

SEPTEMBER-OCTOBER 2023

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# TTGmice



Asia-Pacific's intelligent business events resource



## Meeting commitments

Business events are returning to hotels and resorts across Asia, and prioritising properties with versatile spaces and in-house meetings specialists that can bring value to their programmes

Wellington, a hotbed of research and innovation

More world-class facilities rise in Taiwan

The Maldives warmly welcomes meetings and events



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JIMBARAN CONVENTION CENTER



INTERCONTINENTAL  
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# All the pretty things



**Karen Yue**  
Group Editor

Meeting planners with an eye for pretty things must be so spoilt these days, judging from the range of new and refreshed convention centres and hotels that have entered the market in the past year.

I was fortunate to be able to set my eyes on the new Tākina Wellington Convention and Exhibition Centre when I was there for Business Events Industry Aotearoa's MEETINGS 2023 in June. The venue was rather 'un-convention centre', resembling a chic art museum instead with its gleaming bronze glass skin outside, and dark wood and black beams inside. I can imagine the expanded scope of creativity the young venue can offer to meeting planners looking to do their events differently.

There are several other new and refreshed convention centres in our region that I'm hoping to explore soon, such as Galaxy International Convention Center in Macau, which opened earlier this year; and the transformed Queen Sirikit National Convention Center in Bangkok, which will host the high-profile ICCA Congress 2023 in November.

Beyond convention centres, hotel venues are also looking a lot more alluring. The new generation of hotels is big on design elements. Look at the new JW Marriott Jeju Resort & Spa, which transports one into stone houses and tangerine gardens of old. Pan Pacific Hotels Group's newest additions in Asia – Pan Pacific Orchard Singapore and Parkroyal Collection Kuala Lumpur – are both biophilic beauties.

Opinions may be split on the aesthetic value of event venues – should functional features and price dominate venue choice, or should a visually stunning space matter more? Thankfully, with the stronger design focus taken by hotel developers today, aesthetics now stand with functionality, and meeting planners can have the best of both worlds.

Take biophilic features for example. Bringing greenery into buildings helps to cool the air naturally, which reduces reliance on air-conditioning units, thereby cutting energy usage. Scientists have also found that being among plants has a positive impact on people's mental health.

Practical justifications aside, wouldn't you feel happier to simply meet in a lovely venue?



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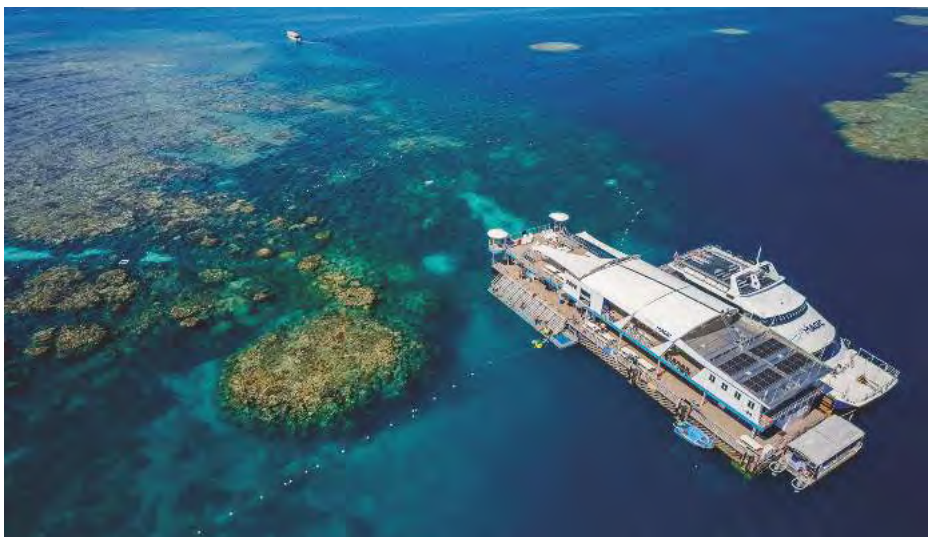
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# Exhibition World Bahrain

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26-28 March 2024

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(26-28 March, Shanghai)

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**Expanded Networking Engagement** to uplift the In-Person event experience



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www.corporatetravelworld.com/china  
for event updates, programme and participation information

## Top 5 headlines this month



**From left: Bangkok wins ICCA Congress 2023; Singapore skyline; and Destination Gold Coast's Brooke Campbell**

**ICCA sings high praise of Bangkok, promises a special congress in November**  
A strong bid presentation by Thailand Convention and Exhibition Bureau, marked by public-private unity, the city's positioning on a sustainable economy and knowledge-based society, legacy initiative, and quality event hardware, was what earned ICCA's nod when the association deliberated on its 2023 congress host venue.

**Japan outlines bold MICE strategy**  
Japan aims to become the number one business events destination in Asia, and among the top five business events destinations in the world by 2030, according to a new national government strategy.



**Singapore's large-scale venues build richer local experiences for delegates**  
Instead of working in silos, large-scale venues in Singapore have gone beyond selling floor space and are working together with the community to spread economic benefits around.

**New Cvent sourcing reports reveal positive MICE outlook**  
Cvent has released the latest edition of its bi-annual Cvent Planner Sourcing Report for Asia, which indicates positive momentum across the business events industry.

**Gold Coast impresses planners**  
Destination Gold Coast has impressed with new products and experiences at its annual showcase, winning high approval ratings from both event planners and exhibitors.



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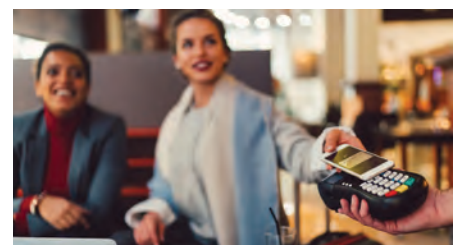
Visit [TTGmic.com](https://www.ttgmic.com) for more exciting reads

## Intelligence



**Global business travel and events costs to remain elevated through 2024**  
Global business travel and events costs are set to climb higher through the remainder of 2023 and into 2024, albeit at a much more moderate pace than the exceptionally steep increases seen in 2022. This is according to the 2024 Global Business Travel Forecast, published by CWT and Global Business Travel Association (GBTA).

**Travel & expense spend management grows in importance: BCD Travel**  
The importance of travel and expense spend management has increased in priority, reaching its highest level since 2020. In 2023, 88 per cent of buyers regarded payment & expense management as "very important" or "extremely important," compared to 76 per cent in 2021.





**Switzerland.**  
by train, bus and boat.

# Switzerland's worst-kept secret?



Switzerland is a stunning holiday retreat, that doubles as a world-class destination for MICE events. It's ideal for business meetings, incentive trips, conferences, and specialized events. Looking for something special? Stand out by holding your next event aboard a luxurious train, capable of accommodating up to 110 guests.

## Magical journeys

Everything you've heard about the Grand Train Tour of Switzerland is true. The magical journey combines the most beautiful panoramic trains into one stunning route. With places like Interlaken, Montreux, St. Moritz, Zermatt and Lucerne within reach, the Grand Train Tour of Switzerland is on the bucketlist of every traveller.



## Magical ticket

If your clients prefer to stay flexible, they can also purchase a Swiss Travel Pass, from 3 to 15 days, and enjoy unlimited travel on train, bus and even boat, while getting a number of other attractive benefits on top.

**More about the Grand Train Tour of Switzerland:**  
[mystsnet.com/grandtraintour](https://mystsnet.com/grandtraintour)



## Magical events

The Grand Train Tour of Switzerland is also a dream come true for event organizers. Tailor-made itineraries, highest level of comfort, breathtaking views and legendary service aboard iconic trains make the Grand Train Tour of Switzerland the preferred way to travel around the country – or to a corporate event.



## Magic that sells

Plus, with demand for sustainable travel options higher than ever before, this makes it an easy sell for travel professionals like yourself.



## Become an expert and win a trip to Switzerland.

Gain knowledge and win attractive prizes: Heidi & Peter take you on a learning journey through the new Swiss Travel System Excellence Program.

**Step aboard and register now:**  
[mystsnet.com/elearning](https://mystsnet.com/elearning)



# Insightful ventures

From conservation efforts to learning about vanishing trades, here are some enlightening tours for corporate groups to consider

By [TTGmice reporters](#)



1



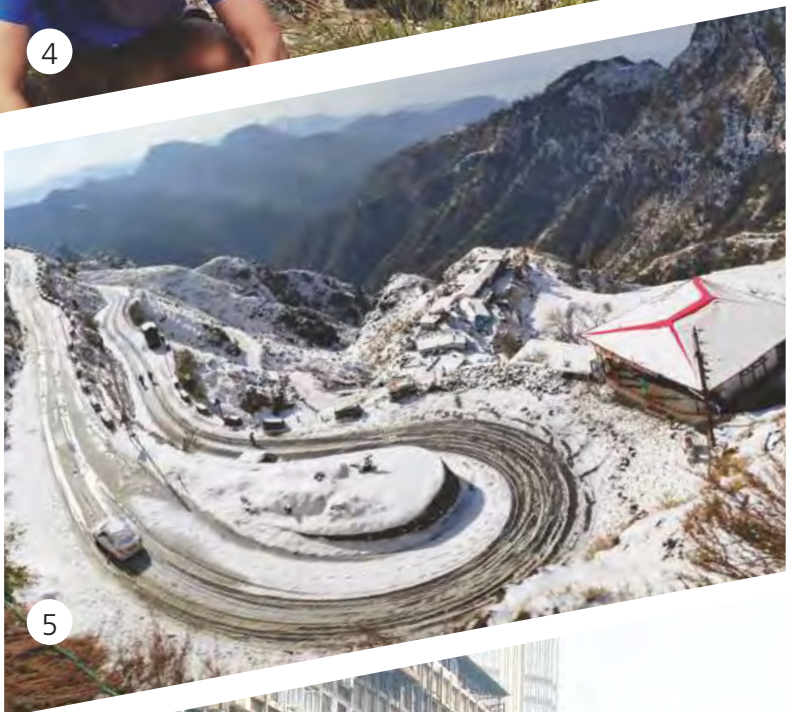
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6

### 1. Reef Unlimited

Reef Unlimited's Reef Connect Program invites guests to immerse themselves in a stunning Great Barrier Reef experience while learning about conservation and First Nation Sea Country, as well as collecting underwater data with marine biologists.

Corporates also have the option of being a Marine Biologist for a day, or a Great Barrier Reef Ambassador. Departing from Cairns and Port Douglas, these guided full-day excursions cater to groups of up to 250 guests.

### 2. Little Vietnam Tours

Little Vietnam Tours likes to do things differently and ensure all guests enjoy Vietnam in their own way – perfect for corporate tours who want a deeper dive into the country.

After an online chat with a local Vietnamese expert, a personalised itinerary will be drawn up taking into account desired destinations and lodging experience, length of stay, group sizes, and F&B. Options include trekking with hill tribes in the northern mountains, photo tours of rural Vietnam, and learning about endangered primates.

### 3. Hong Kong Pearl Cultivation Association

This three-hour Pearl Workshop at the Sea – operated by the association – reveals the history and culture of pearl cultivation at the one and only pearl farm in Sai Kung.

The learning journey starts by taking a 15-minute boat ride from Hebe Haven to Ma Nam Wat in Sai Kung. Participants will learn from a professional instructor of how to harvest pearls, get to shuck their own pearl oyster, and design and create a pearl accessory with the pearl that they harvested on-site. The pearl farm's maximum capacity is 40.

### 4. Junglewalla Desaru

The Lebam River Cruise in Desaru, Johor, involves naturalist guides with Junglewalla Desaru expounding on the mangrove ecosystem and its importance to the planet.

After the cruise, 60 participants will have the opportunity to get involved in a conservation project of planting trees with ReWild Desaru, a not-for-profit organisation, whose dual objective is to reforest Desaru with suitable food plants that will feed wildlife, while establishing a network of greenways and wildlife corridors useful for both man and beast.

### 5. Skil Travels

Skil Travels offers adventurous corporate groups the option to explore Mussoorie, one of India's hill stations in Uttarakhand. The adventure begins with a sunrise visit to Lal Tibba, a scenic viewpoint that allows views of the snow-capped Himalayas on a clear day.

The group is then taken to the Himalayan Adventure Institute for four hours of adventurous activities. Run by army veterans, the institute offers rock climbing, a ropes course, flying fox, and various teambuilding activities. Afterwards, the group will sit down for a sumptuous lunch, before trekking to Kempty Falls. The day will end with pancakes and coffee at a boutique cafe called Café Ivy, where groups can wind down with sunset views.

### 6. SmallWORLD Experience

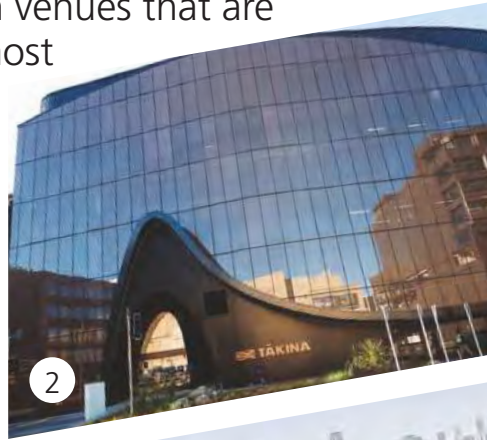
Be transported in a rickshaw – a popular mode of transportation in the 19<sup>th</sup> century in Asia – around the narrow streets of Macau's old town. As there are only 10 rickshaws left in town, this environmentally-friendly activity is suitable for a maximum of 18 guests at one time.

# Meet and greet

With business events ramping up globally, here are some shiny, modern venues that are ready to be hosts with the most



1



2



3



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5

## 1. Te Pae Christchurch

Sitting at the core of New Zealand's second largest city, the venue's name, Te Pae, means 'gathering place', and was gifted by Ngāi Tuāhuriri, the traditional Māori owners of the land.

Within this convention centre is a selection of venues built to welcome a range of events – a 1,400-seat auditorium, 24 meeting rooms, an exhibition space, and a riverside banquet hall that can take 1,000 seats.

Beyond its hardware, the venue has strict commitment to its environmental obligations, with an agreement with Toitu Envirocare to acquire certification as a net carbon zero organisation.

## 2. Tākina Wellington Convention and Exhibition Centre

Opened in the middle of 2023, Tākina Wellington Convention and Exhibition Centre heralds new beginnings for the New Zealand capital city's events industry.

Sitting close to the scenic waterfront and within the CBD, the purpose-built venue incorporates 10,000m<sup>2</sup> of flexible conferencing space over two levels, with capacity for plenaries up to 1,600. The ground floor exhibition gallery, at 1,280m<sup>2</sup>, is said to be the largest in New Zealand.

## 3. Galaxy International Convention Center Macao

Part of the massive Galaxy Macao integrated resort, the venue can cater for up to 8,500 banquet guests or 16,000-strong cocktail parties. The 10,000m<sup>2</sup> pillar-less exhibition hall on the ground floor can take up to 7,000 delegates, and be transformed into a grand venue for 6,500-pax banquets or lively party central for 8,500 guests.

Additionally, the 16,000-seat Galaxy Arena entertainment venue is a good choice for concerts and large-scale sporting events. The arena boasts 360-degree unobstructed views for all attendees, as well as high quality surround sound and high definition broadcasting capabilities.

## 4. The Queen Sirikit National Convention Center

The Queen Sirikit National Convention Center (QSNCC) reopened in September 2022 after a major renovation, sporting a space that is five times larger than when it closed in 2019.

The revamped venue, located just beside Benjakitti Park, now offers a total event space of 78,500m<sup>2</sup>, comprising two main exhibition halls with over 45,000m<sup>2</sup>, two large conference halls with nearly 10,000m<sup>2</sup>, 50 flexible meeting rooms. All function spaces are fully-equipped with the latest technology.

QSNCC is directly connected to its eponymous MRT Station, and also offers retail shopping, F&B outlets, and a spa.

## 5. Exhibition World Bahrain

Opened in late 2022, Exhibition World Bahrain is the Kingdom's newest meetings and events space managed by ASM Global.

Spanning 95,000m<sup>2</sup> of flat floor space, the venue features 10 halls with 14, 12 or 10 metres ceiling height, a dedicated *majlis* (sitting rooms), organiser's office and meeting rooms. All are easily accessible by multiple entry loading docks.

There is also a Grand Hall, which offers a flexible design with a seating capacity for 400 to 4,000, while the auditorium also allows a range of configurations from theatre-style conventions to sit-down gala events. There are also 20 conference meeting rooms ideal for groups ranging from 25 to 200 in theatre-style seating.

# FCTG's investment pays off

FCM Travel Asia's technology capabilities and NDC readiness are well ahead of the pack, thanks to a US\$200 million investment by parent company Flight Centre Travel Group (FCTG) in 2019.

Bertrand Saillet, managing director, FCM Travel Asia, who spoke at the CTC Singapore Corporate Travel Summit in June, said it was the "first global TMC to attain IATA Level 4 NDC certification", and is able "to provide Full Offer and Order Management, including booking, servicing, and flight disruption handling".

He added FCM was also among the first global TMCs to be included in the IATA Airline Retailing Maturity index, and was launch partner of Amadeus's NDC-X programme and Sabre's Beyond NDC programme.

FCM was "'live' delivering NDC content to corporate customers and was driving pilot programmes in partnership with customers, airlines and OBs (online booking tools) to discover the best solutions for our wider customer base and create an

industry standard", noted Saillet.

Since 2019, FCTG has made several acquisitions. In 2019, it acquired SAM. Short for Smart Assistant for Mobile, it is available 24/7 and includes an instant live chat with an agent. In 2020, FCTG acquired San Francisco-based WhereTo, an enterprise travel platform and technology company that simplifies and improves business travel planning for corporations.

In 2021, FCTG acquired FCM Extension. Previously known as Shep, the Texas-based software company provides a browser-extension-based communication platform for MNCs. In the same year, FCM Platform, a new proprietary platform was developed to target customers' pain points with current and legacy corporate travel technology.



Saillet

The omnichannel, Saillet continued, was designed to address six key pillars: a globally consistent booking experience; always available travel assistance; traveller safety and wellbeing support; sustainability; AI-powered reporting and savings, and flexible integration capabilities.

FCTG also took a majority stake in Dubai-based travel firm TPConnects Technologies in 2022 to offer a wider choice of fares to clients by aggregating airline content from multiple sources, including GDSs, low-cost carriers (LCCs) and the growing number of NDC-enabled booking channels.

In understanding different market needs, FCM also developed its own platform for China. Meanwhile in India, FCM Booking was developed and deployed as a proprietary online booking tool in 2022 to cater to the specificity of the market, allowing access to international content, and a wide variety of relevant domestic content including local LCCs and rail.

– Caroline Boey



## About Business Events Sarawak (BESarawak)

Business Events Sarawak is a non-profit organisation supported by the Sarawak Government, industry, and academia to bring domestic and global business events to Sarawak in addition to developing homegrown events.

As Malaysia's first convention bureau, we have the resources and excellent connections to help you develop, organise, and host business events that deliver social and economic impact. Our services are impartial and free.

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- ✓ Corporate Meetings, AGM
- ✓ Corporate Incentives, Teambuilding
- ✓ Seminars, Workshops
- ✓ And Other Business-Related Events

## Sarawak Business Events Fund (SBEF)

### Eligibility

- ✓ Supports all types of business events
- ✓ Application to be made at least 1 - 4 months prior to event date (depending on type of business event)
- ✓ Event must be held for a minimum of 2 days
- ✓ Delegates attending the Convention/ Conference/ Seminar/ Workshop or similar will be required to pay a registration fee

### SBEF Supported Items

- ✓ Bidding Cost
- ✓ Speaker Expenses
- ✓ CMCI Enhancement
- ✓ Exhibition Enhancement
- ✓ Site Inspection
- ✓ Cultural Performance
- ✓ Promotional and Marketing Materials; Delegate Boosting
- ✓ Professional Conference Organiser (PCO), Professional Exhibition Organiser (PEO), Destination Management Company (DMC) and other services
- ✓ Contact us to know more about our supported items

### To Apply or Enquire

For conventions, conferences, seminars, workshops, exhibitions, tradeshows and similar, email Donny Tan, Senior Business Development Manager (donny@sarawakcb.com)

For corporate meetings, AGM, corporate incentives and teambuilding, email Gloria Pahang, Senior Business Development Executive (gloria@sarawakcb.com)

Visit us at [www.businesseventssarawak.com](http://www.businesseventssarawak.com)





Association meeting buyers explored Wellington's event potential during their time at MEETINGS 2023 in June; Welcome Function at the Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa pictured

# Wellington's science appeal

A hefty government investment to make Wellington a science city and the launch of a purpose-built convention centre are changing the fortunes of the destination's meetings sector

By **Karen Yue**

It may come as a surprise for some that New Zealand's capital region, Wellington, is a hotbed for research and innovation, with a collection of 165 business units in the Scientific Research Services sector that employ 10.6 per cent of the national population.

After all, it is often cities like San Francisco, Bangalore, Zurich and Berlin that spring

to mind when one thinks of technology and scientific opportunities.

However, an announcement in May by the government to set aside NZ\$450 million (US\$279.4 million) in funding to make Wellington a "centre of research, science and innovation" will certainly swing international attention its way.

The funding supports plans

that were unveiled last year to "make Wellington a vibrant, resilient, and adaptable centre of research, science and innovation before 2030 by bringing the research community closer together to increase collaboration and performance", according to the proposal published by the Ministry of Business, Innovation & Employment.

News reports in May detailed that the plans would include the establishment of three new research hubs in the city – one will focus on oceans, climate and hazards, another on health and pandemic readiness, and the third on advanced manufacturing and materials, energy futures and biotech.

Speaking at Business Events Industry Aotearoa's MEETINGS 2023 tradeshow in June, Wellington mayor Tory Whanau said: "Bringing innovators, scientists, technologists, investors and professionals to Wellington is an important part of the process to attract conferences that are aligned with (the core areas of research identified by Wellington's science city plans), and then embedding what the conference has to offer to the city itself."

Agreeing, Irette Ferreira, manager at Business Events Wellington, told *TTGmice* that the science city investment will spark off a virtuous cycle, where foreign experts, drawn by the city's reputation as "a

place of opportunity if you are in science and innovation”, will move in and bring with them their connections with international associations, which will in turn help Wellington attract global conferences in their fields. These events will then provide the platform for New Zealand researchers to present their work, attract investors that will fund further studies, and attract even more experts to Wellington.

Business Events Wellington is familiar with the pursuit of science and technology meetings and events – and has seen several victories. The city hosted the Conference of the Oceania Section of the Society for Conservation Biology for 550 pax in 2018; the International Symposium on Epidemiology in Occupational Health for about 400 pax and IEEE 2019 International Conference on Evolutionary Computation for 800 pax, both in 2019; the World Science Fiction Convention for about 2,000 pax in 2020, which went virtual eventually due to the pandemic; and BioTechNZ’s Life Sciences Summit for about 500 pax earlier this year.

Business Events Wellington’s

work is supported by funding that allows the office to incentivise valuable international conferences to come to Wellington. It is also working with Wellington City Council to identify and grow local conferences that are in a sector of interest.

Besides BioTechNZ’s Life Sciences Summit, this approach has also yielded a multi-year contract in 2021 with the New Zealand Game Developers Association to anchor its New Zealand Game Developers Conference in Wellington and to expand the event by incorporating film, screen and interactive media sectors alongside its traditional gaming content.

With Wellington boasting the brand new, purpose-built Tākina Wellington Convention and Exhibition Centre, the capital city is in an even stronger position to convince meeting planners to sign on.

The venue incorporates 10,000m<sup>2</sup> of flexible conferencing space over two levels, with capacity for plenaries up to 1,600. The ground floor exhibition gallery, at 1,280m<sup>2</sup>, is the largest in New Zealand. It opened on May 31 with

more than 50 multi-day conferences booked for the first year – and that number is climbing.

Mayor Whanau said the venue “will allow the city to attract events and provide the right type of space in the right location to ensure that organisers and delegates alike achieve what they need to when gathering here”.

While Wellington checks all the serious boxes for meeting planners deliberating on a suitable host city, it also presents a fun side that will offer event delegates a chance to make beautiful destination memories.

Brooke Bateman, business development manager at Venues Wellington, said overseas meeting attendees are in for a treat when in Wellington, as the city’s food and hotel scene has grown very vibrant through recent years.

“Wellington is not just the seat of the government. It is also a super fun place, with a real focus on hospitality, dining and activities. We had a chance to showcase Wellington’s fun side to a group of Australian meeting buyers recently. We brought them to our museums, enrolled them in a number of workshops to make chocolate, gin, and other things, and gave them a peek into filmmaking and game tech,” shared Bateman.

With artistic hotel QT Wellington and Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa just across the street from Tākina, plus a selection of unique venues and dining establishments located minutes away on foot along the scenic waterfront, it is easy for meeting planners hosting main events at the convention centre to build a varied programme all within walking distance.

Chris Greening, general manager of QT Wellington, expects hospitality businesses to hear the tills ring when “professionals and academics are in town for meetings hosted by associations that Wellington is able to attract (as a result of the science city investment)”.

“These people will take their time to enjoy Wellington,” Greening stated.

## In brief



**Rene de Monchy, chief executive, Tourism New Zealand**

### NZ raises bid targets

Emboldened by New Zealand’s expanded infrastructure for large-scale meetings, growing destination awareness among planners around the world, as well as a stunning bid performance in FY2023, Tourism New Zealand has set itself a higher target of 90 fresh international conference bids worth NZ\$135 million (US\$83.9 million) for the new financial year.

In FY2023, the bureau scored 84 successful bids that are worth NZ\$120 million for New Zealand. The outcomes surpass targets of 70 bids worth NZ\$105 million.

### Taiwan’s new welcome

Meet Taiwan has launched a new marketing campaign for 2023, *Meet Taiwan Open Arms*, to demonstrate the destination’s readiness to welcome business events and corporate meetings from around the world.

The campaign comprises a trilogy of videos based on the Open Arms theme, showcasing various aspects of Taiwan. Activities on social media are planned for the near future.

### Singapore at the top

The newly published ICCA’s Country & City Rankings for 2022 has identified Singapore, Seoul, and Taipei as the top three destinations for association events.

Singapore handled 101 meetings in 2022, followed by Seoul at 66, and Taipei at 55. Rounding off the top 10 Asia-Pacific list, in order from fourth to 10<sup>th</sup>, are Bangkok, Tokyo, Kuala Lumpur, Sydney, Melbourne, Kyoto and Jeju. As for the worldwide rankings, the US topped the list with 690 meetings in 2022, followed by Spain at 528 meetings, and Italy at 522 meetings.



**Clockwise from above: Life Sciences Summit; New Zealand Game Developers Conference; Tākina’s exterior**





Aerial view of Macao &amp; Hengqin, Zhuhai

Weiming Xie / Shutterstock.com

# The Macao-Hengqin advantage

With the new “One Event, Two Places” format, MICE planners can now organise multi-venue events to capitalise on the tourism resources of the two locations

**S**trong government support, well-equipped exhibition and convention facilities purpose-built for events of varying sizes, huge hotel inventory, myriad of entertainment and shopping options, as well as unique heritage and cultural attractions make Macao the ideal business events venue of choice.

With the recent development of the Guangdong-Macao In-depth Cooperation Zone in Hengqin, multi-venue events can now be organised to capitalise on the exhibition advantages and tourism resources of the two locations.

The newly-launched brand image, “MICE<sup>2</sup> Macao x Hengqin”, also serves to promote the collaboration in a bid to attract MICE projects to be hosted in the two locations under the “One Event, Two Places” format.

As a vote of confidence for the UNESCO Creative City of Gastronomy, 208 MICE events were held in Macao in the first quarter of 2023 alone – more than double the figure compared to the same period last year. Hosting nearly 200,000 attendees represented a year-on-year increase of about 20 per cent too.

Many conferences with over 10,000 participants have chosen to stage their events in Macao’s new exhibition venues.

For example, newly-opened Galaxy International Convention Center’s first event in April, USANA BabyCare Sales Convention, played host to a 10,500-strong crowd. It is also the first major business event in the destination since the lifting of Covid restrictions.

Notable gatherings like The 14<sup>th</sup> International Infrastructure

Investment and Construction Forum, Weibo Global Business Partner Conference and Asian IR Expo, have also picked Macao as their host city.

Other influential events like the Asia Performance Entertainment Expo and Global Legal & Sustainable Timber Forum 2023 are in the pipeline for this year.

Leading the charge to promote Macao as a business events destination, the Macao Trade and Investment Promotion Institute (IPIM) offers a one-stop service, as well as support programmes for organisers and planners keen to host their gatherings in Macao.

Apart from bidding support, qualified events will also benefit from financial assistance on expenses such as those incurred for accommodation, venue rental, F&B catering, hardware facilities and event promotion activities.



SUCCESS STORY  
**2**

**Exhibitions can adopt “One Event, Two Places” format**

**EVENT:** China (Macao) High-quality Consumption Exhibition & Hengqin Global Bay Areas Forum (November-December 2022)

**SIZE:** More than 220 brands from 172 enterprises

**VENUE:** The Venetian Macao – Cotai Expo and Shoppes at Four Seasons (Exhibition), Hyatt Regency Hengqin (Conference)

**HIGHLIGHTS:** At the first event held in Macao and Hengqin under the “One Event, Two Places” format, delegates got to see a wide range of premium products from lifestyle to healthcare offerings and Chinese brands capitalised on opportunities to expand into overseas markets. The collective showcase of state-owned enterprises strengthened their branding and spotlighted their ability to cater to consumers’ rising luxury needs. The Hengqin Global Bay Areas Forum also invited renowned personalities to give speeches and seminars to highlight the Macao-Hengqin cooperation advantages and promote business exchanges.

**WHY CHOOSE MACAO AS THE HOST CITY:** The new format could leverage on Macao’s opening to the world, rely on Guangdong’s huge population and market, as well as utilise the incentives available for the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area and the Free Trade Zone.

SUCCESS STORY  
**1**

**Ideal for big-scale events**

**EVENT:** USANA BabyCare Sales Convention (April 2023)

**SIZE:** 10,500 direct sellers from China and overseas

**VENUE:** Galaxy International Convention Center

**HIGHLIGHTS:** It was USANA BabyCare’s first national distributor conference post-pandemic and the number of delegates exceeded 10,000. The founders and senior management team from the US headquarters placed great importance on the event and even flew to Macao to join in the gathering.

**WHY CHOOSE MACAO AS THE HOST CITY:** With world-class MICE facilities and service packages, Macao is one of the few ideal MICE destinations that is capable of accommodating over 10,000 participants.



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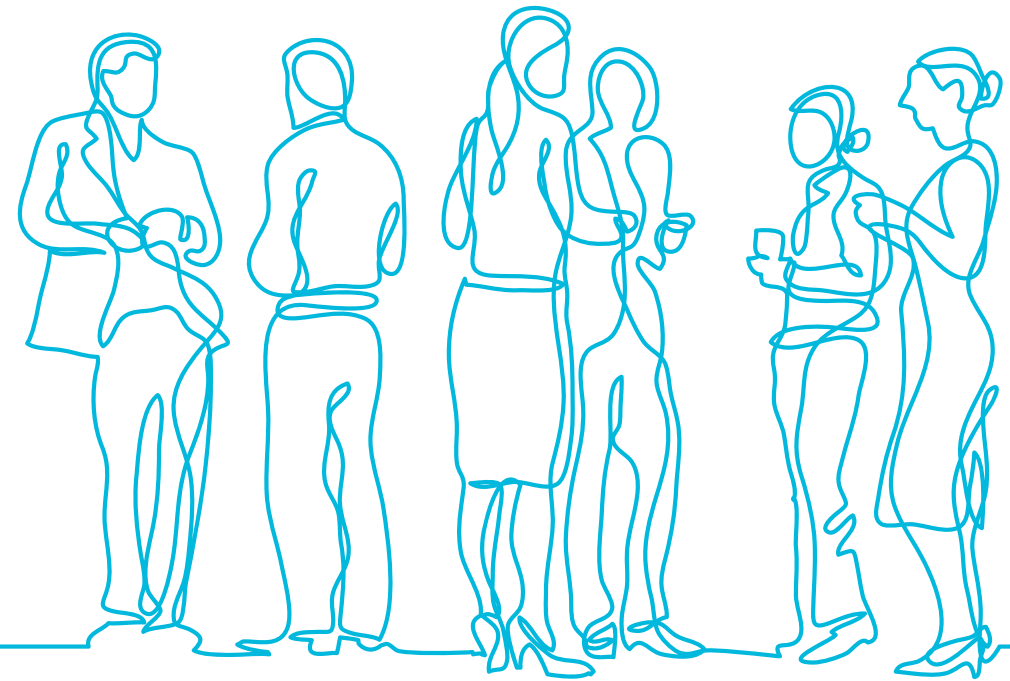


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# Meeting commitments

Business events are returning to hotels and resorts across Asia, and prioritising properties with versatile spaces and in-house meetings specialists that can bring value to their programmes, discovers **Karen Yue**



**B**anquet and event teams at top hotels and resorts in key Asian business hubs have been swept up in a whirlwind since the start of 2023. It is a welcome whirlwind though, as properties celebrate the return of business activities and travel.

The mood at Marriott International is particularly upbeat. According to Ramesh Daryanani, vice president of global sales, Marriott International (Asia Pacific), corporate and group performance has been “robust”.

“As of June 2023, we saw a strong return in demand with year-to-date growth rates for both segments recording above 2019 levels by nine per cent and 18 per cent respectively,” Daryanani told *TTGmice*, adding that business events delivered approximately 20 per cent revenue contribution to Marriott International’s hotels in 2022 alone.

IHG Hotels & Resorts has also seen corporate travel and group bookings returning in many markets since the end of Covid controls.

“Although hybrid working has now

become the norm for many companies, the desire to bring teams together has remained strong,” noted Joff Romoff, vice president, commercial, South-east Asia and Korea at IHG Hotels & Resorts.

Chatrium Grand Bangkok, whose grand opening in November 2022 was timed perfectly for the business events comeback, has hosted 50 events for more than 5,000 delegates altogether as of July 3.

Its general manager, Daniel Kerr, believes that the hotel will thrive on the back of Thailand’s strong business events sector, which is forecasted to generate US\$12.2 billion by 2027, up from US\$6.9 billion in 2019.

Indeed, a buzzing events calendar for many Asian business cities is the source of confidence for both Marriott’s Daryanani and IHG’s Romoff.

Romoff shared that with popular events, such as the Auto Shanghai – Shanghai International Automobile Industry Exhibition, resuming in China, properties especially those with conference halls are enjoying good business.

Daryanani expects Marriott International hotels to show even better numbers from business events by end-2023, thanks to the “widespread return of business events to the region, such as the recently concluded 42<sup>nd</sup> ASEAN Summit in Indonesia and (the ongoing series of) G20 meetings in India”.

He added: “Outlook for Asia-Pacific’s business events industry is bright, and is expected to grow at a CAGR of 8.6 per cent to reach US\$441.1 billion by 2025. In line with these forecasts, we are seeing greater collaboration between the public and private sector to grow the region’s business events offerings.

“For example, the Singapore Tourism Board has signed agreements with global event organisers, Comexposium and Italian Exhibition Group, to grow its reputation as a preferred destination for international business events, while the Thailand Convention and Exhibition Bureau announced a five-year strategic action plan to attract over 160 million business events travellers to the country.

“Overall, the steady return of business events in Asia-Pacific, and the continued demand for face-to-face interactions and networking opportunities, are poised to drive growth beyond recovery.”

## SUPPORTIVE STANCE

Venue specifics and prices are no longer the only things business event planners pay attention to, observed hoteliers.

Daryanani said there is a “clear shift in priorities and considerations” when planners deliberate on potential hotels.

“The biggest trend we have noticed is an increase in demand for more offerings that allow event delegates to contribute meaningfully to the local community and their desire for bleisure (or blended) travel,” he said.

“In addition, as the business events industry leapfrogs from digital to physical events, planners also consider adaptive spaces that can be seamlessly molded into an experiential environment that inspires their attendees,” he added.

These considerations mean planners ex-

pect hotel suppliers to be partners – more than just accommodation and venue providers – that can help them impress their guests with meaningful experiences representative of the destination.

Daryanani pointed to Marriott International's team of associates who will "support planners from start to end – from designing and executing tailored events and meetings to enriching programmes with unique and meaningful experiences".

The group's "wide portfolio of brands across the region's most sought-after destinations" also ensures blended travel desires are fulfilled.

Citing an example, Daryanani said Sheraton Kagoshima in Japan is an attractive place for work and play. Situated on a picturesque bay with a backdrop of Mount Sakurajima, the hotel sports 12 event rooms; public spaces that encourage interaction; and destination-specific rest and relaxation, such as the hotel's spa which boasts a Japanese-style onsen, natural volcanic hot spring pools, and foot baths.

Over at IHG, desires for sustainable

meeting options, as well as versatile properties that facilitate the integration of work and leisure, are most prominent, according to Romoff.

Crowne Plaza Hotels & Resorts is especially cut out for the blended travel trend. "The brand truly understands guest needs for productivity, restoration and inspiration, and our properties are built in a thoughtful manner that integrates work and leisure," he remarked.

"Guests stay in rooms designed in three zones to support work, relaxation and sleep, and will enjoy the use of the Plaza Workspace which offers flexible and open working spaces. Plaza Workspace has been introduced to the region at Crowne Plaza Phu Quoc Starbay and Crowne Plaza Vinh Yen City Centre, and we will see these spaces in our upcoming openings in Thailand and Malaysia," Romoff added.

Besides providing "skilled support and trained on-site teams to ensure an inspiring experience for all in attendance", IHG also has a reward programme for planners.

The Meet How You Meet promotion,

ongoing across South-east Asia, South Korea, Japan and Australasia, dishes out exclusive perks that vary across properties.

For instance, at InterContinental Adelaide in Australia, planners can enjoy F&B benefits, limited complimentary room upgrades and more when they hit a minimum spend of A\$5,000 (US\$3,321). At Holiday Inn & Suites Jakarta Gajah Mada in Indonesia, a spend of at least US\$1,000 will grant planners access to limited complimentary room upgrades, welcome drinks, and F&B discounts during group events.

Meet How You Meet is available to events booked by December 31, 2023, and held from now until June 30, 2024.

Planners are further supported by the IHG One Rewards loyalty programme and IHG Business Edge, a dedicated SME programme that helps clients book hotels more easily. IHG has also partnered with Groups360 to enrol hotels in Direct Book – an self-service online platform allowing customers the option to instantly book simple meetings and small groups, including event space and guestrooms.

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# Pretty places to meet

Aesthetics may not be the prime deciding factor when it comes to hotel selection for business events, but a well-designed property with creative spaces can leave lasting, positive memories for attendees. By **Karen Yue**



## Grand Mercure Hanoi, Vietnam

Grand Mercure Hanoi is an elegant treasure trove of arts and crafts, with lacquerware from Ha Thái lacquer village, Chu Dau pottery from Hai Duong province, and Bat Trang ceramics on display throughout the hotel.

The interior is inspired by rice, with shimmering water-filled fields, hillside terraces, and the colour and shape of individual grains showcased in many elements throughout the hotel.

There are two function rooms on offer, with Trang An Grand Ballroom being the largest at 324m<sup>2</sup>. This venue can be divided into two smaller spaces for 120 and 80 guests respectively in theatre-style. Another venue option is Dong Do 1 and 2, which can seat 15 each in theatre setting.

Elsewhere, four restaurants and bars provide options for social gatherings. Each boasts original culinary concepts – Locally, which promises contemporary all-day dining with international flavours and local favourites; Cat Vi, a signature 15<sup>th</sup> floor Asian brasserie that blends regional gastronomy and Vietnamese soul food with spectacular city views; Van's lobby lounge; and VIVU Rooftop Sky Bar.

## JW Marriott Jeju Resort & Spa, South Korea

Crafted by award-winning interior designer Bill Bensley, the new JW Marriott Jeju Resort & Spa impresses not only with its architecture and design but also with its location.

The property takes inspiration from the raw natural beauty of Jeju and its farming and fishing traditions, with landscaping crafted to take in low lava stone walls, cabbage fields, and mustard flowers that bloom in springtime, and a palette of grey, black and white adopted across the hotel to represent the local volcanic landscapes.



With it perched on a cliffside, the hotel grants guests stunning views of the volcanic coastlines and endless stretch of blue ocean.

As its surroundings are directly connected to Route 7 of the island's famous Olle Trail, guests can easily head off for a liberating hike. For more wellness activities, check in with the hotel's line-up of yoga, pilates and sound healing sessions.

For meetings and events, the hotel offers a Grand Ballroom that can accommodate up to 600 guests, as well as other customisable function rooms.



## Pan Pacific Orchard, Singapore

Soaring above Singapore's prime shopping belt, Pan Pacific Orchard is a verdant sanctuary with an exemplary architectural design that draws nature inwards, featuring four seamlessly connected stacks – Forest, Beach, Garden and Cloud – each providing exceptional experiences across unique environments.

Its architectural design – think terraced landscaping, which takes in 14,000m<sup>2</sup> of foliage and water features – sets it apart from the malls along Orchard Road.

Event planners looking for a venue high up in the clouds will be interested in the pillarless 600m<sup>2</sup> Claymore Ballroom, which features a panoramic LED video wall, natural daylight filtering in from floor-to-ceiling windows, and an outdoor terrace for

al fresco receptions. This space has ample capacity for 420 guests.



## The Westin Resort & Spa, Himalayas

Nestled in the picturesque foothills of the mighty Himalayas and within the Rishikesh pilgrimage and yoga hub, The Westin Resort & Spa, Himalayas cuts a majestic figure with tall columns, high ceilings, and an earthy palette dominated by shades of white.

The resort occupies a unique vantage point, where guests can rejuvenate their minds, bodies, and souls by connecting with the natural splendor of Rishikesh.

With the Westin brand's strength in wellness, guests here are assured of opportunities to tune up their mind and body during their stay.

For corporate gatherings, the hotel offers 1,985m<sup>2</sup> of event spaces, including a pillarless Grand Ballroom for up to 750 guests. Alternatively, take social events outdoors on the lawn where mountain views spill out generously.

## Soundbite

"For our corporate clients coming in from Europe and the US, design-driven hotels and their themed function rooms make the storytelling for Asia, and the destination, more interesting. They allow us to showcase the unique cultural and artistic aspects of the region, offering a deeper and more authentic experience. This, in turn, adds value to the events we organise and creates a stronger connection between attendees and the destination."

### Atika Rosli

Chief & founder, Beyond Events, Singapore

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# Raising the bar

Bangkok's events industry continues to build traction and momentum towards regaining pre-pandemic levels of success

By Alastair Newport

**B**angkok's business events industry has restored its traction and built on its recovery momentum this year, and the city is well on its way to regaining previous levels of success obtained prior to the pandemic.

According to the Thailand Convention and Exhibition Bureau (TCEB), 1Q2023 saw Thailand see the arrival of 7.9 million business events travellers, 183,618 of which were from overseas, generating 8.5 billion baht (US\$240.2 million) for the industry. Buoyed by this, the Thai government has forecast a bumper 2023/2024, aiming for around 18.6 million business travellers, and a target of 109 billion baht for the sector.

International travellers may be flocking to Thailand, but domestic organisations are also loving Bangkok as a host destination for conferences, meetings and expos, observed Tim Russell, head of marketing communications at local DMC and tour company, Smiling Albino.

"With ongoing health concerns and increasing flight costs, we found that in the last couple of years, Thailand has hosted a lot more domestic MICE trips, as Thais who might normally travel abroad have been rediscovering the delights of their own country, and realising why foreign visitors love it so much."

Confident in the attraction of Thailand and Bangkok to both locals and global visitors as an attractive business events

◀ Bangkok's Wat Arun at sunset

destination, TCEB has put together a bold five-year plan to maximise footfall and bring in more than 160 million MICE travellers and generate 945 billion baht for the country.

Dubbed TCEB Go, the plan incorporates the *Thailand MICE to Meet You 2023* campaign, which has already seen some vital updates to the country's event infrastructure. These include dedicated MICE Lanes at Suvarnabhumi and Don Mueang airports, which processed 3,500 business events travellers between October 2022 and March 2023.

TCEB has also made an effort to recognise 52 organisations with the Thailand Sustainable Event Management Standard (TSEM). The certification enables event and travel planners to easily select experienced and knowledgeable local partners and suppliers who understand the importance of sustainability, while being able to provide cutting-edge audiovisual, lighting, data analysis, electronic ticketing, and reservations solutions.

Stefan Bruns, general manager Thailand, Diethelm Travel Group, has noticed that the popularity of the Thai capital has led to significant changes to existing infrastructure.

"The MICE business in Bangkok is seeing a notable surge, particularly for conferences and incentives. A prime example of this growth is the increasing prominence of Queen Sirikit National Convention Center (QSNCC) as a venue for both conferences

and exhibitions."

Located in the heart of Bangkok, after three years of remodelling inside and out, QSNCC's refurbishment was completed at the end of 2022. Its top-down renovations mean the venue now provides more than 78,500m<sup>2</sup> of event space across four conference rooms, eight exhibition halls, four conference halls, and four assembly spaces, alongside 50 meeting rooms and breakout areas.

Since its official opening, QSNCC has held over 400 international and domestic events to date, with more slated to happen in the coming months.

"Previously, QSNCC mainly hosted domestic exhibitions and meetings, but (since the revamp), we have welcomed international tradeshows, global conferences, and entertainment events," Sutichai Buditvorapoom, executive vice president – marketing, sales and operations division from QSNCC told *TTGmice*.

He further shared that QSNCC's portfolio has also changed slightly after its top-to-toe overhaul, where new clients include luxury brand launches such as Porsche and Lamborghini, as well as music concerts. Longstanding clients, such as the annual Book Expo Thailand – which registered around 160,000 in footfall during its October 2022 show – also continue to hold their events at QSNCC.

When asked to outline QSNCC's strategy for the next five years, Sutichai shared: "Our profile will be clearer next year. This



**We now have the capability to run several events at one go. In August 2023, we ran four concurrent events successfully. We are happy with the response to our opening, and the line-up of business so far.**

Sutichai Buditvorapoom,  
Executive vice president – marketing, sales and operations division, QSNCC

is because we are also trying to bring in new events in the innovation and technology space, as well as fintech. One notable win is Money 20/20, which announced (in April) that our venue will be hosting the 2024 edition.”

Moving forward, QSNCC will be focused on luring more business from Asia, as the “economy is strong, and corporates are willing to spend”. Further afield, the venue will continue to seek out business in France, Germany and UK as well.

For Bruns, the centre’s accessibility is a highlight: “Its strategic location, in proximity to Sukhumvit hotels and the MRT station, makes it even more appealing for attendees favouring public transportation.”

QSNCC isn’t the only venue with a packed calendar, where events this year include the 62<sup>nd</sup> ICCA Congress 2023 (November 12-15) and Asian Pacific Digestive Week 2023 (December 6-9).



Queen Sirikit National Convention Centre’s exterior

Other venues with major upcoming events include the World Allergy Congress 2023 (December 1-3) at Centara Grand & Bangkok Convention Centre at CentralWorld, while the Bangkok International Trade & Exhibition Centre

(BITEC) will host Oil & Gas Thailand 2023 (October 18-20), Mobility Live Asia 2023 (November 1-2), and Thailand Friendly Design Expo 2023 (December 7-10). – **Additional reporting by Rachel AJ Lee**



# Networking triumphs

By **Alastair Newport**



FACE (an acronym for Founders and Creative Entrepreneurs), a new Bangkok-based organisation focused on bringing entrepreneurs and startups face-to-face with investors, hosted a networking and business pitching event at Rosewood Bangkok earlier in May this year.

The event within Rosewood Bangkok’s striking Pavilion Ballroom allowed the

startups to socialise, build relationships, and showcase their products and ideas in a Shark Tank/Dragon’s Den-style competition that could potentially secure investment from VCs and Angel Investors.

Poe Aye, the founder of FACE, chose Rosewood for its status as an international luxury five-star property, and the quality of its tech support.

“The 320m<sup>2</sup> Pavilion Ballroom manages to pull off a clever trick of being both a handsome modern venue that will lend gravitas to any event. Yet, it remains an intimate space that makes guests comfortable and encourages interaction, which is perfect for our needs,” explained Aye.

Furthermore, with investors travelling into Bangkok from places such as Hong Kong and Israel, and the density of Bangkok’s traffic somewhat legendary, Aye cited Rosewood for the team’s advice and efficiency, ensuring guests navigated Sukhumvit rush hour and arrived on time, fresh and ready to network.

Rosewood Bangkok’s tech support, alongside FACE tech sponsors Pivot Digital, also excelled when there was a communication breakdown, when the live streaming connection for the event was suddenly broken. Working together, the teams swiftly restored the stream and continued with the rest of the evening without much disruption.

For events further down the line, Aye explained that she is potentially looking to add even further value to FACE events by partnering with local DMCs and tour companies. This will add value for longhaul participants who have made their way to Thailand, and help them discover some of the best parts of Bangkok and its culture.

“Bangkok’s rich culture and ancient history, and modern creativity, are so special. I want participants to be able to experience a real slice of the city’s energy, creativity and traditions. Guided excursions with locals are the best way to do it,” elaborated Aye.

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# Dual fulfillment

The Maldives has made strides in positioning the island nation as an enviable destination that perfectly balances work and play

By Rachel AJ Lee

**T**raditionally perceived as a honeymoon destination, the Maldives Marketing and PR Corporation (MMPRC) has been hard at work for the last three years in pushing to show the world that island nation is also suitable for business events with a touch of leisure.

That is why *Redefining MICE*, Maldives' global business events campaign launched in 2021, did not focus on merely event venues. Instead, it also played up Maldives' natural beauty and activities, such as snorkelling with manta rays, to demonstrate the breadth of possible event ideas that offer planners a seamless transition between work and play.

"*Redefining MICE* has helped to raise awareness about MICE in the Maldives. Crossroads Maldives (an integrated entertainment destination developed and operated by S Hotels and Resorts) and other resorts with MICE facilities have enjoyed an increase in events since 2022," Crossroads Maldives' cluster director of sales & marketing, David Arul Pragasam, told *TTGmice*.

He is "confident that this positive trend will continue", evident as "plenty of enquiries and quotes are being provided for 2024 and 2025".

The recent Visit Maldives Storytellers' Conference 2023 was a clear demonstra-

tion of both the destination and the integrated resort's ability to welcome major business events.

CEO of Soneva, Sonu Shivdasani, has also observed a growing interest among corporate clients for at its two properties in the Maldives – Soneva Fushi and Soneva Jani.

He said: "We have seen a healthy surge of 40 to 50 per cent in enquiries and bookings specifically related to MICE from shorthaul markets such as Singapore, India and the GCC (Gulf Cooperation Council), and look forward to watching the segment grow further."

Soneva is no stranger to large-scale events, as it runs JLF Soneva Fushi, a 10-day festival celebrating literature, art, culture and live performances.

"While this does not fall under MICE, events like these provide us with invaluable experience in hosting large-scale gatherings. The insights and expertise from efficiently managing logistics and delivering exceptional hospitality... strengthen our ability to handle large MICE groups effectively," Shivdasani remarked.

Helen Bolton, director of sales and marketing, Mihiri Island Resort, is also seeing incentive requests filtering through to her property. She has put together targeted marketing plans to encourage island buy-outs during the low season between May and October.

"Traditionally, our markets are Germany, Austria and Switzerland. But this year, we're really focusing on Asia-Pacific, such as China, Hong Kong, Taiwan, Australia and New Zealand," Bolton shared.

Shivdasani added: "During the low season, we focus on attracting MICE-related business. We have designed three- to five-night packages that combine business and leisure, which includes F&B, wellness programmes, and excursions to showcase Maldives' natural beauty."

Suresh Dissanayake, assistant vice president – sales & marketing at Heritance Aarah & Adaaran Resorts, is similarly targeting Asia-Pacific groups and events.



**Maldives offers an out-of-the-box meeting space. You don't have huge areas with air-conditioning rules, and you can play with funky ideas such as having meetings on beanbags. This is what we are focused on creating right now.**

Helen Bolton,  
Director of sales and marketing, Mihiri Island Resort

## MALDIVES

“People may not travel all the way from Europe to Maldives for a conference. We’re focused on South-east Asia, where there are direct flights within a four- to five-hour radius, making it convenient for them to fly to the Maldives for a corporate event, and have leisure time,” he elaborated.

To get the word out, Dissanayake actively participates in tradeshows such as IMEX Frankfurt.

“It’s a big investment for us but we have to look at the long run. Companies don’t decide immediately whether they will hold an event in the Maldives, it usually takes six months. But we are patient, and I plan to grow the MICE segment,” he shared.

Crossroads Maldives has also joined forces with MPRC to participate in key trade-shows like IMEX and ITB Asia, and uses business events lead generation tools such as 1000Meetings, Cvent and Meeting Broker.



An outdoor gala dinner at Crossroads Maldives

“Having a strong presence at major tradeshows is crucial,” Shivdasani stressed.

But for the Maldives to establish itself as a recognised business events destination, Shivdasani said government support is vital.

He added: “It is also necessary to collaborate with renowned MICE associations

like ICCA and MPI (Meeting Professionals International), as well as professional MICE chapters, DMCs, and event management companies. These collaborations can provide valuable expertise, resources, and networks that cater specifically to the needs of business events.”

## Case in point

# The power of stories

By Rachel AJ Lee

The Visit Maldives Storytellers’ Conference 2023 wanted to show that the Maldives is more than just sun, sand, and sea, as the destination possesses a raft of other unique offerings that can ‘Redefine MICE’ – the very name of the destination’s business events-focused campaign.

Held from May 30 to June 2, 2023, at Crossroads Maldives, the conference 2023 gathered over 70 content creators, journalists, bloggers, and media – all selected through a social media competition. The

50 winners, representing over 20 different nationalities and ethnicities, were selected by a judging panel, and all scored a conference invitation, as well as a 3D2N trip to eight regions in the Maldives.

During the conference, participants learnt how to create compelling narratives that showcase the true essence of a destination, through insightful panel discussions, interactive workshops, and networking sessions. Presented by influential speakers such as Doug Lansky, Jessica Nabongo, Vikas Swarup, and Eleni Giokos, topics covered sustainable tourism, responsible travel, cultural preservation, and ways to promote destinations.

There were also pop-up stalls from leading artists in the Maldives, which showcased local products and the skill of the talented local artisans. Participants also learnt about sustainable tourism, and Maldivian culture and heritage, during breakout sessions.

Held at the Sheraton Maldives Full Moon Resort and Spa, the sustainable tourism workshop focused on coral propa-

gation, and coral frame building. Delegates were able to build frames, participate in a planting session, and learn about the delicate balance of marine ecosystems. And in true *Redefining MICE* style, participants also got to enjoy a relaxed snorkelling session at the house reef.

At another breakout session on the Atoll Villa Sandbank, participants were given a raucous welcome with boduberu (Maldivian drum) music. There, they learnt about the history of fishing from the Maldives Industrial Fisheries Company, and the importance of tuna, a mainstay in Maldivian cuisine. Participants also watch locals showcase traditional fish-filleting skills, took part in a cooking class, and received a culinary-themed gift basket.

The last breakout session demonstrated the ancient and peaceful way of Maldivian life in the past, and an ancient form of *kasabu viyun* (embroidery weaving). Delegates also watched the retelling of one of the most popular folk stories in the country – the tale of the star-crossed lovers Dhon Hiyala and Alifulhu – and wrote down their wishes on palm leaves, and planted them on the shoreline.

A gala dinner was also held, doubling up as an award ceremony for the social media competitions held during the conference.

As a memorable finale, participants were whisked away to explore one of eight Maldivian regions – Raa Atoll, Laamu Atoll, Ari Atoll, Vaavu Atoll, Haa Alifu and Haa Dhaalu Atolls, Kaafu Atoll, Addu Atoll, and Fuvahmulah. The experience allowed them to showcase the various destinations to their followers.



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TAIWAN

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# Transform the future

Taiwan demonstrates its commitment to business events by developing more world-class facilities for event organisers

By Mimi Hudoyo

Over the last few years and through the pandemic, Taiwan has kept busy constructing and upgrading event venues across destination to host events both large and small.

In Kaohsiung, new event spaces, accommodation options and supporting infrastructure have risen in Asia New Bay Area. One new space is the Kaohsiung Music Center, which opened in 2021 in Love River Bay, the junction between Love River and Kaohsiung Port.

Su Wei-Hsiang, project manager with Kaohsiung Meeting & Event Promotion Office, said: “The Kaohsiung Music Center has an auditorium (Hi-Ing Hall) in the Wave Tower, which can take up to 6,000 people. In addition, the outdoor square (Hi-Breeze Square) can accommodate about 10,000, and is perfectly suited for group activities.”

In the meantime, The Coral Zone, an independent two-storey building within the same compound, provides a multi-functional space for experiential activities, exhibitions, and businesses.

This facility joins existing venues such as the Kaohsiung Exhibition Center (KEC) which has a capacity of 1,424 standard booths and 4,000 people; the National Kaohsiung Center for the Arts which has

◀ **Glory Pier and Pier 2 Art Center in the port of Kaohsiung**

a total capacity of 5,861 seats; Kaohsiung Arena with the capacity of up to 15,000 people; and the 880-seat Dadong Arena.

Elsewhere in the port city, Kaohsiung Port Cruise Terminal recently opened in March 2023. Shaped like a whale, it can berth two large cruise ships of 225,000 at one time. Its 24-hour boardwalk – which offers shopping and dining – links to the new Pop Music Center, and the arts and shopping district within a green necklace along the waterfront.

Kaohsiung does not just have the hardware, it also has beefed up its software.

Su revealed that the Asia New Bay Area is the most comprehensive 5G AIoT (Artificial intelligence of things) implementation site in Taiwan.

The KEC, for example, participated in the 5G AIoT Taiwan Industry Innovation Platform Subsidy Project, and launched its own 5G private network in the venue.

Renee Chu, project director of KEC, said: “I’m proud to say that we are the first exhibition centre and only one so far to provide a private 5G environment.”

Amber Shih, deputy marketing manager of KEC, elaborated: “The 5G private network allows users to receive the signals in their mobile devices at the location, with the benefits being high bandwidth, and low latency. These 5G applications help to enhance attendees’ on-site experience.”

There are ways KEC has made use of the 5G improvements, such as a 3D 4K beam display, used to project speakers who may

not be physically present at the venue, but yet are able to interact directly with the audience in real time.

There is also an app that functions as an indoor navigation tool that leads exhibition buyers to the booths they are looking for, as well as a two-way translation display using AI, where users can speak in their mother tongue and the app will show the translated speech.

“(With 5G AIoT, event planners) can deploy subtitles for an online conference, reducing the need for interpreters. Attendees just need to use their own mobile phones with the app installed,” Shih said.

KEC also provides a 5G Reality Studio. Providing an example, Chu said: “We cooperated with one exhibitor at the Fastener Show and brought the entire 5G production team to their factory to film a panorama video, before ‘bringing’ the factory to our exhibition hall.”



**TaiNEX 2’s state-of-the-art facilities are a testament to Taiwan’s commitment to advancing the MICE industry and (creating a) convenient business environment.**

Grace Chen,  
Deputy executive director, TaiNEX 2

During the show, exhibitors took buyers on a virtual tour, which helped them learn about the entire manufacturing process while physically standing in KEC, but was immersive enough to feel as if they were touring the factory.

“By doing this, we cut down on travel time and transportation costs, as well as reduce carbon emissions from having to travel from KEC to the factory,” noted Chu.

Over in the capital, Grace Chen, deputy executive director of Taipei Nangang Exhibition Center Hall 2 (TaiNEX 2), said: “TaiNEX 2’s state-of-the-art facilities are a testament to Taiwan’s commitment to advancing the MICE industry and (creating a) convenient business environment. We are also the first exhibition hall to be awarded Green Building Label – Golden Level in Taiwan.”

Owned by the government and operated by Taiwan External Trade Development Council, TaiNEX 2 has 34,480m<sup>2</sup> of space, comprising two exhibition floors and a conference floor. Located on the 7<sup>th</sup> floor of the building, the Skylight Convention Centre offers 14 convertible meeting rooms



Serhana Chekhovskaya/istock

**TaiNEX 2 opened in 2019**

with a maximum capacity of 3,600.

Combined with the TaiNEX 1, this convention and exhibition centre becomes the biggest in Taiwan, providing nearly 80,000m<sup>2</sup> of event space.

New venues have also risen in other cities. For example, the Taoyuan Convention and Exhibition Center is set to be fully

operational by end-2023, where the main hall has a capacity of up to 6,000 people.

Further south, the Tainan Convention and Exhibition Center opened last April. The venue comprises four levels above ground and one level underground, and offers 10 flexible meeting spaces that can accommodate from 20 to 1,000 people.

## **What's new**

By **Mimi Hudoyo**



### **Hotel Provintia**

Located in the old town district of Tainan, the recently-renovated Hotel Provintia now offers 90 keys occupying levels 5 to 12, across five room types. On level 8 are facilities such as a library, meeting room, retro gaming room, self-service laundry, gym, and an open kitchen.

F&B options include NAN Bar 1, and Restaurant La Cupola on Level R, which serves up breakfast, and western dishes such as pork knuckle with sauerkraut, duck confit, and lamb chop with shredded pistachios.



### **The Grand Hotel Taipei**

The 14-storey building was built in 1952 by Soong Mei-Ing, wife of Chiang Kai-Shek, and offers guided tours of its secret passageways.

Two tunnels, one in the east wing and the other in the west wing, were built in 1970 for emergency evacuation for Chiang. The east passage leads to 823 Artillery Battle Memorial Park, while the one on the west leads to the former residence of Kung Ling-wei, the first general manager of the hotel which is now a museum.



### **Old New Taiwanese Cuisine**

The Old New Taiwanese Cuisine in Kaohsiung is a Michelin Guide-recommended restaurant that offers modern interpretations of traditional Taiwanese dishes.

Seven- to eight-course omakase menus are offered at different price points, all featuring traditional banquet cooking updated with finesse and sophistication. The restaurant’s interiors showcase Hakka cultural elements, and can accommodate groups of up to 520.



### **Hwa Gung Tea**

Starting with a modest tea shop, Hwa Gung Tea (HGT) has grown to become a tea company that specialises in growing, harvesting, and processing its own tea leaves from the highest regions of Taiwan.

HGT offers tasting sessions of its teas along with snacks, which are sometimes hosted by Johnny Tu, the CEO and fifth-generation proprietor of HGT. Sessions usually come with a mini history lesson that covers Taiwan’s tea history, and HGT’s evolution since its founding in 1918.

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# Catch up with Steve Lidgey

The general manager of Travel Asia a la Carte relishes the challenge of transforming ordinary gatherings into unforgettable spectacles

By Marissa Carruthers



Also, handling an event for a premium VIP bank with curated art and shopping tours. Handling so many influential, high-end guests was challenging with some on the golf course, others exploring temples with archaeologists, others doing artisan workshops and so on. At times it seemed like 20 different things were happening at the same time... which in fact there were!

authorities, and making sure we have various event permissions. I need to be prepared for someone to say that what was previously agreed is now no longer allowed, and deal with it quickly. It is usually a negotiation as long as you keep to the rules.

## Name the most memorable event that you organised.

My favourite event was arguably, also my biggest challenge. It was a gala event for 330 staff from the Boston Consulting Group in Phnom Penh.

The original request was to organise a dinner at the National Museum. However, it was not feasible for the group size, so in the end, we used a large hall – often used for weddings – and turned it into a *Game of Thrones*-type arena to keep with the evening's theme.

## How do you keep your team motivated?

Event organisation can be difficult at times with long hours, demanding clients and last-minute requests. However, by having the right staff in place, and getting them to understand events are a wonderful learning experience, it can be difficult but fun.

And of course, the team afterparty is a chance to relax, before the next challenge!

## How do you ensure the events you deliver are unique?

I speak with the organiser and end client and see what they want to achieve from the event, before curating what is possible in Cambodia. Some of the organiser's dreams cannot happen, but we can create unforgettable moments – naturally with a Cambodian flavour – for their event.

## What are some of the biggest challenges you face, and how do you overcome them?

Often, it is dealing with the

## What do you like best about what you do?

Every event is a new challenge with the chance to be creative. It's not about selling package A or B, it is about providing guests with incredible, rewarding experiences.

## How has the events landscape in Cambodia changed in recent years?

Cambodia is no longer seen as a backwater. It can be a wonderful playground for authentic and enlightening experiences to suit all markets and budgets.

**My favorite events have been some of the most challenging, but that's what motivates us and, ultimately, makes us more creative.**



## What are some of the highlights of your events career?

Themed events that show the best face of Cambodia to the world, temple dinners, work-

ing with Phare the Cambodian Circus for pop-up events at hotels, and also for gala dinners with performances set against the backdrop of Angkorian temples.

A new two-year partnership between SACEOS and NTUC LearningHub will introduce sustainability-related courses to upskill and reskill the business events industry. These courses will offer insights into sustainability concepts, framework development, and operationalisation.

Pathways will also be made available towards the MICE Sustainability Certification, which is currently being refreshed and due to be completed by end-2023.

"The Certified Sustainable Event Advocate Certification Programme provides a stackable credential pathway where individual modules can be stacked up towards an industry-recognised certification... Not only will this partnership position Singapore as the mover of sustainability in the global MICE events industry, the collaboration will also benefit workers in enhancing their career prospects and lifelong employability, said Jeremy Ong, CEO, NTUC LearningHub.

Agency action

# Collective cadence

By Marissa Carruthers

**Vietnam Events Group (VEG)** has been designing and delivering top-notch experiential events in Vietnam since launching in 2016, with its team core to operations.

"Our vision is to create a creative ecosystem and development of Vietnam's event industry," said CEO Bill Nguyen.

VEG's team of 25 permanent staff and more than 50 freelancers curate a range of events spanning music festivals, major conferences, gala dinners and corporate events. These include the Honda Youth Festival 2021, with more than 150,000 attendees across four events, and Southeast Asia Futsal Football Tournament 2019.

"We believe a great event will provide audiences with impact, emotion and connection. If we can execute with excellence, we can help clients make more effective connections with guests," Nguyen added.

To keep his team motivated, Nguyen created a VEG Football Team Culture, which promotes team spirit and clear communication. This, he



said, helps teammates perform to the best of their abilities, and be able to share their opinions freely.

In addition, the company operates a Recognise and Reward scheme that rewards achievements such as the winning of event pitches.

We also encourage feedback, and provide

team members with the space to come up with new ideas and solutions, which can lead to more exciting and successful events," Nguyen said.

To remain ahead in an increasingly competitive environment, VEG stays on top of industry news, especially about new technologies, products and services. VEG also holds weekly research and development sessions to update each other on any advancements in the sector.

"I recommend encouraging experimentation and innovation within any agency," he added. "Also, allocate time for brainstorming sessions, where the team can explore new ideas and concepts to incorporate into events."

## Appointments



Gerhard Aicher

**Gerhard Aicher**  
Wharf Hotels has appointed Aicher as area general manager of Marco Polo Hotels in Hong Kong. The Austrian has more than 20 years of experience in the hospitality industry, having held the role of director of finance at several hotels.

**Joelle Park**  
BWH Hotels has appointed Park to the role of senior vice



Joelle Park

president and chief marketing officer. She will lead the company's global marketing, brand strategy, and communications, including oversight of the company's loyalty programmes.

**Judy Koh**  
InterContinental Singapore has promoted Koh to hotel manager. She began her journey at IHG two years ago as the director of sales and marketing.



Judy Koh



Kevin Yang

**Kevin Yang**  
FCM has appointed Yang as China's commercial director. Yang previously served as the sales director of FCM China from 2017 to 2019, as well as Ctrip Business Travel as the East China regional director of customer success.

**Melissa Brown**  
The Australian Business Events Association has appointed



Melissa Brown



Rashed Alfajeer

Brown as its inaugural CEO. She has been stationed in the UK, US, and Hong Kong, working with organisations such as Telstra and Talent International.

**Rashed Alfajeer**  
Emirates has named Alfajeer as the manager for Singapore and Brunei. He was most recently the manager for Iran and Central Asia.



**There is no question that suppliers have leverage today, and corporations remain challenged to keep travel costs in line even as business opportunities grow.**

Tobias Ragge,  
CEO, HRS



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## Smooth sailing

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Cruise demand in Asia is making a strong rebound while fresh experiences are plenty, making it an ideal product for both leisure travellers and corporate groups





“  
*We are actively working with destinations around the world to champion sustainability.*”

**Jason Worth,**  
vice president sales  
& general manager,  
Asia Pacific,  
Oceania Cruises

## Amped up earnings

Oceania Cruises and Silversea Cruises promise their travel advisor partners improved earnings through their all-inclusive cruise ticket, ensuring minimised spend leakage and maximised commissions

**By Karen Yue**

**A**fter years of lost business, travel advisors are scrutinising smarter ways to rebuild their coffers – and the sale of premium and luxury cruise holidays is emerging as an ideal earnings generator.

Jason Worth, vice president sales & general manager, Asia Pacific with Oceania Cruises, has seen “more advisors pushing up to the upper premium and luxury space, as they have realised the earning potential from selling luxury cruise product, like Oceania Cruises”.

Cruises, especially those at the top end of the quality spectrum that offer inclusive experiences, ensure maximised commissions for travel advisors.

Kenneth Yau, director of sales, Greater China at Silversea Cruises, explained:

“When a travel advisor books a luxury hotel for his customer, whatever spend made at the hotel, such as on dining or spa, is non-commissionable. On the other hand, Silversea Cruises is all-inclusive. While it is just one cruise ticket, that ticket is a big ticket that covers everything.”

Worth said Oceania’s commission earning structure is an “invaluable source of revenue for our travel advisors in Asia”, as the brand’s cruise ticket comes with “most of the amenities for guests”.

With Silversea Cruises, travel advisors can continue to earn a commission even if their customers made future bookings directly with the cruise line. Additional opportunities to earn more with Silversea Cruises are also created through limited-period specials. For example, in May, the cruise line introduced an incentive for its Travel Partner Appreciation Month, where a new confirmed booking on any expedition cruise made in May and June would enter travel agents into a weekly prize draw for a chance to win a gift card.

Travel advisors’ move to sell upper premium and luxury cruise holidays coincides with the strong desire among travellers to discover new locales and destinations as they return to overseas vacations post-lockdown, according to Worth. Spending levels are also elevated, with more choosing higher category staterooms than before.

He said: “Guests are now sailing for longer periods than ever before, and are extending their cruise holiday, for example, with our longer and more immersive Grand Voyages.”

The same observation is shared by Barbara Muckermann, president and CEO of Silversea Cruises, who pointed to “an unusually high proportion of new clients booking with us” all over the world, with a particularly “huge surge in interest from Asia-Pacific travellers”.

Philippa Walker, marketing director, Asia-Pacific, added that more guests, particularly those from Asia-Pacific, are booking back-to-back cruises to make up a bigger holiday. There is also a spike in guests choosing business class for fly-cruise packages, and picking high category suites onboard its ships.

To help pull demand, Oceania recently launched simply MORE, a programme that offers greater value to guests, in the form of shore excursion credits; a comprehensive beverage package that include vintage champagnes and premium tipples; and expanded Wi-Fi access for two log-ins per stateroom or suite.

Oceania and Silversea have also just launched a new ship each, granting cruise fans one more reason to take their next vacation to the high seas.



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# Rosy outlook for cruising

Travellers are cruising for longer periods to destinations further afield, and booking farther out, discover cruise lines that are now witnessing a strong rebound in Asia-Pacific's cruising market **By Rachel AJ Lee and Karen Yue**

**T**he Asian market is showing a strong appetite for cruise holidays, with cruise lines observing interest in both regional and international sailings as well as more indulgent experiences.

Silversea Cruises' managing director Asia Pacific, Adam Radwanski, told *TTG Asia* that expedition cruises to remote locations, like those to Antarctica, Arctic and Galapagos, are setting sales records.

"Guests from Asia are also booking longer cruises than they ever did before – around 25 per cent longer in duration than pre-Covid. Such cruises tend to be to faraway destinations (to) see something different," he said, adding that customers from Singapore are especially in favour of fly-cruise products.

Those new to expedition cruises would pick "bucket list journeys such as Galapagos and the Arctic", observed Radwanski. It was also common for guests to graduate from classic cruises to the more enriching lures of expedition cruises.

At Resorts World Cruises, Asian guests are seen to be returning to their holidays with a stronger desire to pamper themselves.

Michael Goh, president of the Asian cruise line, said this trend has led to a spike in bookings for his ships' signature Palace accommodation, which comes with luxurious suites,



Silversea's expedition cruises take guests to Telefon Bay, South Shetland Islands of Antarctica

access to exclusive facilities onboard, butler service, and other perks.

Furthermore, not only are Asian guests booking in advance, especially for the peak season, many – particularly Indian, Indonesian, Thai and South Korean customers – are also drawn to fly-cruise options, according to Goh.

Jason Worth, vice president sales & general manager, Asia Pacific of Oceania Cruises, said the Singapore market recorded the strongest rebound, followed by Hong Kong, Indonesia, and Thailand. Meanwhile,

Japan is catching up.

With Oceania's guests increasingly looking to discover far-flung destinations like the Mediterranean, Worth said bookings for longer cruise holidays are rising as a result.

Oceania recently received a booking from Asia for its Around the World Cruise 2025, which was "unusual for Asia because most Asian guests do not sail for that long", reflected Worth.

Another promising observation that reflects intensifying demand out of Asia, is that more travel agents are getting into the cruise space. Radwanski said those that do not traditionally sell cruises have approached Silversea for sales training.

"As societies across Asia continue to age and become more affluent, cruising is becoming a very attractive way to travel," opined Radwanski.



*Cruising is increasingly becoming a choice vacation as many are discovering its convenience.*

**Michael Goh, president, Resorts World Cruises**



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2N

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Resorts World One

## Oceania Cruises welcomes Vista

Oceania Cruises introduces the first of two new 1,200-guest Allura Class ships with *Vista*, which made her maiden voyage in May 2023.

Guests can choose from the standard Veranda Staterooms, Penthouse Suite, Oceania Suite, Vista Suite or Owner's Suite – all suites provide dedicated Butler services as well as key card access to the suites-only Executive Lounge.

As a first for the brand, *Vista* features a new category of Concierge Level Veranda Staterooms dedicated to solo travellers – these rooms come with additional amenities, such as

a dedicated Concierge Lounge, room service from The Grand Dining Room, and free laundry services.

*Vista* also boasts a wide variety of social and recreation venues like The Grand Staircase, the reimagined Martinis bar, The Grand Lounge, the Casino + Casino Bar, and Horizons with its floor-to-ceiling windows that gives guests 180-degree views of surroundings.

For wellness, there is the Pool Deck where guests can take a dip in the pool or just relax by the poolside; and the Aquamar Spa + Vitality Center which offers a host of treatment areas, workout and personal training spaces as well as a new salon and barbershop.

*Vista* has a total of 11 culinary venues for dining at sea, three of which are brand new and exclusive to the ship. These include Ember, serving inventive American creations; Aquamar Kitchen's healthy dishes; Continental dishes at The Grand Dining Room; classic steakhouse

Polo Grill; Italian dining at Toscana; Red Ginger's Pan-Asian dishes inspired by Thai, Korean, Japanese and Malaysian roots; casual dining at the Terrace Café; and indulging in all-American favourites at Waves Grill.

There is also Baristas for those who need their cup of java, and the new Bakery with freshly-baked French and Italian pastries.

For event planners, Priveé is perfect for bespoke celebrations with up to 10 guests.

In addition, *Vista* introduces an entertainment programme with three Broadway-worthy shows: *Headliners*, *The Anchor Inn* and *Into the Night*. An additional edutainment-style production titled *The Music Triangle* will open later this year.

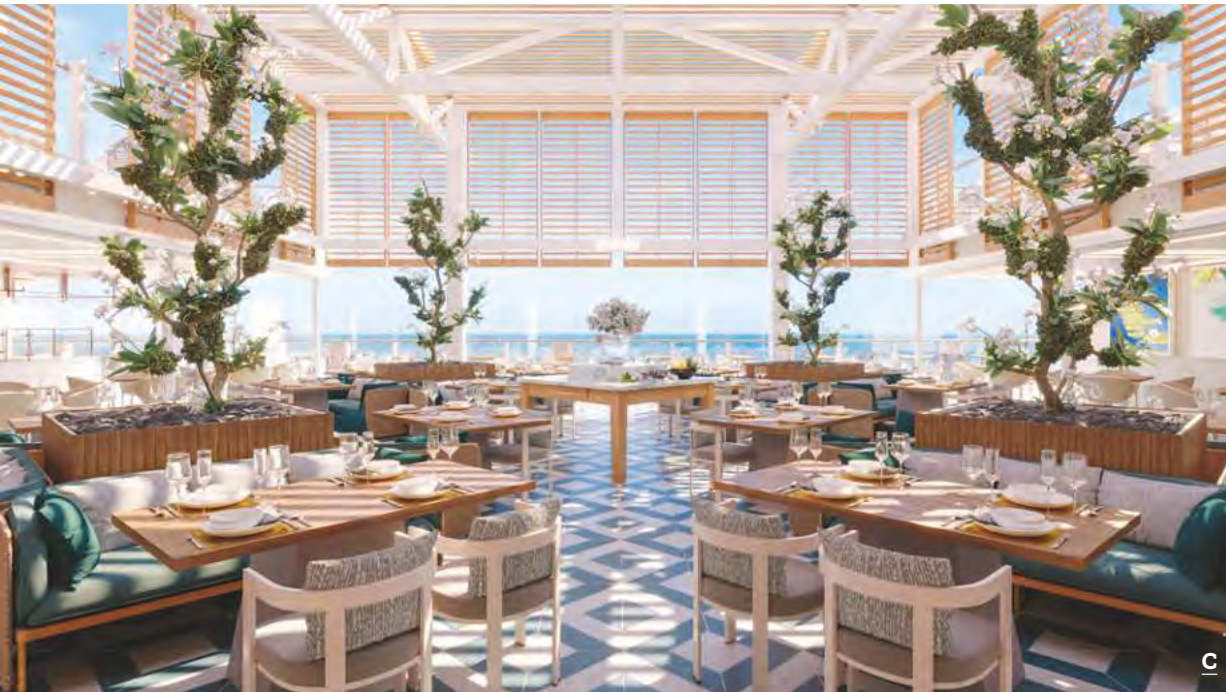


A

# SHIP



B



**A** Elegant accommodation on Oceania's *Vista* **B** Pool deck on the *Vista* **C** The Marquee on *Silver Nova* **D** Venetian Lounge on *Silver Nova*

# AHOY!

Travellers keen on new adventures on the high seas can rejoice, as Oceania Cruises and Silversea Cruises sail out new additions to their fleet this year

By **Melissa Anne Tan**

## Silver Nova elevates luxury cruising

The 728-guest *Silver Nova* is a design delight, as it boasts a unique horizontal layout that allows for an innovative use of space and prime views of the sea from the ship.

The new ship, which launched in August 2023, packs in an array of public venues, such as a three-storied atrium, casino, and a two-storied boutique.

Accommodation is luxurious, as expected of any Silversea ship. Onboard *Silver Nova* are 364 suites across 13 categories, including a new generation of premium suites on the ship's aft.

Dining onboard is always an adventure when the ship offers eight signature restaurants – La Terrazza, Atlantide, S.A.L.T. Kitchen, La Dame, Silver Note, Kaiseki, Spaccanapoli, and the Grill.

Furthermore, budding gourmands will appreciate S.A.L.T. Lab, which comprises cooking stations and a larger, redesigned central workstation for viewing cooking demonstrations.

For tipple, guests can head to the Dolce Vita Lounge, Silversea's signature pre- and post-dinner drinks venue, which transforms into a sophisticated piano bar by night. The Shelter opens in the evening for pre-dinner aperitifs and post-dinner cocktails. Other options include S.A.L.T. Bar, the Pool Bar and the Dusk Bar.

For those fancying a cigar and liquor, the Connoisseur's Corner is the place to be. The Panorama Lounge and the Observation Lounge are both great locations for guests to enjoy views of the destination.

At the Arts Café, snacks and refreshments are served up amid



a relaxing environment.

For entertainment, the two-storied Venetian Lounge is home to live theatrical and musical performances or film screenings that take place in the evening. During the day, this venue hosts lectures and seminars.

Finally, guests who just want to embrace their well-being while on vacation will appreciate Otium Spa. The space incorporates an indoor swimming pool, spa, fitness centre, and a beauty salon.

**The cruise industry has experienced a difficult time due to Covid-19. How do you envision the future of cruising?**

Throughout the pandemic, we saw that travellers booked longer voyages and closer to the date of departure, and we expect this approach to remain in favour.

Now more than ever, travellers have a renewed appreciation for getting out into the world and we have seen a growing interest in travel to remote destinations such as the Galapagos, the Arctic, Antarctica, and the remote Kimberley Coast in Australia. We expect this trend to continue, with a preference for extended voyages for even deeper immersion.

**How well is Asia booking?**

With an unusually high proportion of new clients booking with us, Silversea is seeing a huge surge in interest from Asia-Pacific at present. We have seen a double-digit percentage increase in guests booking cruises in Asia in January 2023, to depart in 2023, versus corresponding periods pre-pandemic. In 2023, Silversea is offering almost 30 per cent more cruise days in Asia versus pre-pandemic levels, and approximately 40 per cent more for 2024.

**What is Silversea's business direction going forward?**

Our strategy for the future is to evolve our current approach – with travel advisors being at the top in terms of importance for us. Asia is a strategic region for luxury products and we keep investing in the region, appealing mainly to Baby Boomers who value experience-led travel to bucket-list destinations, such as Antarctica, the Galapagos, and the South Pacific. We are expecting the Asia-Pacific market to overtake the UK as our second

# Sailing ahead

Barbara Muckermann, president and CEO of Silversea Cruises reflects on the company's recent developments and what might lie ahead

By Kathryn Wortley



largest market in the world.

In terms of our product offering, we launched three new ships in just nine months during the pandemic, with an additional two ships on order, as part of an aggressive shipbuilding strategy aimed at introducing new vessels that are perfectly tailored to sail in specific regions or on specific itineraries, such as *Silver Origin* in the Galapagos and *Silver Endeavour* in Polar regions. *Silver Nova* has just launched as the perfect ship to sail on the broadest possible array of itineraries. We will continue with this approach to further strengthen the cruise experience.

**Tell us about your new S.A.L.T. culinary programme and Otium wellness programme.**

S.A.L.T. connects travellers with each destination's authentic culture through the lens of food and drink, with a dedicated culinary ecosystem on board *Silver Moon*, *Silver Dawn*, and, soon-to-be *Silver Nova*.



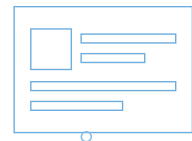
*The global appetite for travel is remarkably strong.*

On each of these ships is a S.A.L.T. Kitchen, which offers regional cuisines, with a menu that changes daily; S.A.L.T. Bar, which serves regionally-inspired cocktails, made with local ingredients, and regional wines; and S.A.L.T. Lab, where guests can get hands-on experience with local recipes and learn from the experts.

S.A.L.T. shore excursions enable guests to experience the local food culture first-hand.

Otium is our Roman-inspired wellness programme, which focuses on indulgence, pleasure, and the very best treatments available. It's about champagne and chocolate in a beautiful Romanesque spa, and other delights. The wellness aspect extends throughout the ship to guests' suites, with enrichments like the first balcony experience at sea, in-suite bathing experiences, and even sleeping experiences.

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# A place to meet

The luxurious *Seven Seas Splendor* can make a great venue for high-profile meetings. To showcase its capabilities, Regent Seven Seas Cruises leads a seven-day familiarisation programme for top meeting planners

By S Puvaneswary

## Event brief

The charters, meetings, and incentives team from Norwegian Cruise Line Holdings (NCLH) crafted an eye-opening seven-night familiarisation cruise from Miami for 25 top meeting planners of Fortune 500 companies from across sectors such as insurance and shipping – all to demonstrate the range of welcome *Seven Seas Splendor* can offer to their event guests.

The trip kicked off on February 1 this year, and featured a thorough introduction to the ship's luxurious amenities, venues, dining options and customisable possibilities. The programme also included a panel discussion on the current state of the cruise industry, which gave meeting planners an idea of conferencing capabilities onboard.



## Highlights

The programme featured a mix of onboard and shore activities to inspire a range of event ideas.

Both the Regent Seven Seas Cruises and NCLH teams curated multiple cocktail parties that were themed according to destinations the ship called at. For example, in Costa Maya, Mexico, meeting planners enjoyed a Mexican cocktail party where seven different types of tequila were served along with *carajillo*, a delicious coffee cocktail popular in the destination.

Shore excursions were also customised for the group. Meeting planners were taken to Sea Salt, a private beach resort in Roatán in the Caribbean, on the third day of sailing, where the entire property was bought out to provide a relaxing day amid utmost privacy.

## Challenge

A day of sea adventures off the coast of Cozumel was planned for day six of sailing, but unexpected heavy rain and strong winds disrupted the programme.

Neil Brodie, senior director, charters, meetings & incentives with NCLH recalled that the weather made it too dangerous to go out to sea and the excursion was cancelled at the last minute.

However, Mother Nature's surprise gave his team a chance to demonstrate their ability to think on their feet and support event clients in creative ways.

"We were at the pier when we were informed that the speed boats could not operate in such bad weather. We worked quickly with our local tour operator to develop a full-day excursion on the fly. The tour operator, with its local knowledge and connections, was able to assemble a full-day land excursion in Cozumel, which included a chocolate-tasting experience, an authentic Mexican lunch, and visits to various tourist spots.

**A** Planners join a cooking class **B** Shore excursion to Cozumel **C** Tequila tasting



## FAST FACT:

**DATES:** February 1 to 8, 2023

**SHIP:** *Seven Seas Splendor*

**ORGANISER:** Norwegian Cruise Line Holdings' charters, meetings & incentives team

**DESTINATIONS:** Miami, Roatán, Harvest Caye, Costa Maya, and Cozumel

# Themed delights

Resorts World Cruises has taken the themed cruises route to work its way into the hearts of cruise fans, discovers **S Puvaneswary**

**T**hemed cruises onboard *Genting Dream* and *Resorts World One* are growing in popularity, drawing a wide range of traveller types – families, youths and friends.

According to Michael Goh, president, Resorts World Cruises, such experiences allow travellers to immerse themselves in their passion with like-minded souls. Travellers also get to build treasured memories and share them on social media.

He sees themed cruises as a segment that is growing across a wide demographic, especially among youths and the young-at-heart.

Cruise themes vary to cater to travellers with different passions. For example, the Good Vibes Festival on *Genting Dream*, which sailed from March 12 to April 30 from its homeports, Singapore and Kuala Lumpur, was designed with culture vultures

in mind. Guests were treated to music, arts and wellness programmes onboard.

The cruise line also collaborated with Lego for its first Summer World of Lego at Sea onboard *Resorts World One* for departures from Hong Kong and Kaohsiung, Taiwan for sailings between July 12 and August 30. The themed cruise, aimed at Lego fanatics, saw an array of brick-based activities and workshops as well as many Instagram-worthy photo opportunities.

Goh added that themed sailings would coincide with school holidays of the sailing port, as well as festive celebrations.

Over the recent Singapore and Malaysia school holidays in May and June, *Genting Dream* sailed with the Sugar Pop Carnival 2023 that brought together plenty of feasting and fun activities such as crafts and slime-making workshops.

Coming up, in conjunction with Halloween, Resorts

World Cruises will organise a Halloween-themed Vessel of the Hexed sailing from October 8 to November 1. Activities onboard include a witches' party, tarot card readings, Halloween makeover station and a costume party.

From September 6 to October 4, tea lovers will get a treat with Tea at Sea, where they can join a bubble tea-making workshop and artisanal tea-blending workshop.

Musicon, a Bollywood Music Festival, is scheduled for *Genting Dream* from October 21 to 26 out of Singapore.

Goh noted that themed cruises have a place in the corporate event environment too. Timing a trip to coincide with a thematic sailing enhances the delegate experience. The corporate programme can be customised to align with some of the activities featured in the themed cruise.



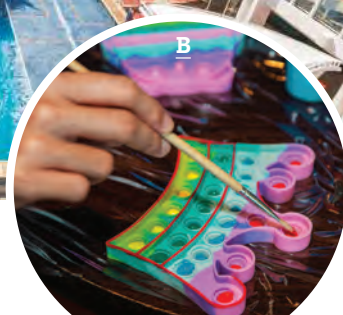
A



C



- A Summer World of Lego
- B Sugar Pop Carnival
- C Vessel of the Hexed
- D Spacious sun deck



B

D

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