop-sale order on all new ticket for Vaccinated Travel Lane flights and buses; Speakers at BE@Penang 2021 discuss the future of Malaysia's MICE recovery

Philippines to implement a MICE Ambassadors Programme

The Tourism Promotions Board Philippines is putting together a MICE Ambassadors Programme, tapping Filipino association executives as frontrunners when it comes to securing and bidding for international events.

Hybrid events take centrestage in Malaysia's MICE recovery: industry leaders
As Malaysia's borders remain closed to overseas event delegates and venues continue to operate at only half their capacity due to Covid-safe measures, industry players in the country believe that hybrid events will continue to dominate the format of business activities taking place in the new year.

Business Events Perth receives A\$15 million injection

The Western Australian (WA) government has unveiled a new Reconnect WA funding package worth A\$185 million (US\$132 million), targeted at attracting tourists, skilled workers, international students

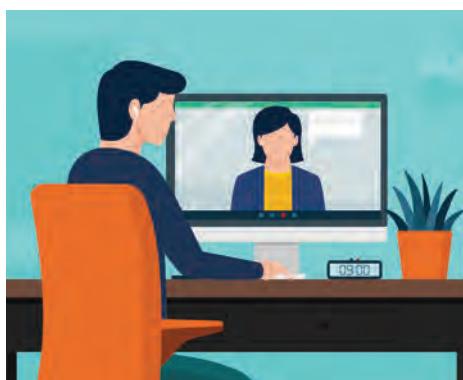
Asia further tightens travel restrictions as Omicron continues global spread

The rapid spread of Omicron infections across the world has forced Asian governments this week to reinstate even tougher border measures, with Thailand pausing her quarantine-free allowance for travellers and Singapore freezing new ticket sales for Vaccinated Travel Lane flights and buses.

Indonesia MICE stakeholders predict a good 2022

Industry leaders who spoke at the Indonesia MICE Outlook 2022 in December in Bali have expressed optimism in the country's business events future, with confidence stemming from a schedule of international events as well as strong domestic appetite for local meetings.

PERSPECTIVES



Do people still want virtual conferences after Covid-19?

Roy Ying, senior lecturer marketing department, at Hang Seng University of Hong Kong, shares his thoughts on why virtual conferences would have risen in popularity even without Covid-19, and what the industry needs to evolve to cater to this format of business events

Reimagining the future of events

Vaibhav Jain, CEO and founder of Hubilo, addresses the unique aspects of the events scene in Asia-Pacific and its shift

Q&A



and events. Out of the A\$185 million, the State's official convention bureau, Business Events Perth, will receive A\$15 million to attract business events to the state to support its business events, hotel, and hospitality industry.



▲ The recovery of Western Australia's visitor economy will have a flow-on effect to a broader range of businesses; Perth pictured



towards virtual and hybrid events, as well as what's next for the industry as countries open up

▼ Tourism Australia's executive general manager commercial & business events Australia, Robin Mack, gives the lowdown on Australia's domestic event situation, its fervent preparation in welcoming international business events when the gates open, and how it plans to stand out as a strong destination for business events on the global stage

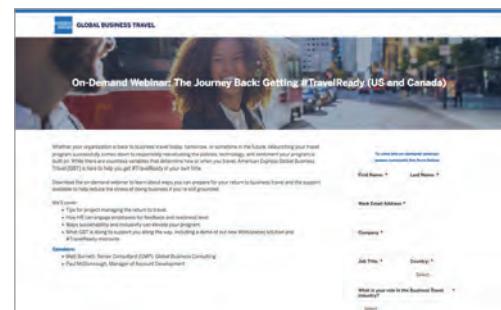


▲ Chiruit Isarangkun Na Ayuthaya, president of Thailand Convention and Exhibition Bureau, sheds light on how the organisation has been strengthening the foundations of the Thai business events industry in preparation for recovery

WEBINARS

► American Express GBT

American Express GBT has released an on-demand webinar, The Journey Back: Getting #TravelReady, dedicated to helping organisations relaunch their travel programme successfully by responsibly reevaluating the policies, technology, and sentiment the programme is built on. explorer.amexglobalbusinesstravel.com/Journey-Back-Getting-Travel-Ready-Americas.html



► SAP Concur and FCM Travel

During this Navigating the Return to Corporate Travel with Endemic Covid-19 webinar, attendees will be able to learn about the importance of pre-travel approval and travel insurances, as well as how companies can help travellers keep up with dynamic changes on travel schedules and compliance.

This is the first of a two-part travel webinar series. The second webinar on Embracing Duty of Care and Travel Risk Management with endemic Covid-19 will run in January 2022. go.concur.com/23285-sg-navigating-the-return-to-corporate-travel-with-endemiccovid-19-1p.html?pid=email&cid=edm23285



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Breathing sustainability

Tokyo's new sustainability offerings satisfy the eco- and business-conscious

Tokyo's portfolio of sustainable venues and activities has seen a recent boost, with expanded options for holding high-quality events while considering the environment. Here is a snapshot of what is on offer.

At Tokyo Portcity Takeshiba, which opened in September 2020 in the Takeshiba area, near Haneda Airport and Tokyo Station, MICE planners can use CO₂ Zero MICE, a state-of-the-art programme that calculates and offsets the cost of the electricity that an event would normally use. Organisers can then replace electricity with renewable energy, thus

Preserving tradition in Fukushima



Organisers keen to show the value of preserving local traditions first-hand after a conference in Tokyo can opt for Fukushima as an excursion. Only about 90 minutes from the capital by bullet train and teeming in cultural history, the prefecture is an ideal place to uncover how local people have

The Great East Japan Earthquake and Nuclear Disaster Memorial Museum

supporting their sustainability agenda.

Takeshiba Urban Biodiversity Center's fascinating eight sceneries – sky, bees, rice paddies, vegetable gardens, fragrance, water, islands, and rain – provide participants with a place to learn about, enjoy, and even experience nature, depending on the season, according to the spokesperson.

This immersion in the natural world can continue at the nearby WATERS takeshiba, where the tidal flats of Tokyo Bay are being rejuvenated. Participants can take boat cruises to explore the shoreline and learn about this unique ecosystem as part of an excursion or simply take a break or stroll along the waterfront, which is full of plant, insect and underwater life.

In the heart of the capital, the Marunouchi district is offering great examples of the best sustainability practices for business events. The area's flagship meeting venue, Tokyo International Forum (TIF), was constructed using sustainable methods and strives for more responsible operations. On-site staff commented that MICE planners highly appreciate the venue's sustainable efforts, including reducing single-use materials, and placing real-time data on carbon dioxide reduction, solar power generation and solar heat collection of the energy management system on the venue's website. TIF continuously educates its staff and successfully meet MICE organisers' requests regarding sustainability.

Nearby, the Ecozzeria Association has introduced initiatives to create a sustainable environment, providing uniquely green and biodiverse



Tokyo International Forum (left) has solar panels to generate renewable energy for electricity and hot water; Tokyo Big Sight (right) uses greenery to insulate the buildings, creating a pleasant atmosphere while reducing the heat island effect

spaces for those visiting the area. The Imperial Hotel, a leading MICE facility in Marunouchi, also has an in-depth approach to sustainability, with efforts to reduce food loss and educate their staff on environmentally friendly practices.

Tokyo Big Sight formulated a new Corporate Social Responsibility policy in 2020 and has adopted greener operations. Its new South Exhibition Halls are highly sustainable and comprise extensive greening on the walls and rooftops, contributing to the 40,000m² of total green space that provides insulation and reduces the heat island phenomenon.

Tokyo's sustainable approach also extends to experiences and activities. Organisers can choose from a host of exciting indoor and outdoor Sustainable Development Goals options including workshops making decorative items using scraps of used kimono fabric that ensures sustainable consumption and kayaking down the Old Nakagawa River towards TOKYO SKYTREE, a part of the city that has been transformed in recent years thanks to green efforts by local people.

After attending a business event in Tokyo, participants can join one of



Kayak down the Old Nakagawa River

these experiences to see first-hand how small changes by individuals can contribute to large-scale momentum in sustainability.

With affordable and accessible public transport, more integrated green spaces, environmentally conscious development, and a greater number of sustainable venues, Tokyo is ideal for organisers seeking a sustainable MICE destination.

TCVB Tokyo Convention & Visitors Bureau

To find out how Tokyo can bring value to your next business event, visit businesseventstokyo.org

endeavoured to preserve their culture.

Tour or enjoy a tasting at one of about 50 sake breweries, some of which have been operating for more than 300 years, or visit the craftspeople of Obori Soma Ware, a traditional handicraft that dates back to 1690. Participants interested in hands-on activities can try Kinomoto lacquerware, another craft with centuries of history.

No visit to Fukushima would be complete without taking a moment at the Great East Japan Earthquake and Nuclear Disaster Memorial Museum, which memorialises the triple disaster of 2011 and its longer-term impact.

Ukedo Elementary School, whose students and teachers all fled to safety before it was inundated by the tsunami, was opened in October 2021 as a museum and reminder of the importance of disaster awareness and evacuation safety.

Both sites offer key learnings about what happened at that time and the ongoing recovery and revitalisation efforts. The Fukushima Innovation Coast Framework is one such national project to build new industrial bases via company tours, exhibitions and business exchange events.

With its rich history, local cultural



Appreciate heritage Kinomoto lacquerware craft in Kitakata City

traditions and memorial sites providing a unique insight into the impact and response of the 2011 earthquake, Fukushima will be a valuable addition to any business event in Tokyo.



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Stay close, stay safe

Companies are eager to return to exciting overseas events and face-to-face engagements, but traveller safety and fluid travel restrictions are keeping domestic programmes and hybrid events in demand. By TTGmice reporters

Australia

Australia's event planners are returning to international meetings with some anxiety, having seen border rules at home change on the fly.

This is despite the Australian government opening travel lanes with Singapore, Japan and South Korea recently, with more travel bubble arrangements planned for 2022.

Some of Australia's most prominent event planners said they would first like to see a number of things happen domestically before they could become confident about doing events abroad.

"I think we've got a little way to go yet... just to show that normal business can be undertaken safely and effectively before they take that commercial risk of taking people offshore," said Kate Smith, managing director at PCO Waldron Smith Management, and immediate past chair of Meetings & Events Australia.

"The first step is ensuring we can travel around nationally, easily and effectively to attend business events without any great risk. Then I think we'll start to look at outbound business. That confidence piece is really crucial across the board and the ability to bring people

back together in any situation is really important," continued Smith.

Australia's domestic borders have been a case of sliding doors, opening and closing to selected states depending on the perceived risk of visitors bringing the Covid-19 virus and its variants into their state.

Of all the states, Western Australia has the strictest border controls and has announced that the earliest date it would welcome visitors would be in February 2022, causing frustration among event planners.

"I think people are ready to travel overseas," opined Renee Bennett, managing director of Encanta and a board director at Business Events Perth.

"But I believe domestic events will be king for a while, and I personally feel that Western Australia is going to struggle with that because the majority of the population is on the east coast. We've lost so much because of uncertainties, with so many events being cancelled or postponed for 2022 because the shutdowns happen very swiftly. That has made it challenging for any of our clients," she added.

Bennett also said convention bureaus could provide more advocacy around protecting and underwriting events that are on the books at the moment.

"By just cancelling an event 48 hours beforehand when so much has been outlaid (financially), it just makes it not feasible for many to instil that confidence. We've got people whose livelihoods and homes are on their line when they invest in events and therefore cancelling an event where we have to refund people and absorb incurred costs isn't good enough," lamented Bennett.

Bennett applauded New South Wales, which has offered to underwrite events over the summer period but underscored that this was needed as a national scheme for an industry that contributes A\$36 billion (US\$26 million) to the economy.

On a positive note, Smith said despite the many challenges, everything is heading in the right direction, and confidence about commercial risks for events is growing quickly. – **Adelaine Ng**

India

A rebound in business events in 2021 has sparked expectations for a stronger year come 2022, although industry stakeholders predict that domestic gatherings will remain dominant.

S D Nandakumar, president & country head – B2B at SOTC Travel, noted that while corporates are enquiring on inter-

national travel, ongoing Covid situation and restrictions will prompt events to stay on home ground.

Subhash Goyal, chairman of STIC Travel & Air Charter Group, agrees and explains that more international scheduled flights need to resume for international travel and events to return.

Despite the prevailing sense of caution, some overseas business events have occurred.

SOTC Travel delivered two “mega groups” to Dubai recently. More than 600 attendees were involved, and the programme featured a cricket tournament and the Expo 2020.

The company also organised a corporate gathering in the Maldives, and Nandakumar expects demand for business events in Switzerland to soar in 2022.

Thomas Cook India is attending to strong interest in overseas events from Indian companies, with destinations such as Dubai, Russia, South Africa, Switzerland and the Czech Republic all earmarked by clients for 2022.

“Outbound demand will grow significantly in 2022, considering that vaccination rates are improving in India and overseas, creating a sense of confidence among corporate event groups,” opined Naveen Manchanda, president, Indian Association of Travel & Tourism Experts.

Goyal echoed the optimism, saying that “things will start coming back to normal” in 2022, and that pre-Covid outbound MICE demand will return by 2023.

Indian PCOs applauded several active tourism boards, such as those in Singapore, South Africa and Dubai, that have continued to engage them during the travel freeze, keeping them updated on the various business events offerings in their destinations.

Going forward, Nandakumar said CVBs and MICE vendors would need to continue to assure the marketplace of hygiene and safety.

“(Valuable information) includes the implementation of health, safety and sanitisation protocols; entry/exit requirements; and optimal group sizes,” remarked Nandakumar, adding that the provision of contactless services and flexible booking options were just as important for rebuilding travel confidence.

– Rohit Kaul

Indonesia

Interest in conducting overseas business events is growing among local companies but actual conversion in 2022 will depend on the pandemic situation, government restrictions, visa and airline policies as well as company budgets.

According to Indonesian event organisers, the government’s 10-day quarantine requirement presents the steepest obstacle.

Vidya Hermanto, chief experience officer of Panorama, said: “When the government reduced the quarantine period from eight to three days, we had incentive groups travelling to Switzerland and Turkey. When it was increased to seven days and then to 10, a number of clients decided to postpone their plans.”

Yento Chen, CEO of Destination Tour, said lengthy quarantines would make an incentive programme impractical.

“A trip to Europe usually takes up to 14 days,” Chen explained. “When (the return quarantine) is for 10 days, participants will have to be out of office for almost a month.”

Fluid government regulations are not the only issue, according to Agustinus Pake Seko, president director of Bayu Buana Travel Services. Technology com-

panies in Indonesia that have replaced business travel with virtual meetings will continue to meet online, while multinational companies in Indonesia are still putting their overseas trips on hold.

On the bright side, he expects NGOs that have postponed their trips over the last two years to finally resume plans in 2022 – barring yet another wave of infections.

For now, corporate incentive programmes are changing as travel continues to face restrictions. Agustinus said clients have been gifting their staff Bayu Buana membership cards, which allows them to choose their individual reward trips at their own pace.

He expects small incentive group travel to also trend strongly in 2022, evidenced by recent client events for 15 to 30 top achievers at “exotic places” such as Amanwana, Nihi Sumba and Lelewatu Resort Sumba.

Budget constraints will also hamper outbound events recovery, warned Pauline Suharno, president director of Elok Tour and chairman of the Indonesian Travel Agents Association.

“Many companies are facing budget constraints. With Covid-19 tests, increased insurance coverage requirements and pricier airfares, travelling has become more expensive. As such, some companies will hold back outbound travel plans,” she said.

Another change in post-lockdown events structure, according to Vidya, is the simplification of itineraries.

“Corporate incentives used to mix leisure with teambuilding or motivational sessions. But with additional travel costs, itineraries will need to be simplified to offer mainly leisure (elements),” she said. – Mimi Hudoyo

Malaysia

The Malaysian government may have relaxed border restrictions, allowing Malaysians to travel overseas for leisure or business events, but corporate demand for overseas activities has yet to return.

Event planners blame the compulsory seven-day quarantine upon return as well as pricey airfares.

Zahira Tahir, founder and CEO of Universal Holidays, told *TTGmice* that reduced flight frequencies to overseas destinations have driven up airfares, making them “ridiculously expensive”.

Scant interest in resuming overseas events is also a result of reduced destination promotions by overseas CVBs in Malaysia throughout the travel freeze.

While destinations such as Thailand, Dubai and Turkey have reopened to

“Corporate incentives used to mix leisure with teambuilding or motivational sessions. But with additional travel costs, itineraries will need to be simplified to offer mainly leisure (elements).”

Vidya Hermanto

Chief experience officer, Panorama, Indonesia



travellers, destination promotions to lure business events from Malaysia have been dull compared to pre-pandemic times, Zahira said.

The high number of Covid-19 infections in Malaysia as well as worries over new variants are also keeping Malaysian companies from planning any overseas events, observed Mint Leong, managing director at Sunflower Holidays.

To safeguard their staff, companies are choosing to reward their top performers with cash or domestic holidays. And with the pandemic affecting many people financially over the past two years, cash rewards have risen in popularity.

Leong elaborated: "Frequent and long lockdowns in Malaysia have affected many businesses, while those employed have to accept pay cuts and reduced work hours."

With overseas travel bookings still elusive for her company, Leong thinks that any return in events outside of Malaysia would only be possible at the end of 2022, she said.

Malaysia's lacking outbound confidence has been further dented by Omicron worries, opined Adam Kamal, head of procurement & domestic market, ICE Holidays. The new variant has led many countries to close their borders or create new restrictions to contain potential spread. Such unpredictable government policies are causing companies to think twice about planning overseas events and sending staff of trips.

In response to travel uncertainties, Malaysian companies are choosing to take their events to domestic destinations such as Desaru, Penang and Langkawi.

Adam said: "These are destinations that are good for both leisure and business, and are easily accessible by road and air from Kuala Lumpur.

"We are also proposing to clients to consider cruising as an option for MICE, especially as *Star Pisces* has just started operating from Penang to Langkawi in December," he said. – **S Puvaneswary**

"Companies don't feel comfortable with planning an overseas incentive trip while Covid-19 is still not tamed."

Adam Kamal

Head of procurement & domestic market, ICE Holidays, Malaysia

"Mass corporate event travelling will be kept to a minimum for the time being to mitigate corporate risk."

Nelson Khoo

Head of events - Singapore & Indonesia, CWT Meetings & Events



Singapore

Strong travel sentiments dominate Singapore companies, as borders begin to gradually open across the world, but new Covid-19 variants are again threatening confidence.

Alexis Lhoyer, co-founder & chief business officer of Chab Events, told *TTGmice* that travel interest hinges on companies' travel policies and risk appetite. Some conservative clients have not allowed any resumption of corporate travel despite Singapore's Vaccinated Travel Lane (VTL) arrangements with select countries.

On the flipside, more adventurous clients have gone ahead to Phuket for events in late December, while there has been an uptick in queries for outbound travel, in particular to European destinations with a VTL arrangement with Singapore.

With VTLs still in its "infancy stage", Nelson Khoo, head of events – Singapore & Indonesia, CWT Meetings & Events, expects domestic events to continue to reign supreme in 2022.

"Mass corporate event travelling will be kept to a minimum for the time being to mitigate corporate risk," he added.

Travel regulations that can change at a drop of a hat are spooking CWT clients, many of whom are in a "wait-



and-see mode" when it comes to travel. Khoo added that companies have had to deal with "steep learning curves on safe management measures and planning processes".

Khoo expects demand for overseas events to pick up when clients are able to access destinations with a repertoire of successful in-person events, and when VTLs "reach a point of stabilisation and confidence is strengthened (with) minimal changes to travel plans".

This would likely happen in 3Q2022, he offered.

Also seeing clients taking a wait-and-see approach is Melvyn C Nonis, director of M.I.C.E Matters. He pointed to possible movements in 2H2022, albeit with smaller groups of 80 to 120 pax instead of the 250 to 500 attendees seen pre-pandemic. Domestic meetings, conferences and teambuilding events will be a mainstay for 1H2022. Nonis is hopeful that Singapore's restrictions will be further eased by then.

For outbound events to truly rebound, events specialists in the city-state say consistency in travel policies must first be established.

"We will need accurate, real-time information and updates, especially on SOPs (standard operating procedures), so that there will be minimal inconvenience to organise and manage an event, and keep costs down," said Nonis.

Lhoyer agrees, saying: "At least a visibility of three to four months to ensure planning won't get wiped out by new measures would be great. Right now, it is the lack of clarity and visibility that keeps projects in limbo."

When asked about Omicron's impact on business events' recovery, Lhoyer said it presented just another challenge, as Delta has, and expressed confidence in overcoming it.

Meanwhile, Khoo said the new variant would extend decision-making processes and add more caution to event planning.

– **Rachel AJ Lee**

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The future of experiential events

As the concept of hybrid events continue to evolve and it becomes certain that the new world of events will no longer play by the old rules, Anna Patterson, vice president & managing director at George P Johnson (Singapore) Experience Marketing, makes a checklist for the production of future events.

By Karen Yue



The term hybrid has been more than a helpful catch-all, as it conveys an idea full of hope and holds the promise of an in-person future in whatever better state of events came next, opined Anna Patterson, vice president & managing director at George P Johnson (Singapore) Experience Marketing, in her presentation at ITB Asia Virtual 2021.

She noted that “offline things moved online (while) outside things moved in”, thus blurring the boundaries of interaction.

“While many things about the future remain elusive and uncertain, one thing is for sure: the new world will not play by the old rules anymore,” she said.

“So, how do you plan for the future when the future is up in the air? A solid and down to earth approach is a great place to start.”

Identify the big picture

Patterson suggested that event planners and producers take a fundamental

approach that puts human experience at the core.

She said: “Clients are coming to us, whether in the events or travel industry, to ensure that they can understand more how humans make the difference. As industry professionals, it is up to us to show clients how digital and physical realities do not just coexist, but combine together to create otherwise impossible things.”

To see the big picture, Patterson said one has to understand where their brand stands in the “grand scheme of things” – something which will provide “essential context to make better decisions and take smarter actions” in their events.

“Once you have found your place, you are ready to move on to your why,” she said.

Set sights on event purpose

In explaining the need for brands, businesses and events to stay rooted in their purpose, Patterson related how figure skaters find their balance.

“Figure skaters were taught to find a spot to set their sights on while they were spinning. As long as their focus remained locked in, the skater could keep from getting dizzy no matter how ‘spinnny’ things got. For brands, businesses and events, a good reason can have similar grounding effects. If you find your purpose, you can move on and out from there,” she said.

However, in defining the event’s purpose, event planners and producers must put their audience first.

“Of all the channels to consider, your attendee really is the only one that matters. Great experiences use human centricity to connect every what with every why,” she said.

Unify event models

Patterson noted common structures between physical and digital event models, and added that there were many ways that a hybrid event could come together.

She added: “Not all events are hybrid, some of the old things will not be coming back from their online homes. Conversely, when face-to-face returns, there will be plenty of demand for in-person-only events. How do you make that relationship work depends on your brand, your audience and the purpose of your event.”

She suggested that event models could be unified through design and delivery, and reminded her session attendees that the event platform “does not equal the experience; it enables it”.

She recommended that events be

imagined from the perspectives of both the in-person and remote audiences, and have experiences designed for a different time and space.

"When we use tools like green screen, motion graphics, broadcast techniques and scripting, these are for the individuals. These experiences will feel very much singular as technology and reality coalesce. For the audience near and far, the distance between in-person and remote will gradually disappear," she remarked.

She pointed to award shows and professional broadcasts in sports as great sources of inspiration for hybrid events.

Maximise both mediums

Patterson urged events planners and producers to understand the different characteristics of physical and digital media.

For example, the digital medium enables scale, has breadth and reach, allows for passive absorption and personalisation, among other attributes. On the other hand, a physical medium

enables engagement, has depth and resonance, allows for active participation and social exchanges, among other attributes.

She said usage should overlap and play up the advantages of both media.

She said: "When we connect, we have to connect with the intentional moments. So when you consider both perspectives and experiences, bring the journeys together to provide an amazing moment of unity.

"We are moving to a new generation of events. Digital and physical realities will not just coexist, but combine to create otherwise impossible things. The new world of experiential is more social, more personal, more local and yet more global, more ambient and yet more in the moment than ever before.

"Without limitation, imagination will be the only constraint."

An ongoing journey

Patterson emphasised that "connectivity is imperative", and underlined how "digital and physical experiences will be more interconnected".

"Audience and journeys will be woven together in-person and remote. Data is the common golden thread, and stitching it all together will require new roles and new skillsets," she said.

She also highlighted the need for organisations to recognise that "life-cycle marketing is here to stay" and that companies and brands must be "omnipresent" by prioritising big technology that enables continuous audience engagement.

"I believe we are at the precipice of a new generation of hybrid events. As upside-down as this may feel to all of us, standing still is not an option," she concluded.



► Anna Patterson

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Into the unknown

Benson Tang, executive director, Corporate Travel Community (CTC), discusses corporate travel recovery in 2022, opportunities, challenges and his industry wishlist. By **Caroline Boey**

What is CTC's outlook for the coming year as more borders open and the fully vaccinated can travel quarantine-free travel?

CTC is cautiously optimistic about corporate travel recovery in 2022. With global vaccination percentage rates continuing to increase and the availability of medicine targeting Covid-19 patients gradually coming to the market, I think the worst has already passed.

Having said that, the continuous mutation of the virus – such as the Delta, Mu, and Omicron variants – remains the biggest uncertainty in 2022.

What must travellers consider if they are willing to go on a business trip and what resources can travel managers turn to to keep up-to-date?

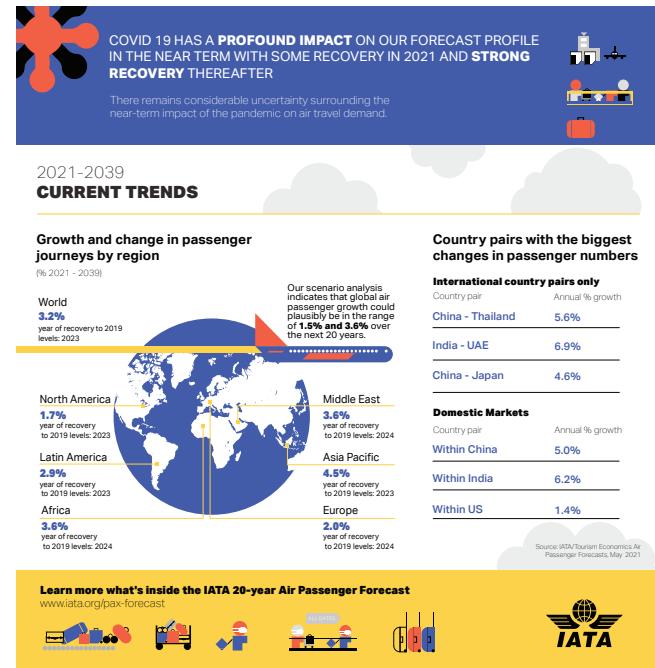
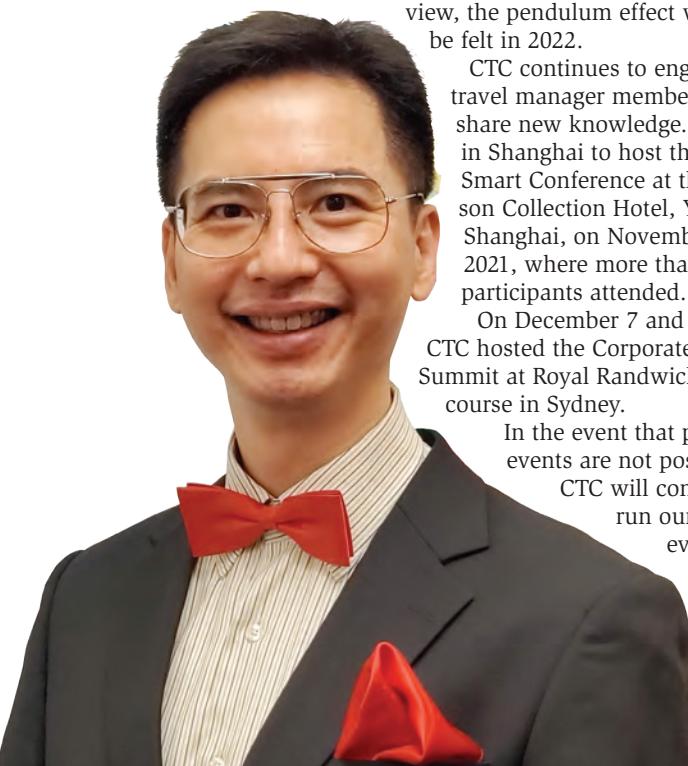
Let me use Singapore's change of Covid-19 national strategy from "zero tolerance" to "living with Covid" as an example. The consequence of this policy has resulted in the immediate opening of its border. But infections rose to an unprecedented record high, with more than 5,000 cases per day reported, forcing the government to tighten some restrictions. In my view, the pendulum effect will still be felt in 2022.

CTC continues to engage travel manager members and share new knowledge. I was in Shanghai to host the Travel Smart Conference at the Radisson Collection Hotel, Yangtze Shanghai, on November 30, 2021, where more than 100 participants attended.

On December 7 and 8, 2021, CTC hosted the Corporate Travel Summit at Royal Randwick Racecourse in Sydney.

In the event that physical events are not possible,

CTC will continue to run our virtual events. To help travel



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▲ Latest IATA Infographics of Air Passenger Forecast

managers' do their jobs better, virtual sessions on topics such as the new ISO 31030 on travel risk management, sustainability, etc., have been organised.

What are some key corporate travel trends to look out for in 2022?

Most of our members are telling us domestic travel has resumed. However, international corporate travel is "still sitting on the fence". One point is clear though: with an increased use of event technology, training or internal meeting trips will be significantly reduced.

What are the opportunities for corporate travel recovery in 2022?

Many new international treaties facilitating freer trade have been reached, such as the RCEP (Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership), CPTPP (Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific), EU/China CAI (EU-China Comprehensive Agreement on Investment), and more.

With implementation starting in 2022, international trade is forecast to continue to expand at a rapid pace in years to come. And as we all know, corporate travel is the paramount prerequisite to negotiating business deals.

Some countries adopting a "living with Covid" policy have already opened their borders. The US, the second-biggest corporate travel spend country, for example, is showing an upward trend for both domestic and international travel.

A new year of growth potential

Despite the many bumps, knocks, and bruises the exhibitions sector has endured in the past two years, UFI's Asia-Pacific regional director, Mark Cochrane, remains cautiously optimistic that 2022 will be the year in-person events will gain momentum. By **Rachel AJ Lee**

How does recovery look like for the exhibitions sector for 2022 and how will Asia factor into this recovery?

Overall, we estimate that Asia recorded an unprecedented 63 per cent drop in net space sold in 2020 compared to 2019. Net space sold fell from the 24.5 million square metres recorded in 2019 down to 9.1 million square metres in 2020. Without China's comparatively strong performance (down 53 per cent to 6.8 million square metres), the regional average would have been much worse.

Across the region, 2021 turned out to be a repeat of 2020 – a damaging year with limited attempts to return to the business of organising events. While 2022 will be a year of recovery for Asia, the path forward will be an uneven one.

It's a good thing that the outlook for face-to-face events in Asia, and globally, is still very positive. This can be seen in markets that have allowed in-person events to resume. For example, from July 2020 to June 2021, domestic events in China roared back to life. We can expect the same all across the world as the pandemic recedes.

In general, factors affecting trade fair recovery in each Asian market will include the government approach to managing Covid (living with Covid versus Covid-zero), the geo-political landscape, the size of the domestic economy and domestic trade fair industry, the importance of international participation, and others.

Larger, more domestically-focused markets such as China, Japan and South Korea will be in a better position to rebound, when compared to internationally-driven markets such as Hong Kong, Singapore and to a lesser extent Thailand, Taiwan and Malaysia.

How has the pandemic changed a customer's value and expectations of exhibitions?

In many ways, the pandemic has reinforced the value of in-person events. Few purely-digital events, if any, have satisfied stakeholders. Of course, event organisers will

have to continue to innovate, improve and add value through events, but we are highly confident that business events of all kinds – will continue to meet and surpass the expectations of visitors and exhibitors in the post-pandemic years.

What trends do you foresee for exhibitions?

We expect to see the virus fade as a threat in the coming months as vaccine rates rise and treatments improve.

This will be followed by a strong bounce back for events in 2022 and even more so in 2023. Event organisers will focus on the getting the basics right, and making use of innovative digital tools to deliver value at in-person events. Companies will also be more willing to heighten their investment in people, as people help make events happen. We need good people with strong business events skills more than ever before.

We see a future full of change, potential and growth.

What bothers you most currently about the pandemic?

There are a few things. The slow rollout of vaccinations, travel restrictions, and perhaps most importantly, governments failing to understand that exhibitions are different from other mass gatherings and that we are key driver of economic recovery and growth. So at UFI, we are committed to mitigating these risks in everything we do.

What is UFI doing to get the exhibitions engine roaring once again?

A lot! That has been our core focus for the past 18 months. We are deeply involved in advocacy work – educating governments around the world on how and when to allow events to proceed.

We track the status of exhibition markets as they open worldwide. We share industry guidelines and best practices, and case studies and details of government support for exhibitions on a market-by-market basis. Our wide range of resources is available on UFI's Coronavirus Resource Page, which is also available to the public.



Incentive cravings

With travel becoming the forbidden fruit for many, the value of incentive trips has skyrocketed over the past two years, observes Aoife Delaney, president for the Society for Incentive Travel Excellence.

By Rachel AJ Lee

What does recovery look like for the global incentive travel sector for 2022?

Following the initial positive traction in early 2021 with the advent of the vaccine, we've been knocked off course again with the onset of new variants. Programmes planned for late 2021 have now been pushed into 2022, causing even more congestion there.

As of late November in Europe, we're in a precarious situation filled with uncertainty, with a stop/start momentum once again dominant. Many corporations have extended their work from home edict well into 2022, and this will definitely impact resumption of corporate travel and incentive trips.

Assuming case numbers stabilise as booster jabs are more widely administered, some programmes will certainly operate in 2022 but we'll continue to see business events recover first locally, then nationally, then regionally. International travel will only revert to pre-pandemic levels in 2023/2024.

Meetings, incentives and events are already taking place in domestic contexts around the world, and this will continue with restrictions and interruptions likely for as long as variants persist.

Singapore, in particular, has played a leading role in allowing events to continue with Covid-19, providing realistic, workable guidelines to ensure stakeholder and delegate safety. In many ways, this is the way forward – managing and living with Covid – and Asian countries have shown great global leadership in demonstrating how this can be done.

How much has the pandemic changed the value organisations and travellers attach to incentive travel?

Scarcity drives value, and the value and appreciation of a travel reward has undoubtedly sky rocketed as a result of its scarcity.

As humans, being denied something makes us want it even more and travel, for most of us, has not been possible for 20 months or more, meaning that since we want it desperately, we yearn for it.

Travel has always been prized as part of a corporate reward and recognition programme, but it's more prized than ever now and will play an even more effective role for corporations in ensuring that their associates are engaged and motivated.

What trends do you foresee in the incentive travel industry in the next few years?

As expected, there will be a focus on safety, and massive attention will be paid to travel risk management. There is also a rise in reluctance to commit and sign contracts due to the uncertainty of travel rules and restrictions that constantly change.

Domestic incentives, or motivation travel experiences in one's own backyard, will still remain as top choice, alongside smaller groups of participants per trip, and the increased use of individual incentives.

There will also be preference for rural over urban, resorts over city hotels, and the great outdoors over metropolises.

What keeps you awake at night in relation to the pandemic, and its impact on incentive travel?

The biggest challenge is uncertainty. It was almost easier to deal with outright lockdowns, as you knew there was nothing you could do for a given amount of time. Uncertainty means you need to have a number of backup options available at any given moment.

I'm also concerned about building back better. I believe the pandemic has given us an opportunity to reset and I hope we take this opportunity to do so, guided by a clear vision for how things should be.

What is SITE doing to rebuild the incentive travel sector?

For the past 20 months our focus has been entirely on our members. We've worked hard to keep them engaged and implemented initiatives to help fund their ongoing participation in the association.

Through SITE Foundation, we've extended our research docket significantly in the belief that data is vitally important for resumption. We're in the midst of a serial piece entitled *Corporate inSITES*, and have just embarked on a joint research project with Southern Methodist University in the US called Leadership inSITES. Both of these will also contribute to getting the incentive travel engine started again.

We will continue to run association events, obviously respecting the protocols of the destinations where they take place, but also asking for additional measures to ensure the safety of all participants.



Positive turns ahead

Founder and CEO of the Philippine Council of Associations and Association Executives (PCAAE), Octavio Peralta, believes associations can shake off the pandemic fatigue and re-energise for 2022. By Rosa Ocampo

What is your outlook for association meetings for the coming year?

Association meetings in the region during the pandemic have actually increased, albeit being interrupted briefly at the start of the pandemic and thereafter delivered mostly online.

This trend will continue in 2022 and, in fact, will increase further as associations gain more experience and confidence in the virtual space. Experimentation is also underway to conduct more hybrid events in 2022 and even in-person events towards the later part of the year.

What is your recovery projection of association meetings in Asia-Pacific?

If this recovery question is in the context of the return in the number of in-person meetings and their revenue intake pre-pandemic, then there will definitely be a recovery, though modest in scale.

As the pandemic and its concomitant restrictions ease up, there will be a spike in the number of in-person meetings, moving from venues closer to home to nearby areas and then to other places within the country before going international.

Revenue generation from these meetings will track the same path as meeting destinations change. However, there is still scope for virtual, hybrid and in-person meetings to coexist and these approaches will form part of the events delivery portfolio of associations.

What do you think Asia-Pacific associations lost and gained during these two years?

The pandemic has been an accelerator and a tailwind to propel digitalisation initiatives to the front and centre of association programming activities. Certainly, the gain for associations is resiliency and technological innovation achieved in so short a time on how meetings have evolved and delivered through different online platforms.

Loss, though temporary, would be the face-to-face networking and less revenue intake of associations mainly due to reduced registration fees and sponsorships.

With most meetings going virtual and hybrid, how can associations inject a human element?

Virtual and hybrid events and engagements have reduced and limited human interactions.

However, the introduction of virtual breakout rooms in online sessions, gamification, storytelling, entertainment, among others, have put a semblance of a human touch during virtual events. That's how event organisers have become media production outfits akin to TV broadcasting. But of course, nothing can replace a face-to-face event!

What are some lessons associations can learn from the pandemic?

From an associations perspective, lessons learnt during the pandemic revolve around member engagement, event design and delivery, value proposition, revenue generation and diversification, reserve funding, remote work, and competition.

In terms of member engagement, associations have shortened their programmes, and are increasingly sharing their content through videos, social media snippets, bullet points, as well as offering micro-volunteering opportunities.

As far as value proposition is concerned, associations have seen the need to focus on value and not the things that they do; not features, but the benefits, outcomes and results.

On revenue generation and diversification, associations have accepted the fact that revenue intake (membership dues, event registrations, sponsorships) have decreased and are looking towards other sources such as advisory services and grants.

These days, there is also a need to have a reserve fund strategy to weather new challenges that may emerge. Remote work has also been prevalent and many associations are considering either work from home arrangements for some functions, and hybrid for others.

Increased competition from within and among associations, as well as from for-profit organisations, academe, and consulting companies has also intensified. As such, associations have to dig into their unique knowledge and content assets to stand out from the competition.



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A sustainable take-off

Intergovernmental collaboration on restoring travel freedom, consistency in border reopening strategy and science-based approach to safe travel measures can speed Asia-Pacific towards air travel recovery, Subhas Menon, director general, Association of Asia Pacific Airlines tells **Karen Yue**

Asia-Pacific borders are reopening but at your November AAPA Assembly of Presidents meeting you noted that international passenger volumes across the region remain deeply depressed, at just six per cent of pre-pandemic levels compared to an average of 40 per cent in other regions. What is causing this recovery crawl?

There is modest pick-up in demand in November 2021, coinciding with the easing of restrictions in several Asia-Pacific markets. (Singapore's) Vaccinated Travel Lanes (VTLs) and travel corridors are (resulting in) a surge in bookings as soon as they are launched, which is indicative of the pent-up (travel) demand.

Such travel lanes and corridors are still too few and far between but should provide the momentum for recovery in 2022 if expanded as planned. Big markets like China and India also need to open up for recovery to commence in earnest.

Is the fear of travel – stemming from a fear of infection and death so widespread throughout this pandemic – among consumers a factor too?

The main factor is travel restrictions, especially quarantine. Quarantine as well as the plethora of regulations with each government keeping its own counsel, dampen consumer sentiment and travel confidence as potential travellers are confused and (doubtful).

The Omicron variant is making plenty of headlines, and causing border restrictions to be tightened once more and disrupting travel rebound. What should governments learn from this as they attempt to live with Covid?

The knee-jerk reaction is understandable as governments are wary of the new variant of which very little is known. As long as the re-imposition of restrictions is temporary and short-lived to buy time or fine-tune risk-based measures, there should not be too much delay to recovery.

The reality is that governments will have to base their decisions on evidence and science, which require data to be gathered and evaluated.

Hopefully, Omicron is only a fly in the ointment and not a spanner in the works. It is heartening to see several governments in the region sticking to their recovery roadmap and reintroducing only some restrictions to address the immediate risks that have been identified.

What ingredients are critical for a more stable travel and tourism recovery?

Living with the virus means we have to take its evolu-

tion in our stride. Governments that have adopted a Covid-normal strategy and are adopting risk-based policies and practices are laying the path to recovery.

The association is calling on governments to collaborate across borders, work with the industry in applying risk-based measures and restore international quarantine-free travel progressively.

Sticking or reverting to hard borders and onerous quarantine rules would not only harm travel and tourism but also the economy and livelihoods of the people. Travel corridors and VTLs once started should be sustained so as not to undermine the demand for cross-border travel.

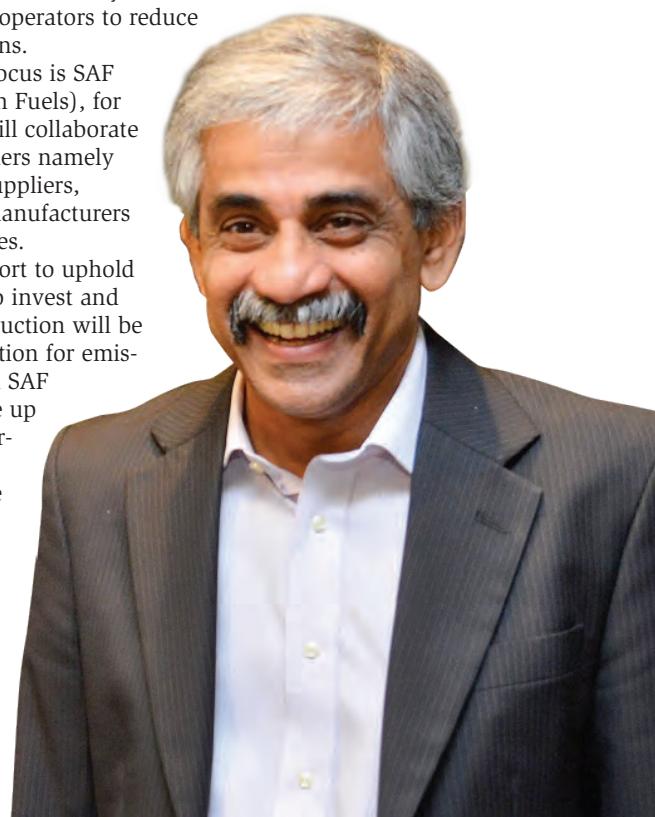
Generally speaking, governments should redouble efforts to spread the access to vaccines as prolonged vaccine inequity will only delay the timeline to recovery.

Besides travel recovery, AAPA has another important commitment for 2022, and that is to cut carbon emissions to net zero by 2050. Will you tell us more about this goal?

AAPA airlines committed to the net zero emissions goal by 2050 on September 13. The focus for the industry at the moment is on ICAO CORSIA (Carbon Offsetting and Reduction Scheme in International Aviation), which is a market-based measure already available for international airline operators to reduce their carbon emissions.

The longer-term focus is SAF (Sustainable Aviation Fuels), for which the airlines will collaborate with other stakeholders namely governments, fuel suppliers, airports as well as manufacturers of aircraft and engines.

Government support to uphold CORSIA as well as to invest and incentivise SAF production will be crucial as a contribution for emissions reduction from SAF use is expected to be up to 75 per cent. Generally speaking, taxes and charges increase cost without benefit to the environment while support and incentives help the efforts to reduce emissions.





Business travellers are eager to resume work trips, as the travel hiatus is taking a toll on their careers and personal lives

Yearning for a business travel restart

Early two-thirds of Asia-Pacific business travellers surveyed are raring to go for professional and personal reasons, but they also want flexibility from employers on how their trips will be conducted, according to new research conducted by SAP Concur.

"Covid-19 has upended business travel in the past year and a half. Yet, it has also reaffirmed business travel's importance in forging business and personal connections, and enabling career advancement," said Carl Jones, vice president and head of strategy for SAP Concur Asia Pacific.

Business travellers are eager to resume work trips, as the travel hiatus is taking a toll on their careers and personal lives

"While uncertainty continues to linger around travel curbs, firms can support business travellers by updating travel policies to provide more flexibility in flight and accommodation selection, better protecting employees' health and safety. Then as vac-

cinations progress and travel bubbles form in the coming months, they will be better positioned to enable safe travel, facilitating business growth and talent retention."

Respondents to the survey carried out in Singapore, Malaysia, China, Hong Kong, Taiwan, Japan, South Korea, India, Australia and New Zealand believe that the current travel hiatus is hurting their careers – by impeding their business goals – and personal lives.

While they hope to restart their in-person meetings soon – 95% are "willing" to travel in the next 12 months, including 63% who are "very willing" to do so – they also want greater control over how they will travel, so that their safety and health can be better safeguarded amid the pandemic.

Notable findings from the study of 1,050 APAC business travellers include:

Career success and business travel

Like their global counterparts, four in five

APAC respondents (81% in APAC vs. 80% globally) worry that the inability to increase business travel will affect them personally.

These concerns include:

- The difficulty in developing and maintaining business connections (51% in APAC compared to 45% globally)
- Not advancing in their career (39% compared to 33% globally)
- Making less money (39% compared to 38% globally)

On the business front, APAC respondents fret that if their organisation does not increase business travel in the year, it will be harder to sign new deals (40%), build new relationships (39%) and renew contracts with existing clients (39%).

In fact, 9% are afraid their business will shut down, and 14% worry that they will lose their jobs. For those who are very frequent travellers, this latter figure jumps to 22%. These grave concerns reveal respondents' perceptions that business travel is a vital vehicle to strengthen business relationships for career success, and experience new places to broaden personal horizons.

Travel policy rethink

Covid-19 has also altered power dynamics in the workplace. Business travellers will consider their options if employers do not match their expectations.

- More than half of APAC business travellers (54%) will make career changes if their company does not provide the necessary policies or measures to protect their health and safety.
- About 37% say they will ask to limit travel if their firm does not implement policies or measures to help protect their health and safety, while 16% will go as far as looking for a different position.

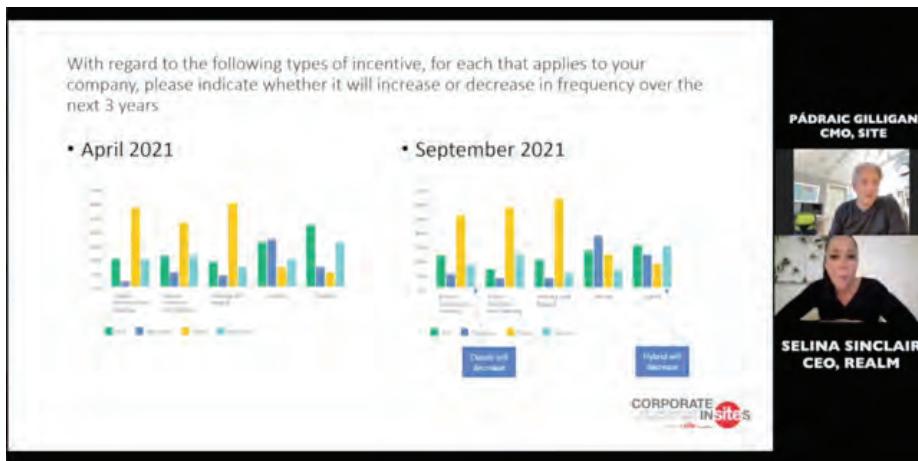
Flexibility for peace of mind

Flexibility is now the most pressing need for APAC business travellers, ahead of their vaccination-related demands (74% vs. 64%).

- This includes everything from planning through the completion of their trips. For instance, respondents cited a preference to choose their preferred accommodation (49%) and mode of travel (43%).
- Once they are on the road, almost all APAC business travellers (93%) expect changes to their travel routine, including more frequently staying in larger hotels (41%), prioritising domestic trips (39%), and using a personal vehicle instead of public transportation (37%).

"Employees are ready to return to business travel, but on their own terms," said Jones. "The actions that businesses take in the next 12 months to protect traveller safety and health could make or break their ability to acquire and retain valuable employees amid a competitive market for talent."

Asia has longer to wait for returning US incentives



▲ SITE representatives Padraig Gilligan (top) and Selina Sinclair shed light on US incentive travel intentions

The September 2021 results of the Corporate InSITEs study has shown that 50 Fortune 500 companies in the US are delaying their resumption of international incentive trips, with most turning first to domestic destinations.

For overseas programmes, most are looking to conduct their first in-person meeting and incentive trip in 2Q2022, and a number are even expecting their first post-pandemic international activity to only take place in 2023.

Selina Sinclair, CEO of Realm and a SITE Foundation trustee, pointed out that the pandemic has forced 74 per cent of respondents to replace their 2020 incentive travel with another type of reward and 42 per cent to do the same with their 2021 programme. The proportions are slightly larger than the April findings, where 71 per cent and 31 per cent had adjusted their incentive programmes respectively.

"As an inbound operator in Asia, we hope that programmes could return in 2021 or early 2022, but that's just not the reality at the moment," she said, adding that the study has also identified Covid variants as leaving an impact on incentive travel confidence.

"We thought that there would be just one or two waves of Covid, but we have seen four, five waves in certain countries. That has obviously added to the volatility within companies wanting to return to incentive planning, and causing companies to move their dates to the later part of 2022," she said.

Fellow presenter, Padraig Gilligan, chief marketing officer of SITE, shared that

respondents are mostly looking to maintain classic forms of incentive programmes – incentives with no meetings, classic incentives with meetings, and meeting with rewards. Results do not differ much between April and September, although both Gilligan and Sinclair have observed some creative virtual meetings and incentives being held during the pandemic.

In light of Covid concerns, respondents regard contracts & risk management, destination selection, better analytics, and new resources & skills as factors most important to the future success of their incentive travel programme. The results between April and September are similar.

Sinclair predicts sustainability considerations will rise in rankings in the January 2022 study once decision-makers are able to move past urgent matters that must be resolved and move forward with planning.

She highlighted a continued sense of optimism for incentive travel resumption among leaders in the surveyed US companies. In the April study, 94 per cent of respondents were committed to returning to incentive travel.

To better understand their intentions, the September study enquired on risk and cost considerations. Half are fully committed to resuming incentive travel without safety and cost considerations, while almost 35 per cent are committed but will want to reduce risk.

A much smaller percentage is committed to resuming incentive travel, but will have to reduce cost.

Sinclair reflected: "I expected more to opt for the need to reduce cost since we know

budgets have been reduced and many have been able to see savings from not doing any activities in 2020 and 2021 or replacing their incentive programmes with virtual executions. The good news is that I have companies coming up to us saying, we want to do our programmes again in 2022/2023 and now we have doubled the amount (of money)."

Expanding on the findings, Gilligan referenced the Incentive Travel Industry Index, which the SITE Foundation is involved in with the Incentive Research Foundation and Financial and Insurance Conference Professionals. He noted that destination safety considerations have "eclipsed everything else in terms of organisers' concerns".

In April 2021, a majority of US respondents ranked safety as the most important criteria when selecting a destination, followed by destination appeal, infrastructure and access. Come September, destination appeal is ranked in first place, followed by safety, infrastructure and access.

"Companies are taking a different view; they are concerned about their people and duty of care to qualifiers. In that context, issues of safety become much more important than issues of value for money," remarked Gilligan.

Agreeing, Sinclair said: "Safety used to mean different things. Before, safety is what will happen in the destination. Today, safety is paramount even before you leave home."

With the September Corporate InSITEs findings pointing to a delayed return in international incentive travel programmes undertaken by the important US source market, Sinclair said Asian destinations and DMCs would have to continue to "look for new ways of earning revenue" and to adapt to local and regional clients.

"We Asian DMCs have shown that we can pivot well, like we did with virtual events. Local events have become the bread and butter for many companies. I know a lot of DMCs have innovated too," she said.

Asian DMCs are also staying busy with laying the groundwork to "support international companies that are looking to (return to their) destination".

"There are a lot of questions about arrival requirements; changes to operations when we visit in two, three, four or five years from now; etc. DMCs are playing a bridging role between the government and organisations in the supply chain... and getting their teams trained and certified to implement their government's safe management measures," she said. – **Karen Yue and Mimi Hudoyo**

All things bright and green

The Japanese capital is beefing up its in-person and hybrid capabilities with the help of technology, while incorporating a robust sustainability ethos in preparation for the return of international events. By Kathryn Wortley

The pandemic is still hampering normal business events, but Tokyo is stepping up to meet changing needs and offer innovative and sustainable solutions.

For the past two years, event organisers and hosts have been embracing new operations while continuing to implement rigorous protocols to prevent the spread of Covid-19. Approaches taken include using technology to bring people together more easily and efficiently while keeping them safe.

"Tokyo has been focusing on promoting Smart City initiatives, and technology such as robots and AI are becoming standard," said Kana Nomoto, director of

▼ Tokyo Portcity Takeshiba is an event venue that supports biodiversity in its buildings

sales at Business Events Tokyo, Tokyo Convention & Visitors Bureau (TCVB).

"Avatar robots, in which meeting participants can log in from their computers and communicate with colleagues onsite, is one way to enhance the delegate experience. The robots make face-to-face networking a lot easier for both online and onsite delegates."

Telepresence avatar robots made by Japan-based firm iPresence were used during the 9th Union of International Associations' (UIA) Round Table Asia-Pacific, which was held in hybrid format in October 2021, with TCVB as the local host partner.

The robots allowed participants to move around

show999/shutterstock



during coffee breaks and interact with in-person attendees.

Chris Christophers, founder and CEO of iPresence, said this technology offered a “more complete interactivity to remote participants, creating truly hybrid experiences”.

Tokyo-based event facility and organiser Happo-en has also devised ways to improve hybrid events.

In November 2021, the company launched an online event platform called We Room, to enhance communication among digital and in-person attendees. The platform places up to 16 pax on “tables” where they can watch a livestream of the event and communicate with each other at the same time. Digital attendees can move freely among the “tables” to talk and meet others, just as they would do at an in-person event.

Rosa Aldridge, brand communication and design manager at Happo-en, says the platform aims to combine the “real” and “online” worlds and is “a way to provide a new level of flexibility and freedom for event organisers and participants”.

The company has also adopted the use of Servi, a non-contact hospitality system to serve guests food. QR codes on the items presented by the robots contain the names of the dishes and their ingredients. Launched in April 2021, these two new initiatives are part of Happo-en’s Future of Communications Project.

Aldridge explained: “The role of the hospitality industry as business event organisers goes beyond just facilitating gatherings and providing cuisine. We must actively contribute to the building of new relationships, the creation of business opportunities and the fostering of corporate – as well as organisational engagement – through people-to-people interaction.”

With safety still top of mind for the industry, Japan’s technology firms are stepping up too.

In November 2021, Panasonic launched its latest anti-infection technology for use at the entrances and exits of venues. Named Anshin Gate, it measures the participant’s temperature and sanitises their hands and feet simultaneously. A related system tracks the movement and number of participants in the space to predict congestion levels so as to reduce the chances of lines or crowds forming.

Beyond improving in-person and hybrid events, Tokyo’s business events industry is preparing for the future of green events.

Following the 2019 release of *Sustainability Guidelines for Business Events in Tokyo*, TCVB’s Business Events Tokyo team launched the Sustainability Experience in Tokyo in 2021. The programme offers ideas for international conference organisers that are keen on engaging their delegates in nature, food, crafts and physical activities.

“We are confident that these (sustainability experiences) will make the guests’ stay in Tokyo most satisfying and meaningful,” said Nomoto. “We also hope meeting organisers will make good use of these programmes that aim to contribute to the achievement of UN Sustainable Development Goals while offering the opportunity to experience unique activities and be immersed in the traditional culture of Tokyo.”

The guidelines and experiences are part of TCVB’s wider efforts to “raise awareness of the importance of sustainability in the business events industry”, she elaborated.

FAST FACTS

3

Tokyo’s ranking in the Global Power City Index, 2020

5

Japan’s ranking in the Covid-19 Regional Safety Assessment

52.5%

The proportion of green coverage in Tokyo, 2019



▲ Telepresence avatar robots at the 9th UIA Round Table Asia-Pacific

Firms are heeding the advice. Tokyo’s newest destination marketing organisation, DMO Shiba, Tokyo Bay, is among those with a green mission. Launched in autumn 2021 and covering the areas of Hamamatsucho, Takeshiba and Shibaura, the DMO supports members that have a high level of interest in the environment.

For instance, event facility Tokyo Portcity Takeshiba supports biodiversity in its buildings using onsite rice paddies, vegetable patches, and a beehive. Its Port Hall and Port Studio offer a CO₂ Zero MICE Initiative for organisers to replace the electricity used for their event with renewable energy.

Meanwhile, DMO member Waters Takeshiba is restoring the tidal flats along Tokyo Bay where it offers experiences and tours, so visitors can better understand and appreciate the valuable ecosystem there.

“(TCVB is working to) raise awareness of the importance of sustainability in the business events industry.”

Kana Nomoto

Director of sales,
Business Events Tokyo, Tokyo
Convention & Visitors Bureau





Looking to a new dawn

Riddled with numerous lengthy lockdowns, interstate travel restrictions, and international border closures, Malaysian events professionals are hopeful that the worst is over and 2022 will be a year of recovery. By **S Puvaneswary**

Malaysia's industry players are hopeful that the days of lengthy lockdowns and travel restrictions are behind them, since the government allowed business events to resume on October 18 last year.

Stakeholders are also hopeful that this year will see the resumption of business events at full venue capacity, and when the borders eventually open to international travellers, it would see the resumption of in-person events with international participation in 2H2022.

To help build confidence among overseas delegates, Francis Teo, president of the Malaysian Association of Convention and Exhibition Organisers and Suppliers (MACEOS), shared that the association was discussing with Bank Negara Malaysia to introduce a Covid-19 insurance for foreign travellers visiting Malaysia for business or leisure purposes. The insurance would cover hospitalisation and medical treatment at private healthcare facilities.

MACEOS is also in talks with a few insurance bro-

▲ **Sunway City is working towards becoming Malaysia's premier hospitality and events destination**

kers to provide insurance coverage to event organisers to help cover pandemic related business interruption losses.

Teo explained: "Business interruption insurance against pandemic risk is vital as it will provide confidence to event organisers to plan and hold their events during the pandemic, even though there are still a lot of uncertainties."

Teo, who is also the head of Setia Convention Centres in Penang and Selangor, shared that business has gradually returned to both centres since October. However, event organisers prefer hybrid formats over in-person events due to current national guidelines which limits venue capacity. For instance, current standard operating procedures impose a two-metre safe distance for seating arrangement and limit banqueting events at 50 per cent of venue capacity.

Events that have returned, Teo shared, include award recognition events from multi-level marketing and insurance companies, as well as local consumer exhibitions.

He remains hopeful that 2H2022 will bring corporate events, meetings and exhibitions with attendees that number in the thousands, from the region and beyond.

This hope is buoyed by two new hotel openings – the 453-key Amari SPICE Penang (opening September 2022) which will be connected to Setia SPICE Convention Centre; and the 225-key Courtyard by Marriott Setia Alam, which will be located adjacent to Setia City Convention Centre.

Recently, the two convention centres have also introduced all-in-one packages for exhibitions, inclusive of rental, booth set-up, cleaners and security. This is in addition to early bird discounts for event organisers who confirm their events early.

Teo stated: "We realise event organisers may not have the capital to restart their exhibitions. So, instead of committing to pay for the entire hall, organisers can pay just for the number of booths sold."

Elsewhere in Selangor, near capital city Kuala Lumpur, integrated resort destination Sunway City, has grand ambitions to become Malaysia's premier hospitality and events destination.

From March 2022, its flagship property Sunway Resort, will reopen in stages after a US\$60 million transformation. The resort will be feature 477 keys, which includes dedicated family rooms with direct access to a brand-new outdoor water playland, perfect for delegates with their families in tow.

In addition, event planners can look forward to hosting functions featuring Gordon Ramsay's signature dishes at the new Gordon Ramsay Bar & Grill, shared Alex Castaldi, senior general manager of Sunway City Kuala Lumpur Hotels.

He also hinted at two more premium restaurants opening by end-2022, which will provide more culinary experiences for corporate groups.

Comprising a theme park, three hotels, a convention centre, mall and Sunway Medical Centre, Castaldi is confident Sunway City holds an advantage as event organisers are more inclined to hold events in an all-inclusive destination post-pandemic.

Aside from offering 360,000m² of event space, having Sunway Medical Centre, a world-class medical facility close by is all the more important.

Castaldi said: "It gives assurances to organisers, especially those holding large events. As the medical centre is also under our group, organisers can rest assured that delegates will be well taken care of."

"We are employing a flexible partnership approach with all clients and organisers."

Alan Pryor
General manager,
Kuala Lumpur Convention Centre



▲ Setia City Convention Centre will soon get an adjoining hotel, making it easier for delegates

FAST FACTS

15

The number of international conferences won by Malaysia Convention and Exhibition Bureau in 2021, with events taking place between 2022 and 2030

RM139 million

Equivalent to US\$33.2 million, this is the estimated economic impact based on the 15 scheduled events

37

The number of local business events supported by MyCeb in 2021, benefiting some 31,000 delegates

Sunway Hotels & Resorts is working out an insurance package to be built into the room rate or as a separate opt-in, which will cover hospital bills and quarantine fees for those who test positive for Covid-19 during their stay.

While the hotels in Sunway City Kuala Lumpur are currently welcoming small- and medium-sized bookings of up to 800 delegates, Castaldi is optimistic that larger events of more than 1,000 will materialise in 2H2022.

Over at Kuala Lumpur Convention Centre, general manager Alan Pryor shared that forward bookings for 1Q2022 are looking "positive", and is 40 per cent of the venue's overall target for the new year.

"We currently have about 60 events – primarily conventions and exhibitions – confirmed. As for meetings and corporate functions, they are still (planned on a) short-lead basis and will trickle in the new year onwards within the same event month."

"After having undergone a cycle of reopening and closures, organisers are treading the waters very carefully to avoid further cancellations and postponements."

Elaborating on the centre's strategies to drive more bookings, Pryor shared: "We are amplifying our customisation, where no two organisers would be advised with the same solution. Based on the event format and its requirements and after considering budgets and costs, we are tailoring every package to suit an organiser's need."

He pointed out that this new business model of "risk-sharing joint event partnerships" was developed during the pandemic, and has helped kickstart and stimulate the overall business events industry.

"We will continue with this strategy to bolster confidence in our stakeholders until we surpass the recovery phase and enter the growth period."





Sydney's resolute presence

By stimulating activity, launching new hardware, and ramping up marketing for business events experiences, Sydney is paving the way for the post-pandemic return of in-person events of all sizes, finds **Adelaine Ng**

The lights are back on for live business events in Sydney, although many in the industry are under no illusion that business will return immediately.

Sydney's events industry has been filled with fresh confidence, as more than 90 per cent of its population has been double-vaccinated. International borders also reopened for the first time since the pandemic started, to gradually welcome overseas visitors and students at the end of 2021.

The doors were first thrown open to Singapore, Japan and South Korea for fully vaccinated visitors, with more destinations planned for travel bubble arrangements in the new year.

After months of lockdowns and travel restrictions, Sydney is expecting "a big year" and a key role in rebuilding the country's A\$36 billion (US\$26 billion) business events sector.

"Sentiment is starting to be very positive for the future," said BESydney's director global corporates & incentives, Sinead Yeo.

▲ Sydney has in place a long-term recovery strategy for business events; a busy Sydney Harbour Bridge precinct in pre-pandemic times pictured

"Australia's global city is opening up again – firstly for citizens and their families who have been kept apart, and very soon we will be excited to welcome our international visitors back to show them all of the exciting things that we have been doing while they have been gone," she continued.

While the pandemic has been playing out in full drama on the world stage and shutting down many gatherings, Sydney announced in September 2020 it would be a 24-hour city featuring late night transport, longer opening hours for cultural institutions, fewer restrictions on live music and reclaimed spaces for activities like outdoor dining and concerts.

Sydney also launched its newest major large-scale function centre in December 2021, offering two floors of state-of-the-art conference and exhibition space.

The new WINX Stand at Royal Randwick, named after the legendary mare who captivated Australia, stands just 10 minutes from Sydney's CBD and is accessible by Sydney's new dedicated light-rail service.

A number of new hotels have opened too while



FAST FACTS

A\$70 million

The revenue, equivalent to US\$50.1 million, expected from 18 meetings secured for New South Wales in FY2020/21

127,000

The number of delegates in Sydney's pipeline of events for 2022-2029

350

The number of rooms in Crown Sydney at Barangaroo, the largest hotel – in terms of room numbers – to open during the pandemic

spring back and snap back as soon as circumstances allowed, and that's the circumstances we're in now. We're looking forward to being in Asia in early 2022 in conjunction with Business Events Australia," he added.

ICC Sydney has also been proactively engaging with the city's activation programmes that will take place across the summer to get Sydney-siders back into the city and promote Sydney again to the international market. The convention centre itself is hosting an experiential exhibition called Neighbourhood Earth, inviting an expected 150,000 visitors into an interactive, science-inspired space.

"We're showing to the city community that it's perfectly safe and advisable to come to events at the centre, and it's a matter of starting that snowballing effect of momentum, creating confidence that events are safe. It's safe to come to Sydney and to ICC Sydney," he stressed.

Meantime, although one of Sydney's most significant source markets for business events visitors, China, is still closed, decisions are being made within corporate circles that could see Chinese tourists returning from 2023.

"There is a general feeling among corporates that they will be pushing ahead with overseas trips even if it means they need to quarantine upon their return," said Shanghai-based managing director of PTC Express Travel, Christopher Zhang.

"And I think in general, the bureau in Australia is doing a fantastic job because over the last 18 months, a lot of bureaus pulled out of China, especially from smaller destinations.

"But Tourism Australia and some of the state bureaus have stayed active in the marketplace, which may have been the right thing to do because pre-pandemic, there were over a hundred destinations promoting in China and it was very difficult to get your voice heard – you had to spend big to stand out," he elaborated.

Zhang also said Australia was likely to be preferred to other Asian destinations because the Chinese found the greater cultural contrast more attractive.



borders were closed, such as the Crown Sydney at Barangaroo and M Gallery by Sofitel Porter House.

However, industry frontliners expect business will return in small and measured ways.

"We're watching the trends in the Northern Hemisphere, and we know it is most likely that smaller groups will return first," said Yeo.

"Our sense from talking with our clients is that those with larger groups will be a little more cautious to start and pace their return. It is very clear that companies will be looking to destinations like Australia that have handled the pandemic and put strong protocols in place for their first point of travel," she continued.

ICC Sydney, the city's flagship convention centre has also been working hard to prepare for the return of live events, and will start the new year with more than 90 international events in the pipeline out to 2031.

"We never closed (during the pandemic)," said ICC Sydney CEO Geoff Donaghy.

"There were times when we couldn't do face-to-face meetings but we were ready to

"Sentiment is starting to be very positive for the future."

Sinead Yeo

Director global corporates & incentives,
BESydney