

# TTGmice

ASEAN  
**50<sup>TH</sup>**  
ANNIVERSARY  
SPECIAL EDITION



Supported and endorsed by the 10 ASEAN member nations



Southeast Asia  
*feel the warmth*

# A journey that matters

The ASEAN economic bloc is celebrating its big five-oh in 2017, a milestone that the region's tourism industry can be proud of too as ASEAN Tourism Forum holds its 36<sup>th</sup> edition in Singapore next year.

As an event that dives into regional and international issues impacting ASEAN's tourism business and seeks useful collaboration, and showcases the beauty of South-east Asia's diversity to tourism buyers from all over the world, ASEAN Tourism Forum has been instrumental in positioning the region as a single, exciting destination.

ASEAN member nations' singular and collective pursuit of the business events market may have started later than their quest for holiday-makers, but it is catching up fast. Today in this region are several integrated resorts with MICE capabilities as well as a good mix of business hotels under international and home-grown brands. Notable tourism and civil infrastructure investments are being made in every member country. Young individuals are also stepping up to lead.

While considerable advancements have been made, work isn't done yet for the ASEAN MICE community.

That said, one should always celebrate every single victory and we hope the *TTGmice ASEAN's 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Special Issue* will help you appreciate how far South-east Asia has come in its MICE pursuit and what more needs to be done to achieve ultimate triumph.

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# Getting to know the machine

ASEAN's tourism sector is represented by various divisions, each with its own important role to play. **S Puvaneswary** profiles three of them

## ASEAN Tourism Association (ASEANTA)

Known commonly among the trade as ASEANTA, this organisation was established on March 27, 1971, with the aim of providing a common body to facilitate interaction between tourism players in the private sector and the government bodies in South-east Asia with the intention of expanding the growth of tourism in this region. Its other objective is to provide a common platform for South-east Asian tourism players to have a voice.

From its humble beginnings, ASEANTA is well established today and have members from both the public and private tourism sectors across all 10 ASEAN member countries. Members include NTOs, national travel and tourism associations, national hotel associations and airlines based in the region.

ASEANTA initiatives include fostering closer working relationships with all its members, partners and travel related government agencies, with ASEANTA as a platform for bridging communications and collaborating efforts in sustainable growth and development; encouraging



**"The biggest achievement in marketing ASEAN is the fact that the private sector is putting itself at the forefront alongside the NTOs."**

**Aileen Clemente**  
President, ASEANTA

efforts to develop and grow tourism in the region, offering support and assistance when required; playing an active role in the shaping of tourism policies within the region that will safeguard the interests of its members – through feedback, recommendations and having dialogues with relevant government departments and agencies; creating synergistic alliances among ASEANTA members to enhance the growth of tourism in the region; stressing the need for improving and providing reasonable quality service to travellers and tourists by monitoring standards of service and professionalism; providing assistance to any government, statutory or international body in connection with tourism matters; setting a platform for the South-east Asian tourism fraternity to interact; and opening of opportunities to ensure the sustainability of the integrated ASEAN Economic Community (AEC).

ASEANTA president, Aileen Clemente, said: "The biggest achievement in marketing ASEAN is the fact that the private sector is putting itself at the forefront alongside the NTOs. You will see more of that happening in the succeeding months."

Among recent milestones include ASEANTA reorganising itself in 2014. That year also saw it kicked off a strong campaign among ASEAN NTOs to remember the partnership and its membership in ASEANTA, and that the private sector was an important component in ensuring the success of ASEAN integration as it pertains to tourism, especially in campaigning ASEAN as a single destination.

In November 2015, ASEANTA was re-registered as an association with the Registrar of Societies Malaysia including amendments in its by-laws to include membership of other sectors such as education institutions with tourism curriculum and the meetings and events sector, among others. That same year, ASEANTA was invited to participate in the ASEAN Business Council as its research partner for tourism.

Plans coming up soon to market the South-east Asia region include supporting activities around the *Visit ASEAN@50-Golden Celebration* campaign, such as Visit ASEAN@50 tour packages, ASEANTA Excellence Awards for the travel and tourism industry, a photo contest and a food trail.



**"When we create a buzz among member countries to visit South-east Asia, the message will catch on in markets outside of the region and travellers there will be curious and want to discover what we have."**

**Hamzah Rahmat**  
President, FATA

## Federation of ASEAN Travel Agents Associations (FATA)

FATA was established in early 1990s, a few years after the first ASEAN Tourism Forum was held in 1991. FATA's role is to bring into greater focus the issues and challenges faced by travel associations.

FATA's aims are: to contribute significantly to the growth and development of the travel industry in ASEAN; to provide effective advocacy in industry and government affairs, training, education and communication initiatives as well as marketing opportunities; to strive towards the attainment of the highest standards of services and facilities for travellers and tourists; to uphold the dignity and ethics of the tour and travel business and to strive towards its professionalism.

On FATA's biggest achievements, Hamzah Rahmat, president of FATA, said: "We have embarked on *Domestic ASEAN* which promotes intra-ASEAN travel. In all travel fairs held in our member countries, ASEAN as a destination has been given great prominence. Arrivals at each South-east Asian country from others in the region are also on the rise. This speaks volumes of the result achieved thus far."

He added: "When we create a buzz among member countries to visit South-east Asia, the message will catch on in markets outside of the region and travellers there will be curious and want to discover what we have."

Hamzah said new and young visitors from longhaul markets should be targeted, as they regard ASEAN in the same way as Europe.

"This is where ASEAN is appealing as a multi-destination and cultural holiday region," he said.

In March this year, FATA joined the World Travel Agents Associations Alliance (WTAAA).

"Joining WTAAA has allowed for exchange of information and promotions, and an opportunity to reach a wider market. All information and promotional messages of ASEAN are channelled to WTAAA, which in turn shares it with its members. When the world economy recovers in a couple of years, we will reap the fruits of our labour today," Hamzah said.

## ASEAN Hotel & Restaurant Association (AHRA)

One of the key reasons for the establishment of AHRA in 1971 was to create a platform for the national associations of hotels and restaurants in ASEAN member countries to come together to share trends and best practices.

The two broad aims of AHRA are to promote international, regional and domestic tourism and to advance the business of hotels and restaurants within the South-east Asia region.

Cheah Swee Hee, president of AHRA, said: "I believe our biggest achievement in marketing ASEAN is our strong working relationship with NTOs, airlines, travel, tour and transport operators, hotels and restaurants in the region through ASE-ANTA. This strong bond shared by all stakeholders strategically promotes our region's rich and diverse offerings, and ASEAN as a single destination."

"My hope is for AHRA to continue to grow in stature so as to be an even more effective platform to increase business and raise standards for hotels and restaurants in the region."

Cheah added that AHRA members are working with their respective NTOs to put together special packages to commemorate ASEAN's 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 2017 and beyond.

Meanwhile, AHRA will continue to promote multiple destination events and cultures in ASEAN member countries through two soon-to-be-launched websites – smileasean.com and smileasean.travel.

# Mutual cooperation for the greater good

## What can the private sector in South-east Asia do better in marketing the region as a whole?



The private sector should definitely work closer with the governments to offer new products and marketing. We had the Visit ASEAN campaign in 2002, and ASEANTA launched the ASEAN Circle Pass and ASEAN Hip-Hop Pass (for one or two countries). We should promote more of such cross-country packages with ASEAN for longhaul markets and identify target segments such as youth travel. (For example), many Thai youths don't know much about ASEAN and look towards Japan, South Korea and London as travel destinations. We always create packages for working adults but we should look at kids and youth too.

We can also look at ladies to "soften" the image of ASEAN and make it more inviting by tailoring programmes for ladies such as spa packages, fruit carvings and local dessert classes. Tourism Authority of Thailand's (TAT) Women's Journey Thailand campaign is one good example.

**Phornsiri Manoharn,**  
former TAT governor (2007-2009)



In hindsight, associations are not the best vehicle to implement a successful commercial undertaking. Marketing is promoting and selling products or services, including market research and advertising. Promoting is just one aspect, while selling is the fulfilment of the effort of promoting.

In my opinion, the private sector should enlist a private organisation to promote and sell to the public. A dynamic packaging tool is also needed so that it can pull together the various components (air travel, hotel accommodation and ground services) by a commercial entity and marketed online.

**Tunku Iskandar Tunku Abdullah,**  
former secretary-general of ASEANTA (2003-2005)



There must be total commitment in the industry followed by appropriate resource allocation. Halfway measures to achieve success will not work. The products being promoted must be up to the expectations of potential clients the private sector are trying to woo.

**Datuk Abdullah Jonid,**  
former director-general of Tourism Malaysia (1999-2004)



We need to contribute in creating the ASEAN packages. It should be done by a reputable and experienced company, but every tour operator in ASEAN should be able to sell it.

**Elly Hutabarat,**  
former president of ASEANTA (2006-2007)



Every ASEAN tourism stakeholder must use the spirit of ASEAN – we are one in diversity – as the basic principle of marketing. Then, the business integration among ASEAN stakeholders will be easy.

**I Gede Ardika,**  
former Indonesia Minister of Culture and Tourism (2000-2004)











1



4Q2015 compared to 4Q2014.

Thai corporates are also increasingly heading to Vietnam, with a 37 per cent rise in the first seven months of the year compared to 2015.

The Thai government's focus this year on pushing the domestic MICE industry, by offering incentives to government agencies and state enterprises to hold inter-provincial meetings, is thought to have dampened the outbound market.

Meanwhile, Thailand Incentive and Convention Association president, Sumate Sudasna, spoke of how the ASEAN Economic Community will free the MICE industry to cross-sell and share best practices and expertise.

While the "level of engagement" may vary between countries, he urged players to take advantage of the open border agreement.

## >> Vietnam

More Vietnamese businesses are looking to hold events abroad as the economy continues to grow alongside the local market's appetite to branch out.

Pham Ha, CEO of Luxury Travel Vietnam, said the last decade has seen an increase in the number of organisations opting to hold events in other parts of South-east Asia.



**"South-east Asian destinations for MICE are in various stages of maturity but all have a clear vision to increase market share in the MICE segment."**

### Judy Lum

Senior vice president sales & marketing international market, Tour East Singapore

This has mainly been fuelled by a rise in offerings across the region, as well as increased connectivity with more LCCs being introduced.

Ha said: "Vietnamese businesses are more actively seizing the opportunity to develop their business through activities abroad. There is more of a desire to integrate into the international market, where they can meet potential partners or discuss new business."

Tinh Huynh, founder of Danang-based Green Age, said this has led to a need for add-on activities while abroad, such as teambuilding and social and cultural events with a 'wow' factor.

With infrastructure gaining momentum in less developed countries, such as Cambodia, many Vietnamese businesses

are looking to their neighbours to host events. The Vietnamese are Cambodia's number one market, with 987,792 visiting last year, and a rise in the number of companies hosting events there has been noticed.

Kimhean Pich, CEO of Discover the Mekong, said: "Cambodia has more business hotels and conference centres opening, cheap prices and better connectivity."

According to Ha, top MICE destinations among local companies in the last decade – Thailand, Malaysia, Indonesia and Singapore – have been replaced by Cambodia and the Philippines. He predicts these destinations will continue to gain popularity as more Vietnamese firms opt to host business events there. – **Marissa Carruthers**

# The last frontier

These emerging destinations are gaining traction among MICE buyers. By **Xinyi Liang-Pholsena**

Once perceived as frontier destinations for MICE, Myanmar, Cambodia and Laos are now stealing more of the international spotlight.

Cambodia has become "a perfect playground for foreign MICE travellers", thanks to attractions like Angkor Wat that allow leisure opportunities, said Ianic Menard, AccorHotel's vice president sales, marketing & distribution for upper South-east Asia.

Sofitel Angkor Phokeethra Golf & Spa Resort saw a 41.2 per cent growth in the MICE segment last year over 2014. "Much of

that growth has come from Asia, with delegates from Singapore, Thailand, Hong Kong and China naming it a favourite," he said.

However, "promoting and marketing...is probably the greatest challenge," admitted Prak Vuthy, deputy director of marketing & promotion department at Cambodia's Ministry of Tourism, which

does not have a dedicated CVB.

For Myanmar, recent high-profile events like the ASEAN Summit and SEA Games have thrust the spotlight on Nay Pyi Taw, according to Khin Than Win, deputy director general, ministry of hotels and tourism Myanmar.

Yangon, on the other hand, has seen its MICE strength steadily rising on the back of growing air connectivity and hotel construction, observed Tom Wood, sales and marketing manager at Myanmar Polestar. "Qatar and Emirates have been particularly game-changing for Yangon.... connecting it to more than 20 cities worldwide," he added.

Indeed, Myanmar has caught the attention of global DMC and event management company Pacific World, which in June 2016 announced its expansion into the country through a partnership with Myanmar Polestar.

As well, Myanmar's liberalising visa policy – most recently the 30-day visa exemption with Singapore beginning December 2016 – is "an added stimulus", Accor's Menard remarked.

Development in Laos' MICE sector, meanwhile, is "slow" due to lack of infrastructure and



**Sofitel Angkor Phokeethra Golf and Spa Resort**

flight connections, although the abundance of boutique high-end properties in Luang Prabang has attracted high-end incentive groups, according to Jon Bourboud, Laos general manager at Apple Tree Group. Laos' ASEAN chairmanship in 2016 is likely to raise Vientiane's appeal to MICE planners, he added.

Laos' lack of beaches has to an extent curtailed the country's appeal for incentive travel, shared Laos Mood Travel's co-founder and general manager Laurent Granier.

He commented: "Our efforts to promote Laos as a stand-alone destination have generated steady business. We are also working closely with regional partners, especially in Bangkok, who are more willing to propose (Laos) for post-conferences extensions."

But visa remains a key issue. Said Menard: "For sizeable MICE events, (visa fees) could translate into thousands of dollars. The authorities need to reduce fees, keeping in mind they actually make more money (doing that)."



**Ianic Menard, VP sales, marketing & distribution, upper South-east Asia, AccorHotels**

# Courting the drago

Easy access, cultural familiarity, affordability and a reputation for being safe are why Chinese MICE groups are drawn to South-east Asia. By **Caroline Boey**

**M**any countries in South-east Asia appeal to Chinese MICE groups for reasons such as easy access, cultural familiarity and good value for money.

A key factor is the perceived safety of particular South-east Asian destinations, according to Violet Wang, destination manager, Pacific World, China.

"Thailand, and Bangkok in particular, is popular. It's easy to get to and safe," she said, adding that the capital has been picked for an upcoming senior management meeting.

Alicia Yao, general manager, IME Consulting, who is a member of the SITE international board and vice chairman of the SITE China Chapter, agreed that Thailand, with its many flights to China and visa-free entry, is a boon to Chinese groups.

Yao, the former vice president of CITS International MICE, added: "Having the required air access and no visas save time and money for bigger Chinese MICE groups. They can also enjoy the weather in South-east Asia (compared to China in winter), the cleaner air, the food and the good value for money."

She also stressed the importance of government support.

"For one of the China direct sales event we organised, former Thai prime minister, Yingluck Shinawatra agreed to meet the group," Yao pointed out.

She credited the Thai industry for its creativity and politeness, similarly for Indonesia and Malaysia. Group size to these countries tends to range between 200 and 1,000 people, though IME has sent up to 5,000 people for an event in Indonesia.

Albert Lee, senior business development director, CYTS M.I.C.E. Service, China, agreed that the support of local authorities is very important to woo MICE groups from China.

"Support can be (in the form of) cost savings or non-monetary benefits. For example, one island destination in North Asia named a street after the company

for organising its MICE trip there!"

"Many Chinese businesses have factories or are in joint ventures in South-east Asia so MICE programmes or study tours are often organised for staff to familiarise themselves," she explained.

Among the ASEAN CVBs, Lee noted Thailand stood out and was the most constant in terms of the support offered to Chinese MICE groups. He added airlines, such as Vietnam Airlines, which was willing to change the aircraft type to move more people, was a plus.



"It helps when suppliers are flexible," he commented.

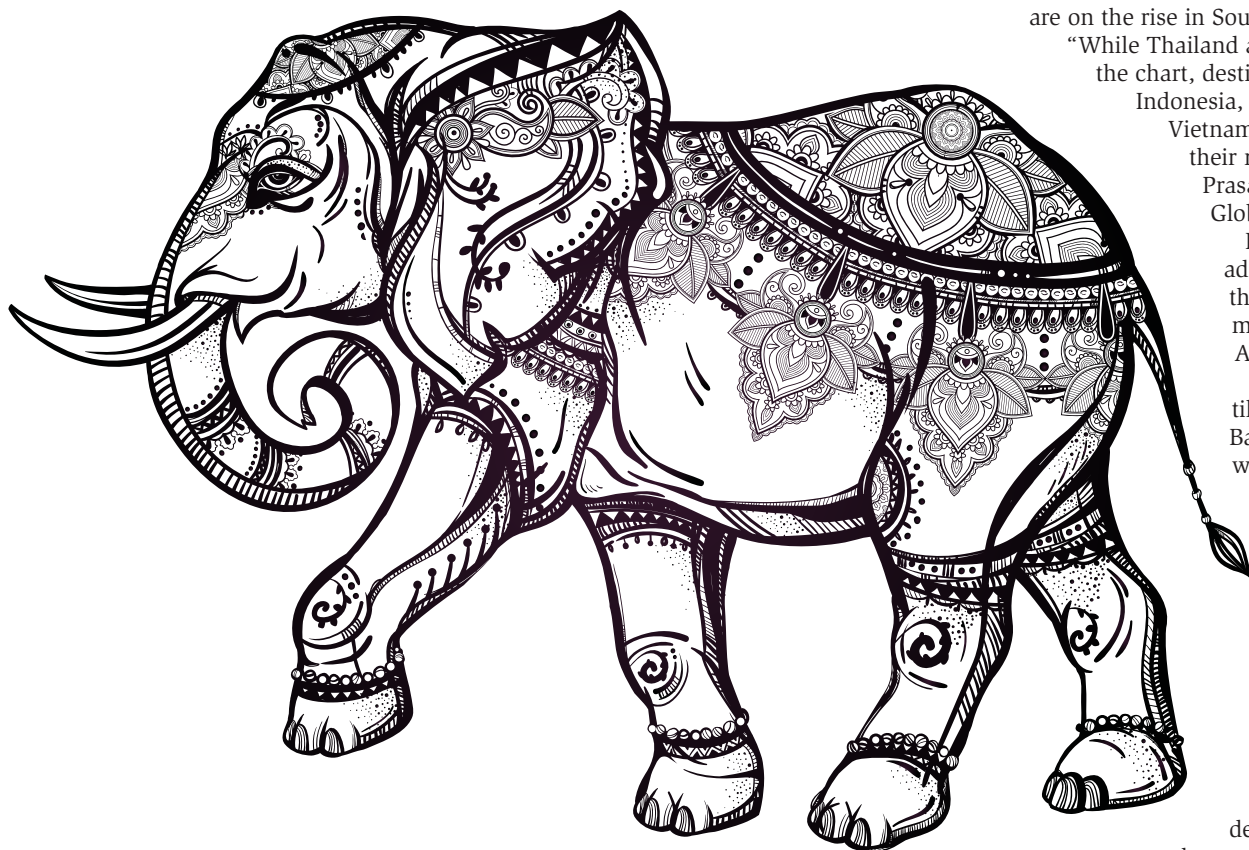
Not all destinations are seeing the same level of interest, with Wang saying some Chinese companies perceive Indonesia, Malaysia and the Philippines as being less safe.

As well, although Cambodia and Vietnam are up and coming, Yao said there are just not enough flights to China.

Itinerary preferences are also changing, as Wang noted: "Resort-style programmes used to be more appealing but not so now with the rise of more resorts in China."



# n and the elephant



are on the rise in South-east Asia.

“While Thailand and Malaysia top the chart, destinations such as Indonesia, the Philippines and Vietnam are increasing their market share,” said Prasant Saha, CEO, CIM Global.

He was quick to add that only security threats can slow demand for South-east Asia in India.

Anand added: “Until a few years ago, Bangkok and Pattaya were Thailand’s must-go destinations.

However, we are now also receiving enquiries for destinations like Hua Hin and Chiang Mai as they are off the beaten track and less explored by Indians.”

Meanwhile, some demand segments are hampered by lack of direct

flights.

“Demand for Bali is very high but all flights are via Thailand, Malaysia or Singapore which in turn increases the cost of air tickets,” remarked Rizvi.

Amaresh Tiwari, managing director, A.T. Seasons & Vacations Travel, said: “Destinations like Indonesia, Cambodia and Philippines have no direct flights from India. Corporate clients don’t want to waste time on stopovers.

“These countries need to push for direct connectivity, offer visa on arrival to all Indian nationals and offer incentive schemes.”

Anand further urged the region’s CVBs to come up with aggressive promotional strategy for the Indian market, and for its MICE players to provide customised services for different corporate verticals.

He said: “Infrastructure must be developed with side trips in mind as Indian corporate travellers club (business events) with leisure. Hence, easy access to tourist places becomes one of the deciding factors. Indian corporates also look out for special incentives offered by the destinations such as complimentary cultural programmes and discounts etc.,”

Infrastructural development, MICE promotion strategy, and incentives offered to corporates can enhance the appeal of South-east Asia for Indians. By **Rohit Kaul**

**A**lthough Indian MICE buyers are already witnessing strong demand for South-east Asian destinations, some players remark that there is room for the market to grow.

Pharmaceutical, paint, glass, automobile, food, telecoms, medical, banking and finance are some of the industries that have been consistently contributing to MICE tourism to South-east Asia, according to Karan Anand, head – relationships, Cox & Kings.

“Demand for South-east Asian destinations has always been high from the Indian MICE market, especially South India owing to the close proximity. The combination of vivid cultures, tempting cuisine, white sandy beaches, tropical rainforests, excellent flight connectivity from major Indian hubs and the variety of accommodation options make the region

a perfect MICE destination for the Indian market,” said Naveen Rizvi, executive director, Pacific World India/TUI-Meetings & Incentives.

According to Indian PCOs, Singapore – attractive for its diverse culinary options, shopping and infrastructure – and Thailand – for its architectural marvels, shopping markets and sandy beaches – are favourites among Indian MICE groups.

“Thailand is the most preferred MICE destination among our corporate travellers,” agreed Anand.

He continued that South-east Asian destinations have taken concrete steps to attract Indian MICE traffic and serve them with top-tier services including world-class convention and exhibition centres, luxury hotel chains, good airport connectivity, experienced human resources and sound infrastructure.

Some also noted that new destinations

# The power of one region

Can ASEAN as a single trade bloc also find success in positioning the region as a single MICE destination? Four industry veterans share their views with **Karen Yue**



**Rajeev Kohli (RK)**  
President, SITE



**Gary Grimmer (GG)**  
CEO, GainingEdge



**Lisa Fitzell (LF)**  
Group Managing Director  
Diethelm Travel Group



**Belinda Doery (BD)**  
Regional director, ASEAN, American  
Express Meetings & Events

**TTG The competition for business events is so hot globally and within South-east Asia. Is positioning South-east Asia as a single MICE destination a viable concept?**

**RK** The key to surviving and sustaining growth in a competitive landscape is to forge greater intra-regional cooperation between countries and MICE institutions. To achieve this, regional standards of quality, safety/security and infrastructure must be developed, adopted and practiced by all cooperative ASEAN markets.

A good example is the recent launch of the Thailand MICE Venue Standard as the model for the improvement of MICE venue standards in South-east Asia.

**GG** The answer varies according to the market segment. For international conventions, regions are considered in relation to rotation patterns. Increasingly, global conventions will be coming to Asia every three or four years, and they will rotate between three parts of Asia – East Asia, South-east Asia and either South or West Asia. South-east Asia will get its share so I don't see how regional promotions will affect that.

For incentive trips, planners are very destination focused and (choice) is driven more by product and location.

Corporate meetings are more driven by priority markets where companies have

offices, product demand or supply chains. Again, I'm not convinced that (joint) South-east Asian promotions will be effective (in luring corporate meetings).

For exhibitions, China is now the focus in Asia and when you bring the ASEAN Economic Community (AEC) into the picture, Asia becomes a formidable economic region. In this case, it will be wise to do more promotions to raise awareness (of the benefits of the AEC).

**LF** Competition for business events is intense and Destination Marketing Organisations around the globe are using every opportunity to leverage the assets they have to differentiate themselves and attract international business events.

As an example, for large association events, it is no longer just about the size of the convention centre or the number of hotel rooms in a city. Association event owners increasingly look at the human and intellectual capital in a region to choose where to go. They want to leverage the expertise of local specialists in creating content, attracting delegates and expanding their footprint in a region.

Positioning South-East Asia as a single MICE destination by using this regional intellectual capital will be very attractive to association event owners.

Multi-destination incentive programmes can deliver a more exciting multicultural experience.

**BD** From a marketing perspective, endeavours to increase awareness of the region to international meeting planners can deliver benefits to many countries.

Beyond high-level awareness campaigns however, the MICE sector needs to collaborate to address more practical issues like geographical disparity, travel costs, passport control and immigration/visa logistics. From an experience perspective, considerable differences between cultures and activities as well as varying levels of perceptions around safety and security, pose both a threat and an opportunity when positioning a MICE offering for the entire region.

**TTG How can ASEAN members benefit from being marketed as a single destination for MICE?**

**LF** It is a crowded marketplace, and pulling together key highlights and messages will help the region stand out. Working together on event and venue standards can help organisers feel comfortable that their event is in good hands and that they will receive the level of services they are used to. Engaging important stakeholders with a single voice will ensure that the MICE industry in South-east Asia gets attention. Working together by sharing data and insight can attract high quality hosted buyers and delegates to industry trade shows.



**BD** Regional collaboration is more likely to attract large international events into the region. Larger nations with a more mature MICE sector are likely to benefit the most due to the variety of experiences available and better safety perceptions.

### **TTG How popular are multi-destination itineraries now and in the future?**

**RK** There is an increased interest in multi-destination programmes to regions of the world that can offer extraordinary experiences in culture, gastronomy and geography while at the same time providing good value for the investment. Emerging and non-conventional destinations are often best able to deliver something different, exciting and unusual.

**GG** I don't see multi-destination events as being the wave of the future. If anything, meeting and convention programmes are getting shorter. Logistical challenges and time needed to do more than one destination are prohibitive.

Exhibitions could be an exception as show producers may be motivated to stage "tandem-shows" – same events held in two different cities or parts of Asia. There could be economies of scale there, plus enhanced exhibitor numbers depending on the circumstances.

**LF** The number is starting from a relatively low base, but we are seeing a small number of requests for multi-destination programmes coming through, particularly for corporate incentives. We think this will continue to grow as event owners look to deliver high quality experiences.

**BD** Multi-destination itineraries for business events do not tend to be as popular in South-East Asia as other parts of the world. We typically see such incentive programmes being executed in regions like Europe where moving between countries is cheaper and requires less time.

Also, interestingly, we have noticed fewer delegates extending their business trips to include a leisure component, which also reduces the scope for multi-destination travel. I believe this is partly due to many delegates feeling that business trips provide sufficient leisure opportunities. For some industries, like the highly regulated pharmaceutical industry, trip extensions are becoming very rare.

### **TTG What are the critical requirements for ASEAN members to suc-**

### **ceed in being seen as a single destination for business events?**

**RK** Emerging destinations in the ASEAN region need to position themselves in an eco-system that desires something different but wants it delivered in the same way that they are used to.

Changing perceptions about a destination requires significant effort and cooperation by member nations to create an image and positioning statement that can be presented by all stakeholders. Talking points, marketing collaterals and more must be created and provided to organisations that sell the destination.

To consistently build and communicate a destination's brand, all stakeholders must speak the same language.

Fam trips and events are very effective ways to showcase the ASEAN region and create goodwill ambassadors.

**GG** Branding is all about delivery and the question that needs to be asked is, do all ASEAN members deliver well? If not, the regional brand suffers and everyone will feel the impact. So, to build MICE business in South-east Asia, I would see regional capacity building as being far more important than promotion.

The one exception is that there's a shared interest in promoting the economic power of the AEC because that's about global perceptions, awareness and the need to balance the world's current infatuation with China.

**LF** Creating a marketing and sales infrastructure that treats the business events industry as a B2B industry. For example, a willingness to share lead data, using modern CRM tools which will ensure efficient tracking of event opportunities.

Creating and delivering strong MICE trade shows within the region, and delivering brilliant experiences at trade shows in other regions.

Ensuring the marketing message is tailored to the type of event and ensuring it resonates with decision makers and attendees.

**BD** The three key elements which South-East Asia must fulfil and promote in order to attract international planners are: offer a unique experience; be cost-effective; and address any safety/security concerns.

As the world gets smaller, people are becoming more open to travelling farther, which enables South-East Asia to offer a unique experience. In terms of cost-effectiveness, it's not uncommon to see a better ROI in South-East Asia compared to more mature regions and cities. Promoting the region as being safe is also critical to attracting new events and visitors.

### **TTG What major obstacles are there today to prevent ASEAN members from achieving this united front?**

**RK** It is easy for destinations to fall in love with their own story and lose sight of what the customer wants. Destinations that can adapt their marketing to different cultures will be most successful.

**GG** I think that "coopetition" isn't well developed in South-east Asia, and the current reality is that the AEC isn't really a common market but rather a system of relatively loose albeit beneficial and positive trade arrangements.

South-east Asia's MICE industry is not unlike those in other parts of the world. It has limited regional platforms for developing regional strategies and a current void of leadership that is committed to making that happen. But if governments and the business communities there were to appreciate the power of coopetition, then ASEAN as one would thrive.

**BD** Given the varied cultures and experiences on offer within South-East Asia, it's likely that there will be differing appetites for collaboration and varying resources to invest in such an endeavour. A global marketing campaign to promote the region may bring greater benefit to larger countries, especially considering existing flight routes, and some may feel that their current efforts to promote their own country to international events planners are sufficient.





# Best MICE experiences

Agents share their best MICE experiences in South-east Asia and what made these memorable for them, from little sentimental moments to breathtaking spectacles



El Nido Island, Philippines

leolise/shutterstock.com

My memorable event arrangement experience in South-east Asia was quite a long time ago – back when Singapore Flyer was just launched.

For a group of medical doctors, we organised a sunset cocktail on board three private capsules which offered views of the city lights. We were all excited and walked around to take photos.

Not long after, a small dinner event, complete with butler service, was held for our client to host their VIP guests.

(Events in this setting) was then a very spectacular idea, and until today Singapore continues to update her offerings with creative event concepts that make use of venues and places of interest.

## **Intan T. Senduk**

Director, Multi Taruna Sejati Indonesia

I think my best South-east Asian MICE experience was on a fam trip to Sabah. It was enjoyable because the people there spoke Chinese, so it was easy to communicate. The food and drinks were familiar to me and what we had was delicious and fresh. We also enjoyed a high standard of service from the guides and drivers, and for sure, Sabah has one of the most beautiful beaches, not impacted by too much commercialisation.

## **Starry Wong**

Deputy manager, outbound, Century Holiday International Travel Group, China

I particularly enjoyed the Singapore MICE Forum Gala Dinner at Gardens by the Bay – Flower Field Hall. It had everything you need for a great event plus the experience of a creatively curated dinner – not just a dinner served warm.

Prepared on the spot, the food was a treat to both vision and palate. The most memorable dish for me that night was Singapore's favourite breakfast of half boiled eggs, but given a new lease of life with the eggs cooked sous vide.

## **Judy Lum**

Senior vice president sales & marketing international market, Tour East Singapore

A memorable event happened in Pattaya, Thailand when the group got exclusive entry to an ancient temple. A dinner under the full moon made the evening so special that our clients still remember this as the best event they had ever had. This was made possible by the support of our local DMC.

## **Prasant Saha**

CEO, CIM Global India

A memorable experience was attending a banking client's gala dinner at Capitol Theatre Singapore. A wonderful cocktail reception was held in a covered outdoor space, where Singapore fusion canapés

and special cocktails were served. The soft branding elements and entertainment added to the atmosphere – as guests entered the main venue for dinner, for example, they walked the royal blue carpet with sparkle inlay.

For the gala dinner, the venue was transformed using lighting, floral decorations and ice sculptures. Entertainment was specially crafted for the whole evening with the finale being an acrobat performance.

## **Matthew Smith**

Director, performance improvement, MCI Singapore

My best event experience in South-east Asia was attending the closing gala of a regional conference for creative entrepreneurs. The event was held on one of the temple grounds at Angkor Wat in Siem Reap, Cambodia. We were ferried in tuk tuks from our hotel to this mysterious site where we were welcomed by traditional cultural performances put up by a local NGO that supports the under-privileged children in Cambodia. We had to walk in darkness to our dinner table but were rewarded with the highlight of the evening, a spectacularly choreographed sound and light (show) that lit up the temple just before dinner. That certainly set the tone for the rest of the evening which was filled with song, dance and great conversations.

## **Andrew Koh**

Director, Events Architects Singapore

My most memorable occasion was when I was able to relax after an event in the Philippines had ended and the pressure was off. This was around 15 years ago and my wife had come to join me. We stayed in a resort on El Nido Island, off Palawan. Along with a guide, the two of us went to a tiny, isolated island where we were served lunch and went scuba diving later. The whole day was unforgettable.

## **Takayuki Kawahara**

General manager, MICE sales division, Tobu Top Tours Japan



My best event experience was attending WTM Connect Asia's gala dinner at Leong San Tong Khoo Kongsi in Penang in May 2016. Upon arrival, we were greeted by one of Penang's most famous *Chingay* flag pole performance troops. I could hear a lady behind me squeal in fright when one of the performers caught the towering flag pole, more than 8m in height and 25kg in weight, with his teeth!

Throughout the night, delegates were allowed to walk about freely within the grounds, soaking in the beauty of this century-old site. House-tours of the iconic Clan House Temple were also available for anyone interested in the temple's history and architecture. Little stalls featuring (traditional Malaysian crafts) such as beaded-shoe making, *ketupat* weaving and flour figurine moulding, made the evening not just enjoyable, but also educational.

#### **Kingston Khoo**

Senior product development / contracting manager, Discovery Overland Holidays, Malaysia

My best travel experience was attending the ASEAN Tourism Forum in Phnom Penh (in 2011). The destination itself has a fascinating culture and heritage. The people are unassuming, friendly and polite. The local food is delicious and good value for money.

#### **Mohammad Rosly Md Selamat**

Senior vice president, economics & investment (tourism), Iskandar Regional Development Authority, Malaysia



My best event experience was organising an incentive dinner for Airbus in 1997. It was an outdoor event held at Lake Gardens Kuala Lumpur. It took us 10 days to set up the place (to evoke a Malay village). We had to fumigate it, put standby generators and coordinate with local suppliers.

The event was very memorable because everything came together, the weather was good and everything went smoothly.

#### **Arokia Das**

Senior manager, Luxury Tours Malaysia



I attended a conference in Bangkok last December and the city tour was truly memorable: buffet dinner on the rooftop of Baiyoke Sky Hotel offering a panoramic view of Bangkok, a pleasurable spa experience, wonderful shopping, and of course food, glorious Thai food.

#### **Katrina Cruz**

Team leader, meetings and events, Adventure International Tours Philippines

I remember two memorable board meetings held in South-east Asia with my previous company.

In Lombok, the highlight was cruising on a traditional Indonesian sail boat. We got to enjoy what MICE clients typically look for – use of a private (venue), the chance to enjoy good food and drinks outdoors and have a relaxing time with team members.

The other was a trip to Luang Prabang, where we were invited to dinner at the company chairman's home. It was more than just a dinner in a beautiful house. There were also activities such as an elephant ride and a blessing ceremony to showcase the cultural aspect of Laos.

#### **Kris Van Goethem**

Inbound & MICE director, Thomas Cook China

Delivering a hilarious and interactive team-bonding experience in Bali while building bicycles for an orphanage was a meaningful marriage of fun and purpose, riding on the back of other exclusive experiences including a stay and gala dinner at the Bvlgari Bali to pamper the body and elevate the spirit.

#### **Daniel Chua**

Managing director, Aonia Singapore

My best experience was participating in Malaysian Nature Society's Kenyir Birds and Nature Quest in 2015. It included hornbill sightings, a river cruise and jungle trekking in the rainforest with scientists. We inspected camera traps and saw evidence of tigers that had been in the area recently. It was a memorable event as we were so close to nature and learnt so much about wildlife.

#### **Alex Lee**

CEO, Ping Anchorage Travel & Tours, Malaysia

My best MICE experience in South-east Asia was attending the award ceremony and product launch for an Indian company in Chiang Mai, Thailand. The event was executed in a traditional Thai setup with a temple in the background. We were enthralled with the thousand-hand *Guanyin* dance in which the performers, dressed in traditional Thai costumes, delivered a complex visual spectacle relying only on (hand movements).

#### **Naveen Rizvi**

Executive director, Pacific World India / TUI-meetings & incentives

My best travel experience in South-east Asia was a short study tour to Bali and a visit to the Bali International Spa Academy. The Academy operates, conducts and awards certification in Balinese Spa, therapeutic techniques and wellness concepts. It was a real eye opener for me after having experienced therapists from other parts of the world.

The visit was made even more worthwhile by the charm and warmth of the Balinese people.

#### **John Chan**

Business development director, Kris International Traveltours Malaysia

My best event experience in South-east Asia was during an international association conference we did in Bangkok a few years back. We had rented out an exclusive dinner cruise for 200 delegates on the Chao Phraya river, with live singers and traditional Thai performances. All the participants enjoyed the performances while we cruised on the river.

#### **Chander Mansharamani**

Managing director, Alpcord Network Travel & Conferences India







# MICE playground on the high seas

Several international cruise operators are witnessing rising corporate demand from South-east Asia and for sailings in the region, but more must be done to help push growth further. By **Paige Lee Pei Qi**, **S Puvaneswary** and **Mimi Hudoyo**



**Costa Cruises**

Buhdy Bok, Asia president

## Are you seeing a rise in MICE business and what does the future hold?

Cruise ships are seen as an ideal 'all-in-one' venue for corporate events and incentive trips. Cruise ships are also seen as a destination and floating accommodation. At the moment, the majority of our passengers are still leisure travellers but our MICE business has increased to a significant portion over the past decade. We expect the growth to continue.

This is a highly competitive market in terms of cost and flexibility. For cruises, the fare includes accommodation, full board with various meals throughout the day, 24-hour room service, and access to gym, spa and entertainment.

Costa Cruises' MICE programmes can be tailored for each group without increasing greatly on costs and compromising on quality, at the same time providing

high flexibility for event planners. For example, there are personalised meeting spaces and reserved areas in restaurants as well as daily programmes, menus and on-shore excursions to suit the needs of each individual.

## What would you like to see happen to help grow your MICE business?

Visa restrictions and limitations on port infrastructure are major challenges facing the cruise industry in the region. If Asia, including South-east Asia, can take this into account, it will effectively accelerate the development and quality of the cruise industry in the region.

Internally, Costa Cruises will continue to be committed to travel agent training. By providing a variety of sales training and fam trips, we hope travel agents can better educate customers about the benefits of cruising and create an all-round cruise experience for their customers.



**Crystal Cruises**

Marnie Tarsinos  
Director, international sales

## Are you seeing a rise in MICE business and what does the future hold?

Yes, absolutely. From 2014 to 2016, the South-east Asian region has seen tremendous growth in MICE and the best growth performers are private banking incentive travel groups.

As more MICE groups experience cruising as an option, positive word of mouth

**"...cruising provides a relaxed atmosphere for groups to gather with chance meetings, unlike land-based experiences where invitees often leave hotels to explore cities."**

## Marnie Tarsinos

Director, international sales, Crystal Cruises



will continue to help grow market share.

There is a tremendous benefit for MICE groups experiencing a Crystal voyage since meeting space, a cocktail party, deliveries to the room and other amenities are completely included (in the fare). Furthermore, cruising provides a relaxed atmosphere for groups to gather with chance meetings, unlike land-based experiences where invitees often leave hotels to explore cities.

Onboard Crystal we see MICE participants connecting from various dining venues to extracurricular activities, and notice business conversations lending towards creative idea- and solution-sharing taking place by nature of the relaxed environment.

### **What would you like to see happen to help grow your MICE business?**

We would like to see the younger generation travel professionals be motivated by the exceptional number of experience choices Crystal offers, and to not shy away from selling luxury.

Younger travel professionals shyly admit hesitation in selling luxury because they cannot picture themselves selling a US\$10,000 to \$400,000 holiday. We would like to see them shift their mindset and qualify the clients' wishes and match the client to the experience.

It is not about price, it is about value for experience, whether luxury cruise, yacht, air or beyond. When agents sell value and overcome objections based on value, they will see their repeat business grow and see more opportunities in upselling one rung of the ladder at a time.

And it's important to remember that Crystal has grown past two ships – we now have river, yacht and private air.



### **Norwegian Cruise Line Holdings**

Steve Odell

Senior vice-president and managing director Asia Pacific

### **Are you seeing a rise in MICE business and what does the future hold?**

Norwegian Cruise Line has been active in the MICE business globally for many

**“We’d like support from the government which includes improving cruise infrastructure; providing tourism training and education to supply a trained workforce; easing of visa rules for cruise travellers; and driving joint consumer campaigns.”**

### **Steve Odell**

Senior vice-president and managing director Asia Pacific, Norwegian Cruise Line Holdings

years and MICE is certainly a growing segment.

Cruising is increasingly becoming a prevalent choice among event organisers who see the tangible benefits of cruising. For example, organisers no longer need to spend time and money to organise transportation to bus delegates to and from gala dinner venues. We are able to offer organisers the option of not only housing their delegates under one roof, but also providing all the meeting facilities, entertainment and activities in one mega venue.

### **What would you like to see happen to help grow your MICE business?**

We’d like support from the government which includes improving cruise infrastructure; providing tourism training and education to supply a trained workforce; easing of visa rules for cruise travellers; and driving joint consumer campaigns.

Internally, we will continually enhance Norwegian Cruise Line’s product quality and service standard to cater to guests’ needs; develop more bespoke cruise voyages and excursions for south-east Asian travellers and MICE organisers; and keep Norwegian Cruise Line top of mind for repeat guests and consumers who are new to cruising.



### **Princess Cruises**

Farriek Tawfik

Director of South-east Asia

### **Are you seeing a rise in MICE business and what does the future hold?**

We had positive demand from corporate incentive trips during our first two home-porting seasons in South-east Asia. About 1,000 guests from Indonesia and 300

guests from Malaysia signed up for such trips during our 2014/15 season. Short-haul sailings of three to four days proved to be more popular with these corporate groups.

We are witnessing a trend for corporate incentive travel that is less rigid and more personal, and this is highly possible on a cruise ship. There are spacious areas and cosy rooms both indoors and out that guests can use for meetings, team-building activities and personal leisure.

We believe that MICE demand will rise in the near future as companies become more aware of the wide range of facilities on cruise ships.

We saw high customer satisfaction for our first two home-porting seasons in Singapore, and are excited to be deploying in South-east Asia for a third season, this time on a different ship, *Diamond Princess*. We are confident of attaining the same level of success with the appeal of enhanced, one-of-a-kind facilities on board *Diamond Princess*, such as the Izumi Japanese bath and Kai sushi bar.

### **What would you like to see happen to help grow your MICE business?**

Changing perceptions will remain one of the biggest challenges for us. We as an industry need to create stronger awareness and engagement with travellers.

For instance, we hope to work more closely with travel agents to promote the appeal of cruises for leisure and corporate incentive trips. We will also continue to collaborate with tourism boards and government bodies to motivate stronger interest in cruising as a holiday option.

Catering to the specific preferences of the local market will remain pivotal in encouraging cruise demand. When our third home-porting season begins, we will have a multilingual crew in guest-facing positions on board *Diamond Princess* to address the needs of different guests from South-east Asia. We also have local food on our dining room menus to complement the international cuisine offering with a touch of home. Specially-designed enrichment programmes and other amenities, such as the selection of retail stores and spa treatments, will also be tailored to suit local preferences.



### Royal Caribbean Cruises

Sean Treacy  
Managing director, Singapore and  
South-east Asia

#### Are you seeing a rise in MICE business and what does the future hold?

MICE business takes up between five to 10 per cent of our Singapore bookings. In markets like Indonesia and Thailand, this is growing from year to year and makes up 30 to 40 per cent of our total sales, and we expect this to grow further with greater market awareness around the benefits of taking a MICE group on a cruise.

Cruising is like having two retreats in one: the ship itself as a destination plus the land options.

Companies which hold incentive groups, offsite retreats and regional meetings (on a cruise) will find this more cost effective than housing overseas colleagues in local hotels, as our cruise packages not only offer complimentary use of state-of-the-art conference facilities but also include comfortable accommodation, award-winning entertainment like ice shows, non-stop activities through the usage of sports facilities (basketball courts, ice skating rink, rock climbing walls, in-line skating, swimming pools, minia-

ture golf), and world-class dining options. Everything is included in the fare.

#### What would you like to see happen to help grow your MICE business?

A lot more still needs to be done, especially in South-east Asia, to develop more ports to accommodate larger cruise ships as well as the road and tourism infrastructure near the ports.

On top of some of the most popular ports-of-call in South-east Asia such as Singapore, Penang and Phuket, we can also look forward to adding more ports with adequate places of attraction and infrastructure, to create more attractive cruise itineraries.

Specifically for the MICE market, we will continue to tap our trade partners and invest in travel agent training. It is essential for us to boost training in their cruise product knowledge especially on the new ships that are launched.

Meanwhile, Singapore Tourism Board's new Tourism Development Fund that supports cruise charter businesses out of Singapore by trade partners is a positive example of promotional efforts by government partners in boosting the industry's

efforts in this area. We hope it will produce great results in the years to come.



### Star Cruises

Michael Goh  
Senior vice president – sales

#### Are you seeing a rise in MICE business and what does the future hold?

As more corporate companies are discovering and opting to host their corporate events on board our Star Cruises ships, we continue to witness an upward trend for our MICE business segment.

Due to Star Cruises' diversified product offerings, we cater to a variety of MICE events, ranging from incentive trips to

**"...to meet future growing demand, Star Cruises remains committed to Asia and had recently announced the order of two Global Class cruise ships to be delivered in 2019 and 2020 to be homeported in Asia, which will cater to the increasing demands of both the leisure and MICE businesses in the South-east Asia region and across Asia."**

#### Michael Goh

Senior vice president – sales, Star Cruises



company retreats, product launches, award ceremonies, anniversary celebrations and workshops.

With our experience and deep understanding of the various Asian cultures, unique preferences and evolving expectations, we remain positive that the MICE business will grow and remain a vital business segment for Star Cruises, as we continue to offer differentiated and unique experiences that are tailor-made for our valued guests across our fleet.

**What would you like to see happen to help grow your MICE business?**

In order to grow the overall cruise business and infrastructure across the region, it's important that the relevant stakeholders from both the government and private sectors continue to work collectively, both on a domestic and regional level.

In addition, there is also a constant need to educate and increase awareness of cruising as a vacation option that best suits today's lifestyle, as well as a venue destination for MICE events.

As such, we continue to work closely with our trade partners and intermediaries at all levels, imparting regular and updated training skills to promote

awareness and growth towards the cruise tourism industry.

Also, to meet future growing demand, Star Cruises remains committed to Asia and had recently announced the order of two Global Class cruise ships to be delivered in 2019 and 2020 to be homeported in Asia, which will cater to the increasing demands of both the leisure and MICE businesses in the South-east Asia region and across Asia.



**Silversea Cruises**

Melvyn Yap  
Regional director, Asia

**Are you seeing a rise in MICE business and what does the future hold?**

Our market segment has always been in the leisure sector, however most of our Asian guests do not like to cruise in (South-east Asia). Many of our guests are sophisticated travellers and they seek new and exciting ports besides the usual one like Malacca, Port Klang, Penang, Langkawi, etc.

Silversea has gone where no other international cruise lines have, to remote destination within South-east Asia, such as Agats, Anak Krakatoa, Banda Naera, Bau Bau and Karimunjawa in Indonesia, Frost Island, Hastings Islands, Kyunn Phi Lar and Kyunn Mee Gee in Myanmar, Ko Adang, Ko Rawi and Phuket in Thailand, so as to keep our itineraries fresh and have our guests coming back for more.

But we are stuck in a vicious cycle with the MICE market. Programmes are usually short with many companies preferring to have it within three to five days. Such short time frames would only allow cruise ships to visit the usual places as mentioned above.

**What would you like to see happen to help grow your MICE business?**

I hope the cruise infrastructure will be improved and cabotage laws relaxed.



# ASEAN's top investments

ASEAN's thirst for better, stronger tourism business is resulting in a slew of new and improved tourism and events hardware. **TTGmice reporters** shine the spotlight on some game-changing MICE investments in South-east Asia

## Cambodia



NagaWorld

### NagaWorld

NagaWorld is Cambodia's first and largest integrated hotel and entertainment complex, owned by holding company NagaCorp. Opened in December 2006 by founder, president and CEO, Chen Lip Keong, in Phnom Penh, it has extended from 100 rooms to the current 14-storey building that is home to more than 700 suites and rooms, a spa, shopping gallery, 14 F&B outlets and an eight-storey entertainment wing. Its dedicated MICE division has organised several events in its meeting and ballroom spaces, including Cambodia's largest hotel convention space serving up to 1,000 people. Neighbouring Naga2 is currently under construction and is slated to commence operations in mid-2017. Spread across a built-up area of 110,105m<sup>2</sup>, it will include 13,248m<sup>2</sup> of retail and public space, 1,000 rooms and 38 VIP suites, a gaming section and multipurpose entertainment with a seating capacity of 2,100 – making it the Kingdom's largest MICE venue.

**Why is it a game-changer?** In a country where MICE is in its infancy, NagaWorld has set the standards and continues to be at the forefront of developing the country's offerings. The completion of Naga2, which will be integrated with NagaWorld, will create by far Cambodia's largest integrated complex. The current NagaWorld has scooped best business and MICE hotel awards in Cambodia annually since 2011, and believes its new development will keep it at the top of its game.

### Rosewood Phnom Penh

Slated to open later this year, Rosewood Phnom Penh is Rosewood Hotel Group's first South-east Asian venture.

It is located in the new CBD where large corporations such as Asian Development Bank, Manulife, AIA Group, Hitachi and Diethem Travel have opened or are scheduled to open.

MICE features heavily on the hotel's agenda, with it focusing on key outbound markets in Asia-Pacific, specifically Sin-



Rosewood Phnom Penh

gapore, Malaysia, Thailand, Vietnam, China and Hong Kong. Meeting facilities will total 655m<sup>2</sup>, comprising three multifunctional meeting rooms with capacity for up to 320 guests, plus an adjacent 412m<sup>2</sup> pre-function space. More event space will be available at The Pavilion, a residential-style meeting and function venue with bars, lounges and show kitchens for up to 100 guests.

**Why is it a game-changer?** Rosewood Phnom Penh will be a notable catalyst to Cambodia's growing MICE market and five-star hotel accommodation offerings.

### The Bay, Phnom Penh

Set on the capital's Chroy Changvar peninsular, a real estate hotspot now in Cambodia, The Bay is a prestigious US\$500 million hotel and residential project. Its first phase will include the luxurious 45-storey Okura Prestige Phnom Penh which is due to open in 2019 and a 53-storey apartment building.

Okura Prestige Phnom Penh will be the first five-star hotel in Chroy Changvar and it will cater to international business needs. The hotel will offer 250 rooms, banquet halls, conference rooms, a Japanese restaurant, a rooftop bar, a spa and an outdoor pool.

The second and third phases propose five, 55-storey apartment buildings, which will include shopping malls, meeting spaces and entertainment venues.

**Why is it a game-changer?** Chroy Changvar has been dubbed the 'City of the Future'. As space rapidly runs out in the capital, development is spilling outside and this peninsular is prime land. It is expected to become the capital's business hub of the future. The Bay project as a whole is set to raise the bar in standards of integrated hotel, residential and commercial offerings in the area.

# Indonesia



View of Lake Toba

## Lake Toba Development Plan, North Sumatra

One of Indonesia's 10 tourism development areas, the Lake Toba Development Plan will include construction of a highway between Medan and Parapat (116km), a highway covering Medan, Kuala Namu and Tebing Tinggi (62km), and a Lake Toba outer ring road. Access into the Lake Toba region will further be improved with the development of Silangit Airport near Lake Toba (this comes in addition to Kuala Namu International Airport in Medan which had opened in 2013) as well as a number of piers.

**Why is it a game-changer?** Lake Toba is rich with tourism lures. It is the largest volcanic lake in the world and the second largest lake in the world after Africa's Victoria Lake, and Samosir Island in the centre – as large as Singapore is – offers plenty of natural and cultural attractions.

# Laos

## Hotel Pullman Luang Prabang

Soft opening this December, Hotel Pullman Luang Prabang occupies 16 hectares of the countryside, making it one of the largest properties in Laos. It will have 64 standard rooms, 52 deluxe and 10 suites, a ballroom that can accommodate 280 guests, a spa, a gym, kids facilities and various dining establishments. Besides these hardware, the hotel will offer short nature walks, a drinking-water spring, cycling and waterfall visits to its guests.

**Why is it a game-changer?** Styled as an upscale resort village, Hotel Pullman Luang Prabang intends to lure companies in Hong Kong, Singapore, Thailand and Europe into hosting events in Luang Prabang, thereby raising the profile of the destination as an interesting one for business events in these markets.

It is also worth noting that the property will engage locals in tending to its rice fields and organic farms.

## Crowne Plaza Vientiane

The five-star, 198-room Crowne Plaza Vientiane is due to open later this year.

It targets mainly business and incentive events and has a banquet hall for 600 guests and six breakout rooms to back that pursuit. The breakout rooms are wired to the ballroom, allowing attendees at larger events to participate in real time via 27-inch TVs.

Improved access into the Lake Toba region will encourage event planners to consider the destination for their next event. The future Medan-Parapat highway will cut travelling time between the two points to only 90 minutes from the current five/six-hour drive. The future Silangit Airport will also bring more flights into Lake Toba. These will make it far easier for planners to combine a conference in Medan with incentive or teambuilding activities in Lake Toba.

## Mandalika Resort Development, Lombok, West Nusa Tenggara

Launched in 2011, the Mandalika Resort Development is a long-term, massive project that involves more than 1,100 hectares of tourism related mixed-use development, with 51 per cent of that being set aside for "green space".

Among the infrastructure to come are 10,532 hotel rooms, event venues for 5,000 to 7,000 people, 1,586 residential units, a theme park, a water park, an eco park, a marina as well as equestrian and golfing facilities.

At press time, five hotels will break ground this year and the next, and they will put up a total of 1,500 rooms over the next two to three years.

Support civil infrastructure in the form of road works and clean water system will also come, along with a hospital and a mosque for 1,500 people.

Meanwhile, Lombok is working on attracting international airlines to fly there. An MOU between the West Nusa Tenggara government and Emirates airline was signed earlier this year.

**Why is it a game-changer?** Echoing the successful development of Nusa Dua in Bali, Mandalika Resort is expected to create a strong buzz that will attract leisure and MICE travellers to Lombok.

**Why is it a game-changer?** Crowne Plaza Vientiane is said to be the first international brand with full MICE facilities in the capital, according to its general manager, Oliver Horn.

Determined to define hospitality excellence in Vientiane, the hotel promises to answer RFPs within 24 hours – others in the city takes two to three days – and has brought in an experienced and creative event sales manager who will provide clients with out-of-the-ordinary event options.





# Malaysia



SPICE Convention Centre, Penang

## SPICE Convention Centre, Penang

SPICE Convention Centre, one of five key components of The Subterranean Penang International Convention and Exhibition Centre (SPICE), will open in 1Q2017. Its 4,546m<sup>2</sup> Grand Ballroom can accommodate 8,000 people and be divided into four smaller rooms. This space is further supported by two VIP serviced rooms and 13 function rooms on the lower and ground floors. Atop the convention centre is a rooftop park, a 2.8-hectare 'green lung' which is capable of hosting outdoor events.

**Why is it a game-changer?** Large events that head to Penang are currently held at Penang International Sports Arena, an indoor stadium which is more suited for exhibitions and concerts, and hotels with large function rooms, such as Hotel Equatorial Penang. With SPICE Convention Centre, the Malaysian city's first purpose built convention venue, mega events will now have a proper home in Penang.

## Gurney Wharf, Penang

Development of Penang's future iconic waterfront destination started in early 2016 when the Penang state government approved a project to reclaim 53 hectares of land. The masterplan includes a waterfront public promenade, seafront dining facilities, a 400m man-made sandy beach, a pier walk, landscaped water gardens and a skate park.

**Why is it a game-changer?** Gurney Wharf will make Penang more exciting than it currently is, by complementing Gurney Drive's renowned street food offerings at night and providing additional recreational facilities to travellers.

## Kuala Lumpur Convention Centre

The popular and long established venue in Kuala Lumpur is undergoing an expansion that will provide an additional 10,000m<sup>2</sup> of flexible and multipurpose space over three floors plus three levels of underground car parks with 1,500 lots, two levels of retail and F&B outlets, a sky garden overlooking the KLCC park and a rooftop restaurant. Works are scheduled for completion in 2018.

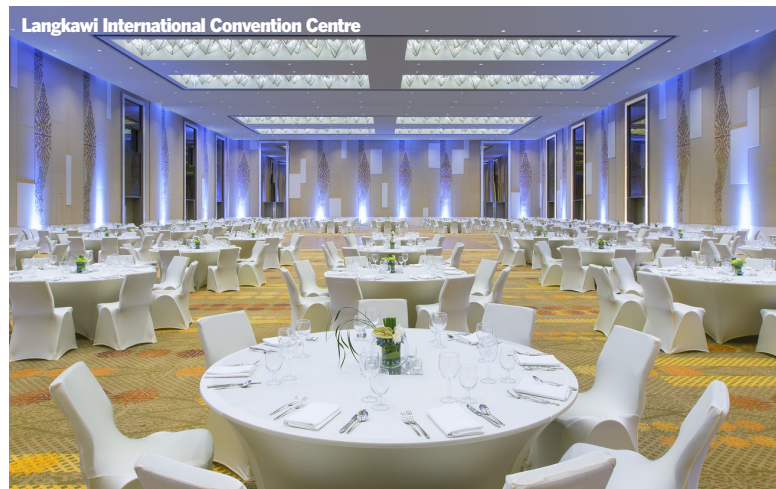
**Why is it a game-changer?** The future Kuala Lumpur Convention Centre will span 30,059m<sup>2</sup>. This means more room to comfortably accommodate larger international association meetings and concurrent events, and the opportunity for many current clients to grow their activities and events significantly.

## Langkawi International Convention Centre

Opened on March 2015, Langkawi International Convention Centre, which sits adjacent to The Westin Langkawi Resort & Spa and is managed by The Westin Langkawi, has a grand ballroom for up to 1,000 people in a banquet setting and seven meeting rooms ranging from 21m<sup>2</sup> to 1,660m<sup>2</sup> in size.

The modern convention centre is decked out in high-end audiovisual equipment and allows plenty of natural daylight into the foyer areas.

**Why is it a game-changer?** Since its opening, Langkawi International Convention Centre has garnered high profile event wins such as the ASEAN Defence Ministers Meeting in March and the ASEAN Leaders Summit in April. It will continue to raise Langkawi's profile as a serious contender for business events.



Langkawi International Convention Centre



# Myanmar

## Yangon International Airport

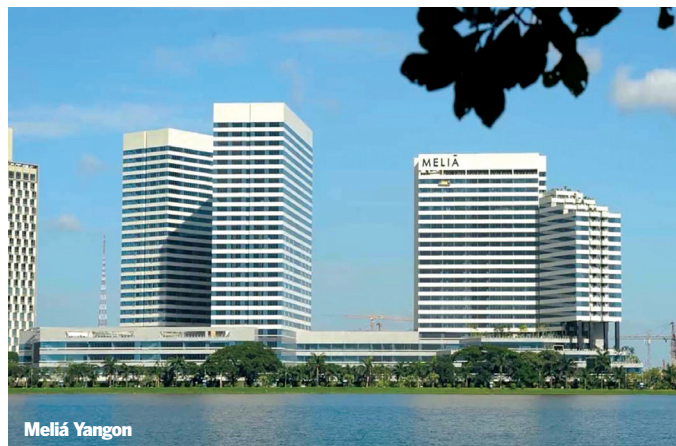
An expansion project is underway at Yangon International Airport in Mingaladon to grow its passenger handling capacity from 2.7 million to eight million by 2019. So far, a new arrival and departure terminal has opened, boosting the airport's capacity to six million passengers.

**Why is it a game-changer?** Myanmar's international tourist arrivals have been soaring. The country welcomed 2.1 million visitors in 2013, 3.8 million in 2014 and 4.7 million in 2015. The growing demand of travellers eager to explore the country for leisure and business opportunities is stressing the country's primary and busiest airport and limiting the tourism sector's growth potential. The expansion project will provide welcome relief for travellers and tourism stakeholders in Myanmar.

## Meliá Yangon

Opened in August, the five-star Meliá Yangon offers 430 keys, extensive meeting facilities totalling 2,000m<sup>2</sup> of space, three fine restaurants including a 375-seat all-day dining restaurant which is said to be the largest hotel restaurant in Yangon, an outdoor swimming pool, a fitness centre and a soon-to-open spa. It overlooks Inya Lake and puts guests within easy reach of the city centre and Yangon International Airport.

**Why is it a game-changer?** The hotel has its sights set on high-level governmental meetings from within Myanmar and beyond, months ahead of opening. And its collection of Grand Ballroom, Junior Ballroom and six meeting rooms as well as various luxurious suites were built to support such political gatherings and their participants.



## The Peninsula Yangon

Once the former headquarters of Myanmar Railways, built in the 1880s, the historical colonial building will in two or three years' time be home to The Peninsula Yangon. Located on BogyokeAung San Road in Yangon's CBD, the hotel will have 80 rooms. Further details of the luxury hotel are still under wraps, however parent company, The Peninsula Hotels, have revealed that the existing structure will be preserved and restored.

**Why is it a game-changer?** Luxury hotels have demonstrated their ability to draw travellers' attention and interest to new and emerging destinations, and the opening of The Peninsula Yangon will be no different. Promotions of the hotel will invariably benefit the destination too.

# Philippines

## SMX Convention Center Cebu

When SMX Convention Center Cebu opens in late 2017 it will have capacity for up to 5,000 pax and with room for expansion. The development is being modelled after Manila's Mall of Asia which, in addition to SMX Convention Centre Manila, has Arena for huge events and concerts, hotels, shopping areas, entertainment and sports centres and F&B outlets.

**Why is it a game-changer?** SMX Convention Centre Cebu will be the first convention centre in Cebu and one that will help the city attract large-scale business events. The destination has had to reject large-sized events due to the absence of a convention centre, while mid-sized gatherings are usually held only in hotels.

The Centre also complements other hardware improvements that are emerging in the province, including new hotels, new tourist attractions and the ongoing expansion of Mactan-Cebu International Airport which will double the facility's capacity to 12 million passengers annually.

## Henann Convention Center, Bohol

Opened last year, Henann Convention Center in Panglao, Bohol has an enviable location next to the 400-room Henann Resort on the beachfront of Panglao's Alona beach. The three-storey venue has capacity for up to 1,000 guests seated and 1,500 for cocktail parties. Its 13 breakout rooms and meeting rooms can accommodate smaller events.

**Why is it a game-changer?** Being the only convention centre in Bohol, Henann Convention Center brings the province to the MICE map in the Visayas, attracting not just foreign events but also those from neighbouring Cebu and the rest of the Philippines. It complements the growing number of hotels and infrastructure being built in Bohol.

Henann will become more accessible once the planned international airport in Anglo becomes operational a few years from now.

## Boracay Airport

An expanded Boracay Airport in Caticlan is set for a 1Q2017 opening. Its runway is being expanded to accommodate bigger aircraft, unlike the 72-seat turboprop aircraft that it is currently only able to handle now. The expansion will also see the airport increasing its passenger capacity from one million to five million.

**Why is it a game-changer?** An expanded airport in Caticlan means travellers can reach the island resort of Boracay faster. From Caticlan, they can just walk to the ferry which will take them to the island, unlike now when most of the commercial flights are in Kalibo airport, about two hours from Boracay.

It will also reduce airfares as more airlines can open routes there and compete for market share.

Business events will stand to benefit too from improved connectivity, greater capacity and better safety measures. As it is, MICE groups with more than 70 delegates have to split up and take several flights to Caticlan.

## Philippines

### Marriott Grand Ballroom, Manila

Despite its name, Marriott Grand Ballroom is the size of a convention centre with 8,000m<sup>2</sup> of dedicated meeting space for over 5,000 pax. The term Grand Ballroom denotes luxury, and as the most modern convention centre in the Philippines, it boasts high technology never before seen in this part of the world.

Launched in 2015, MGB uses Skyfold Technology in dividing meeting spaces and programmable lights that can change into 360 colours. It has its own restaurants, sophisticated security equipment and impressive on-site apps for meeting planners.

**Why is it a game-changer?** Marriott Grand Ballroom redefines the concept of generic convention centre while raising the bar for convention centres and MICE venues in Manila, many of which have predictable designs and offerings.

It also prepares Manila for bigger events or those with up to 5,000 pax. Currently, foreign events hosted in the capital city are smaller and medium sized for up to 3,000 pax.

It is an ideal alternative venue especially during the high sea-



son towards the end of the year and early part of the year.

Furthermore, convention venues tend to converge in the Manila Bay area so Marriott Grand Ballroom's location near Ninoy Aquino International Airport is positively viewed by the travel trade.

## Singapore

### Singapore Sports Hub

Opened in 2014, Singapore Sports Hub is one of the world's first fully integrated sports, entertainment and lifestyle destinations, housing under one roof a unique cluster of world-class facilities designed to stage scalable events and activities.

The centrepiece of this iconic landmark is the 55,000-seat National Stadium which comes with retractable seating capability, making it the only stadium in the world able to host a multitude of events such as rugby, cricket, football, athletics, concerts, family entertainment shows, national and community events.

Other facilities within the Singapore Sports Hub are the Singapore Indoor Stadium, the OCBC Arena, OCBC Aquatic Centre, Water Sports Centre, Singapore Sports Museum, Sports Hub Library, Splash-N-Surf water playground, and Kallang Wave Mall.

**Why is it a game-changer?** The Singapore Sports Hub is more than just a sports facility. Since its opening, the massive venue has proven popular with lifestyle and business event organisers seeking space for large-scale productions. Its first three events were World Club Rugby 10s, Singapore Chinese Orchestra presents Our Music, Our People 2014 and Stefanie Sun, Kepler World Tour 2014.

It will host the annual Stadia & Arena Asia Pacific conference from September 26 to 28 this year at the Singapore Indoor Stadium.

### National Gallery Singapore

Opened end-2015, the stately National Gallery Singapore is a celebration of Singapore's past, present and future. It occupies two important landmarks in Singapore – the former Supreme Court and City Hall – and has transformed the buildings' cavernous interior into a 64,000m<sup>2</sup> visual arts venue and museum. It is the largest of its kind in Singapore.

National Gallery Singapore is dedicated to modern art from Singapore and South-east Asia, and specialises in extensive long-term exhibitions of art from the region.

**Why is it a game-changer?** As a modern city state, historical unique venues for events are rare. National Gallery Singapore, with its numerous venues for private hire, makes an attractive new addition to Singapore's MICE landscape. Its spaces, which include a 200-seat auditorium, can support conferences, seminars and other corporate gatherings.

As well, National Gallery Singapore has on its premises several dining establishments of the finest kind and which offer splendid views of the Singapore cityscape. These restaurants and bars add to event organisers' selection of venues for social gatherings.



Photo by Singapore Sports Hub



# Thailand

## Queen Sirikit National Convention Center, Bangkok

A deal to expand the Queen Sirikit National Convention Center was struck as far back as 1996, five years after the 65,000m<sup>2</sup> venue was opened. However, for the past two decades the plan faced legal difficulties, stemming from height restrictions that prevented any structure 31m or taller from being built. That all seemed to be fixed in March this year, with an announcement that the Center Phase II will finally proceed.

The investment and concession period have been agreed on, according to the Treasury Department and liquor tycoon Charoen Sirivadhanabhakdi, owner of NCC Management and Development Co, but they have yet to announce whether the upgrade will include the planned 400-room four- or five-star hotel and 28,000m<sup>2</sup> of retail space.

**Why is it a game-changer?** Queen Sirikit National Convention Center is popular and has a calendar with few gaps between various events, but is looking decidedly dated a quarter of a century on. More modern facilities that combine convention space with retail and hotels are only a few stops away by public transport. With the expansion, the Centre will realise its full potential and revitalise the part of town where it is at.

## Bangkok International Trade and Exhibition Centre

Bangkok International Trade and Exhibition Centre's expansion will add 32,000m<sup>2</sup> of exhibition space and 5,800m<sup>2</sup> of convention and meeting facilities to its current stock. Three new event halls will be added to the current seven, with the largest featuring a 25m-high ceiling in an effort to attract international concerts and acts on world tours.

The expansion will have a direct connection to the city's BTS skytrain network, and a retail and dining zone that will support visitors' needs throughout the day. The mixed-use Biraj Tower at BITEC will also be on site.

**Why is it a game-changer?** Once the expansion is complete, Bangkok International Trade and Exhibition Centre will be one of the largest venues in Asia. It is billing its largest event hall

as the most flexible space for events in Bangkok. Impact Arena, on the city's outskirts, can expect more competition from the expanded Bangkok International Trade and Exhibition Centre in trying to land big acts.

## Centara Grand West Sands Resort & Villas Phuket

A new convention centre is at the heart of the ongoing expansion project at Centara Grand West Sands Resort & Villas. When it opens in 4Q2016, the venue will add 2,548m<sup>2</sup> of event space with state-of-the-art facilities to Phuket's MICE inventory. It will be capable of hosting meetings for as many as 820 people.

**Why is it a game-changer?** The new convention centre will be among southern Thailand's largest and an investment that will solidify Phuket's standing as a serious destination for business events at a time when successive governments have been slow to move on the idea of building an international convention centre on the northern stretch of the island. Centara's expansion not only satiates MICE demand in the island's north, as the sector in Phuket rebounds over recent years, but it also helps bring the critical mass of interest that will enable other facilities to succeed.



Centara Grand West Sands Resort & Villas Phuket

# Vietnam

## Grand Ho Tram Strip

Grand Ho Tram Strip is Vietnam's premier leisure destination, featuring 541 rooms, 10 F&B outlets, four swimming pools, a 2.2km stretch of private beach, a Grand Ballroom for 1,800 people and several break-out rooms, and award-winning The Bluffs golf course and clubhouse which houses additional meeting venues.

While it isn't new, having opened in July 2013, new facilities have been unveiled over the years while more are in development. In January this year, Grand Ho Tram Strip unveiled new entertainment facilities which are expected to raise the fun factor for corporate events. These new hardware includes a 3D cinema, karaoke lounges, retail outlets and the Central Park, a one-hectare attraction that houses an 18-hole miniature golf course, a football field, a basketball court, a pétanque court and more.

Coming online in the next year is a second tower, a vacation home and a luxury villa, with more resorts on the horizon.

**Why is it a game-changer?** Grand Ho Tram Strip's convention centre, which is home to a 1,800-pax pillarless ballroom – among Vietnam's largest – combined with entertainment facilities, accommodation, shows and new tours exploring Vietnam's

natural, political and revolutionary history, has quickly led to it driving the standards of Vietnamese MICE.

## JW Marriott Hotel Hanoi

When JW Marriott Hotel Hanoi opened its doors in late 2013, it brought with it some of the country's most extensive venues for business events. The five-star hotel boasts 450 guestrooms and 55 suites – along with the claim to having the city's biggest collection of double-bedded rooms – and more than 5,000m<sup>2</sup> of flexible meeting and function space that come supported by a dedicated in-house events team. The complete event space inventory includes a 1,000m<sup>2</sup> Grand Ballroom which can cater for up to 750 guests, 17 meeting rooms and 1,200m<sup>2</sup> of outdoor event space. Other facilities include five dining outlets, a spa, a gym and a swimming pool.

**Why is it a game-changer?** JW Marriott Hanoi has geared itself towards the MICE market right from the start and is the only hotel adjacent to the National Convention Centre in the city's new CBD. The hotel has recently recruited a management team with expertise in the MICE market to further grow its specialisation.

# Integrated wonderland

Integrated resorts have a role to play in South-east Asia's growing appeal among MICE buyers. **TTGmice reporters** find out what's new at these massive complexes

## Indonesia

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### Laguna Bintan

One of the three Laguna integrated resorts in South-east Asia under Banyan Tree Group, Laguna Bintan comprises the 64-villa Banyan Tree Bintan, the 113-key Angsana Bintan and Laguna Bintan Golf Club.

Banyan Tree Bintan on Tanjung Said Bay is an elegant property with a wide selection of recreational activities and is loved for its award-winning spa and memorable dining experiences in unique settings. In 2013, the resort's villas were refurbished and new relaxation pools were added.

Angsana Bintan, the younger sister of Banyan Tree, has a more active character, armed with a 1.5km stretch of private

beach and a Marine Centre that makes watersports available to guests. It also runs activities for everyone in the family, including nature tours.

Both welcome MICE. Banyan Tree Bintan's meeting room can take 32 people while Angsana Bintan has two for 132 pax.

New this year at Laguna Bintan is the fresh face Laguna Bintan Golf Club is putting forth. Reopened in July after a complete redesign and renovation, the 18-hole, par-72 golf course now covers 60 hectares and affords sweeping views of the South China Sea.

Banyan Tree Group's fourth hotel brand – Cassia – will also soon make a debut, offering one- and two-bedroom apartments.

## Malaysia

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### Resorts World Genting

Located in the cool climes of Titiwangsa Mountains northeast of Kuala Lumpur, Resorts World Genting (RWG) has long drawn domestic and international travellers alike since the 60s. Today, the integrated resort comprises the Genting International Convention Centre which houses 13,935m<sup>2</sup> of function space with built-in high-tech features, six hotel options to suit various budgets, a casino, and a variety of entertainment and dining outlets.

RWG's room inventory has recently grown, following the completion of First World Hotel's renovations and expansion in June 2015. The hotel added 1,286 rooms and now boasts a place in the Guinness Book of Records as the world's largest hotel with 7,351 keys. In all, RWG offers more than 10,000 keys.

Also new is a speedy cable car system which opened in August. It comprises 99 gondolas and covers 2.8km in 11 minutes, offering great views of the mountainside as well as the soon-to-open Twentieth Century Fox Theme Park. Ten of these gondolas

come with glass floors and are an attraction themselves.

More shopping, dining and entertainment options were also presented in August with the opening of Sky Avenue Mall. Genting Premium Outlet is slated to debut by the end of this year.



## Philippines

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### Resorts World Manila

Resorts World Manila (RWM) was the first integrated resort in Metro Manila when it soft-launched in 2009. Today it draws travellers with a selection of hotels and a combined guestroom inventory of 1,707 rooms as well as a casino, a plethora of restaurants and bars, and the four-storey Newport Mall.

It endeared itself to planners with the opening of the 10,000m<sup>2</sup> Marriott Grand Ballroom in 2015, a facility which has been touted as the most spacious and modern in the country.

The 480-key Belmont Hotel Manila also opened last year.

The expansion continues this year, with the debut of Japanese concept restaurant Ichiba, modelled after the market alleys of Osaka and Kyoto. RWM's Marriott Manila will add another

228 keys late this year, while construction of Hilton Manila and Sheraton Manila is ongoing. All three will raise RWM's hotel capacity to 4,200 keys from the existing 1,226 keys.

### Solaire Resort and Casino

Opened in 2013, Solaire Resort & Casino in Manila's Entertainment City offers 800 luxurious resort-style guestrooms in two towers – Sky Tower and Bay Tower – and a collection of dining, entertainment and retail opportunities for its guests.

For business events, Solaire has more than 5,000m<sup>2</sup> of event space, including a ballroom for 1,300 guests.

New at Solaire is the Sky Range Shooting Club and the 1,760-seat The Theatre which is said to be the most advanced in the



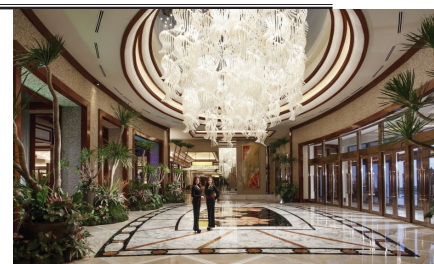
## Philippines

country and the only venue in the Philippines equipped with Meyer Sound Constellation acoustic system.

### City of Dreams Manila

City of Dreams Manila, soft-opened in December 2014, is a luxury complex comprising of three hotels – Crown Towers, Nobu and Hyatt – along with casinos, retail outlets, entertainment for all ages, and a collection of dining establishments including the famed Nobu Japanese restaurant.

In addition to the various event function spaces within the integrated resort, City of Dreams has recently made available its two night clubs – Chaos and Pangaea – for private hire. They can be hired during the day and early evening on weekdays.



Solaire Resort and Casino

## Singapore



Marina Bay Sands

### Resorts World Sentosa

Spanning 49 hectares on Singapore's Sentosa island, Resorts World Sentosa (RWS) is a collection of six hotels each with a distinct theme, the Resorts World Convention Centre, a casino, several celebrity chef restaurants and specialty retail outlets, and a number of renowned attractions including Universal Studios theme park, S.E.A. Aquarium and Adventure Cove Waterpark.

Resorts World Convention Centre features a variety of indoor and outdoor spaces that suit intimate incentive programmes for 10 people to massive conventions with up to 6,000 delegates.

RWS recently enhanced the lighting at Adventure Cove

Waterpark which transformed the attraction into an ideal outdoor venue for evening events. Coming up, S.E.A. Aquarium's three-tiered Ocean Gallery will soon be equipped with more state-of-the-art mood lighting and audiovisual capabilities which will enhance the venue's potential for hosting evening cocktail functions.

RWS' 6,000-seat ballroom is due for a face lift in 2017.

### Marina Bay Sands

Opened in 2010, Marina Bay Sands (MBS) is home to 2,561 guestrooms, the 120,000m<sup>2</sup> Marina Bay Sands EXPO and Convention Centre, a casino, the ArtScience Museum, the MasterCard Theatres, and some 300 retail and F&B outlets.

Last year MBS reconfigured two ballrooms on level four to better serve the needs of clients. The combined Roselle-Simpore main ballrooms can now accommodate up to 2,000 delegates.

Two high-resolution video walls – a 100m<sup>2</sup>, 10mm screen for outdoor events and a 50m<sup>2</sup>, 2.8mm screen for indoor events – will be installed soon to allow planners to enjoy greater brand visibility at their events.

## Thailand

### Laguna Phuket

Said to be Asia's first integrated resort, Laguna Phuket is a massive complex that houses eight hotels and resorts, the Banyan Tree Phuket Spa Sanctuary, the 18-hole, par-71 Laguna Golf Phuket, a teambuilding grounds and activities provided by Quest Laguna Phuket Adventure, and more than 404.6 hectares of tropical parklands that can be utilised for corporate events.

For planners, Laguna Phuket offers the 1,000-seat Latitude Marquee, which is perfect for themed events, in addition to func-

tion rooms available across the eight hotels and resorts.

Planners with mega-sized events on hand appreciate the accessibility of these facilities in a single location and the convenience of a single master bill, and this is reflected in the success Laguna Phuket is enjoying in being the destination of choice among companies like Amway China (16,000, 2012) and Nu Skin Greater China (4,000 pax, 2013).

Latest developments here is the rebranding of Outrigger Laguna Phuket Resort and Villas to Angsana Villas Resort Phuket.

## Vietnam

### Laguna Lang Co

Laguna Lang Co occupies 280 hectares of Phu Loc's pristine coastal land, nestled between the cities of Danang and Hue in Central Vietnam.

Pushed up against the resort's 30km private beach are two Banyan Tree properties – the 229-key Angsana Lang Co and Banyan Tree Lang Co with 60 pool villas.

Hotel guests can get around the compound on buggies and shuttle boats to enjoy a host of on-site facilities, including an 18-hole championship golf course, spas, retail outlets and an

organic garden, which lend well to incentive and teambuilding purposes.

Angsana Lang Co has four meeting rooms while Banyan Tree Lang Co has four boardrooms.

There is more to come. With room for six more properties on the compound, Laguna is looking for potential investors to complement its existing offerings and enhance the resort as a whole, informed Khiet Le, senior manager, marketing and communications at Banyan Tree Lang Co.

# Homegrown hotel darlings

As an engine of growth for the world economy, South-east Asia has attracted strong business travel numbers and spurred the birth of homegrown hotel chains with event-ready properties. **TTGmice reporters** spotlight what's in the marketplace

## Cambodia



Sokha Beach Resort, Sihanoukville

### Sokha Hotel and Resorts

Sokha Hotel and Resorts was founded in 2004 by Neak Oknha Sok Kong, with the opening of its flagship five-star hotel, Sokha Beach Resort, in Sihanoukville. The 180-key property was expanded to 210 in 2009, then 391 in 2010.

Today, the company owns six properties across Sihanoukville, Kampot, Siem Reap and Phnom Penh. Each of the spacious hotels are kitted out with a variety of conference space.

### Almond Group

The first Almond hotel opened on August 8, 2008 by Cambodian celebrity chef Luu Meng, who has championed the country's hospitality industry since the 1990s. The 70-room hotel targeted the growing international business community in the capital. It quickly hosted a number of prestigious dining events and catered for business executives and VIPs travelling to Phnom Penh.

Almond Group currently operates two hotels in the capital and a swathe of restaurants. It is currently focusing its efforts on Almond Bassac Hotel, an artisan business hotel near Koh Pich, but has plans to branch out further into Cambodia in the future.

### NagaWorld

NagaWorld in Phnom Penh opened in 2006 as the country's first integrated resort. From 100 rooms, it now has more than 700 rooms and suites. Besides being home to the country's largest casino, NagaWorld's series of spacious meeting and conference rooms have led to it hosting many of the largest international and local events.

Construction is well underway for Naga2, which will be integrated with the current building to offer the country's largest integrated complex, featuring 1,000 rooms and conference space for up to 2,100 people. Naga2 will complete by the start of 2017 and operations are set to commence mid-2017.

## Indonesia

### Tauzia Hotel Management

Established in 2001, Tauzia Hotel Management started as a consulting service for AccorHotels until 2006, but in 2002 it began to manage its own hotel concepts and products in Indonesia.

Among its various hotel brands, Harris Hotels is best suited for the MICE market. Properties are built with convention facilities that can accommodate more than 1,500 people.

The brand launched its first hotel in Batam in 2002. Fourteen years on, it has a stable of 21 Harris hotels across Indonesia, with 20 more in the pipeline to be opened by 2021.

Tauzia Hotel Management is expanding into South-east Asia, with the first Harris hotel due to open in Vietnam in 2018 with some 300 rooms.

### Archipelago International

Archipelago International is Indonesia's largest operator of hotels, condotels, resorts, serviced suites and branded residences. It manages more than 15,000 rooms and apartments for property owners in Indonesia, the Philippines and Malaysia.

Its Aston Hotels collection debuted in 2007 with Aston Bali – now Grand Aston Bali – and offers properties that come with a wide range of facilities to support events of various sizes and purpose.





# Indonesia



Hotel Santika Premier Hayam Wuruk, Jakarta

The Aston Hotel brand is present in 44 major cities in Indonesia, and 10 are under construction in Indonesia and elsewhere in South-east Asia.

## Santika Indonesia Hotels & Resort

Santika Indonesia Hotels & Resorts was born in 1981 when Kompas-Gramedia Group, the largest media company in Indonesia, diversified its business portfolio into the hospitality sector.

Among its various brands, the Hotel Santika Premiere collection is best suited for business travellers and corporate events. The four-star portfolio promises international class MICE facilities. There are now 10 Hotel Santika Premiere hotels across the country, all in major cities such as Jakarta, Semarang, Jogjakarta, Medan and Surabaya. Several more are being built in Sumatra.

# Malaysia

## Sunway Hotels & Resorts

Sunway Hotels & Resorts, the hospitality division of the Malaysian-based property-construction conglomerate Sunway Group, opened its first hotel in Penang on June 1, 1994 with the four-star, 250-room Sunway Hotel Georgetown.

Today it operates and manages 10 hotels and resorts in Malaysia, Cambodia and Vietnam.

Its flagship property, the five star, 439-room Sunway Resort Hotel & Spa in Selangor, is a compelling MICE destination in Malaysia. It is a cluster of three hotel towers, a convention centre with 62 function spaces, countless outdoor event venues, a theme park and a shopping mall.

In early 2016, Sunway Hotels & Resorts announced an investment of RM875 million (US\$214.4 million) to facilitate a three-year redevelopment and expansion plan. Upon completion, the company will own and operate 11 hotels, nine of which are in Malaysia.

## Holiday Villa Hotels & Resorts

Alangka-Suka Hotels & Resorts owns and manages the Holiday Villa Hotels & Resorts chain worldwide. The first Villa Hotels & Resorts property – Holiday Villa Beach Resort Cherating – opened in 1987 on a beautiful beachfront plot, featuring 34 rooms and 18 family apartments. It has since expanded to 122 keys which include 16 family suites and 22 garden villas.

Currently, Villa Hotels & Resorts has 30 hotels in 11 countries. It offers four- and five-star business hotels with extensive conference and meeting facilities in city locations such as Kuala Lumpur, Guangzhou, Sanya, Doha, Medina and London.

The latest hotel opening in South-east Asia is Holiday Villa Johor Bahru City Centre, in March 2016. This business class



Holiday Villa Johor Bahru City Centre

hotel has 345 rooms, a grand ballroom for 800 people, and 10 meeting rooms.

## Berjaya Hotels & Resorts

Founded in 1992, Berjaya Hotels & Resorts is an established hospitality company in Malaysia with properties ranging from island resorts in Langkawi, Tioman and Redang, to city hotels in Kuala Lumpur, Johor Bahru and Penang, as well as the French themed chateaus in the Bukit Tinggi highlands.

Berjaya Hotels & Resorts caters to both leisure and mid-scale events, as the hotels are also equipped with meeting facilities. Its flagship in Malaysia, Berjaya Times Square Kuala Lumpur, has 650 rooms and a convention centre with a ballroom and 15 function rooms.

Its expanded out of Malaysia to Singapore in 2001, but the hotel was sold off in 2014.

Today, Berjaya Hotels & Resorts owns and manages 17 properties, while parent Berjaya Group owns three which are managed independently – Intercontinental Hanoi Westlake Hotel and Sheraton Hanoi Hotel, both in Vietnam and The Four Seasons Hotel Kyoto in Japan.

## Swiss-Garden International Hotels, Resorts & Inns

Malaysian-born Swiss-Garden International Hotels, Resorts & Inns was established in 1991 and debuted its first property in 1993, the four-star Swiss-Garden Hotel Kuala Lumpur which offers 296 keys, a 540m<sup>2</sup> ballroom and several other function rooms.

It currently manages and operates 10 hotels in Malaysia and one in Australia, with an inventory of over 2,800 rooms. The latest hotel to open was Swiss-Inn Johor Bahru in January 2016.

There are plans to expand into China and South-east Asia, and grow its Australia portfolio in the coming years.

## Malaysia

### YTL Hotels

YTL Hotels opened its first hotel – the 56-room Pansy Resort (rebranded as Pangkor Laut Resort in 1994) – in 1985 and has today a collection of 26 award-winning hotels and resorts across Asia, Australia and Europe.

YTL Hotels caters to both MICE and leisure travellers. Its city hotels, such as The Ritz-Carlton, Kuala Lumpur, JW Marriot Kuala Lumpur and The Majestic Hotel Kuala Lumpur, are located near or in the city centre and offer luxurious meeting facilities. Resort properties, such as Pangkor Laut Resort, Tanjong Jara Resort and Gaya Island Resort, keep guests entertained with customised activities like nature trails and culinary classes, among many others.

YTL Hotels is now developing two luxury hotels, one in Thailand's Koh Samui and another in Japan's Niseko Village – both bearing the Ritz-Carlton brand.



The Ritz-Carlton Kuala Lumpur

## Philippines

### The Henry

Hanky Lee, chairman of Innovoterra Properties which owns and manages The Henry, sees the potential in transforming “unloved spaces” into boutique hotels.

He envisions transforming existing properties into small hotels offering personalised service in a unique setting, something that's sorely lacking in the Philippines.

In 2012, Lee transformed a space outside a residential subdivision into 38-key The Henry Cebu, beloved by guests for its quirky vintage-meets-industrial aesthetics.

Two years later, he transformed post-World War II homes in a private compound in Pasay into 34-key The Henry Manila, beautifully capturing the look and feel of modern nostalgia.

The Henry is ready to expand to 10 hotels by 2020 in Manila, Palawan, Bohol, Cebu, Batangas, Baguio and Dumaguete.

### Chroma Hospitality

Chroma Hospitality is a hotel management company jointly put up in 2010 by Indonesia's Archipelago International and the Philippines' Filinvest, which also owns the hotels and resorts.

Chroma's brands include Crimson, a luxury brand promising rich cosmopolitan

style, sleek design spaces and warm Filipino hospitality; and Quest, a brand for MICE and affordable lifestyle. Two new brands that joined the family are Azure Beach Club which is co-branded with Crimson, and Canvas for the hip and young travellers.

Today there are two Crimson hotels, two Quest Hotel and Conference Centers and an Azure Beach Club at Crimson Mactan. A 192-key Crimson property will open in Boracay come mid-2017. There also are plans to open Quest hotels in Dumaguete City and Tagaytay over the next few years, another Azure Beach Club at Crimson Boracay, and to debut Canvas in Cubao, Quezon City and Mactan, Cebu over the next several years.

### Bellevue Hotels and Resorts

Bellevue Hotels and Resorts owns and manages two brands: deluxe Bellevue and business hotel B.

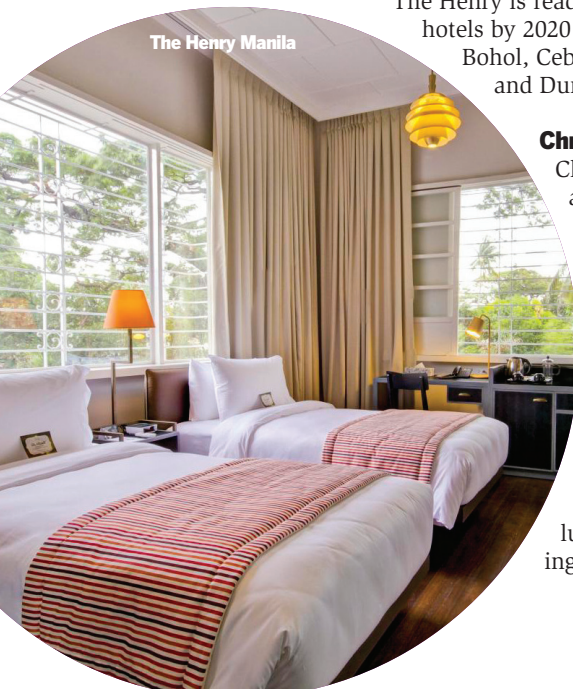
To create experiences that delight, the brands integrate traditional Filipino culture by focusing on family values such as warmth, optimism and loyalty while being ethical and consistent in delivering what they promise.

The group now has two Bellevue properties and two mid-priced B hotels.

As part of its expansion, Bellevue Hotels and Resorts is looking to have a Bellevue resort in Palawan and B hotels in Cagayan de Oro and General Santos in Mindanao over the next several years.



Crimson Hotel Mactan in Cebu



The Henry Manila



## Singapore

### Far East Hospitality Holdings

Singapore based Far East Hospitality Holdings had its first South-east Asian property in Singapore – Ming Court Hotel in 1987, which has been renamed as Orchard Parade Hotel.

Since then, the company has been driven by its corporate DNA of Singapore-inspired hospitality, distinguishing each brand through unique experiences. The company's business travel and MICE positioning focuses on diverse options that cater to different needs.

Additionally, its customer-focused mantra stands out in the industry with its distinctive approach to segmenting brands based on traveller profiles, a departure from the traditional star-rating system.

Through joint ventures, Far East Hospitality now has a combined portfolio of more than 13,000 rooms under management across 90 hotels and serviced residences in seven countries. In South-east Asia, FEH's portfolio comprises 12 hotels and ten serviced residences.

The company's Village Hotels collection holds leisure and business travel-ready properties in four locations in Singapore – Albert Court, Bugis, Changi and Katong. The hotels carry a unique and local cultural flavour in both its decor and MICE offerings. For example, with Village Hotel Changi's recent rebranding, planners can choose from team retreat activities at Pulau Ubin, as well as local delicacies that are well-loved in the local area – bringing to life its tagline, *Your Ideal Retreat and Meeting Destination*.

### Millennium & Copthorne Hotels plc

Founded in 1989, Millennium & Copthorne Hotels (M&C) is a global hospitality management and real estate group which



Village Hotel Changi

owns, asset manages and operates a worldwide portfolio of 125 hotels with 34,665 rooms in over 80 business and leisure destinations. Listed on the London Stock Exchange since 1996, the group's property portfolio encompasses distinct global brands – Grand Millennium, Millennium, Grand Copthorne, Copthorne, M Hotel, Studio M, Kingsgate and M Social.

Millennium Hotels and Resorts (MHR) under M&C has properties strategically placed in key gateway cities worldwide, which makes them perfect for business travellers and corporate events. MHR hotels are never cookie-cutter, but always fresh and tailored to their location.

In South-east Asia today, MHR is present in Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, Thailand and the Philippines.



M Social Singapore

## Thailand

### Onyx Hospitality Group

Onyx Hospitality Group has decades of experience in running some of Thailand's most successful hotel operations, and in 1992 it introduced the Amari Hotels and Resorts brand. With the move, properties were rebranded under Amari, with Amari Pattaya and Amari Phuket among the first. In 2009, the brand was revamped to today's Colours and Rhythms concept.

Amari caters to both business travellers who like to be in the thick of the action, with a hotel in central Bangkok, and those who like to relax by the beach. A number of properties have space to accommodate business events, including Amari Watergate Bangkok, Amari Pattaya, Amari Hua Hin and Amari Phuket.

There are now 14 operational Amari properties, located in Thailand, Qatar, Bangladesh and the Maldives. There are eight Amari properties in the pipeline, including Amari Johor Bahru in Malaysia, set to open later this year.

### Centara Hotels and Resorts

The hotel now known as Centara Grand at Central Plaza Ladprao Bangkok opened in 1983, an all-in-one hotel, convention centre and shopping mall that set a template for success. It also marked the beginning of Central Plaza Hotel Public Company, founded

by the Central Group, Thailand's largest retail conglomerate.

In June 2007, the hotel company rebranded to Centara Hotels & Resorts to reflect its Centara branded hotel network spanning both city centres and resorts.

Among its many brands, the five-star Centara Grand is catered



Centara Grand Bangkok

## Thailand

to business travellers, with meeting rooms, business centres and concierge services available in all properties. Convention facilities are attached to Centara Grand properties, making for an integrated experience. The Centara Club provides separate meeting rooms, food and drinks, and extra assistance from Club staff.

Also MICE ready are properties under the four-star Centara brand and the three-star Centra brand. Centara hotels are centrally located in Thailand's major destinations and have on-site meeting facilities, while Centra properties come with a range of facilities in prime central destinations.

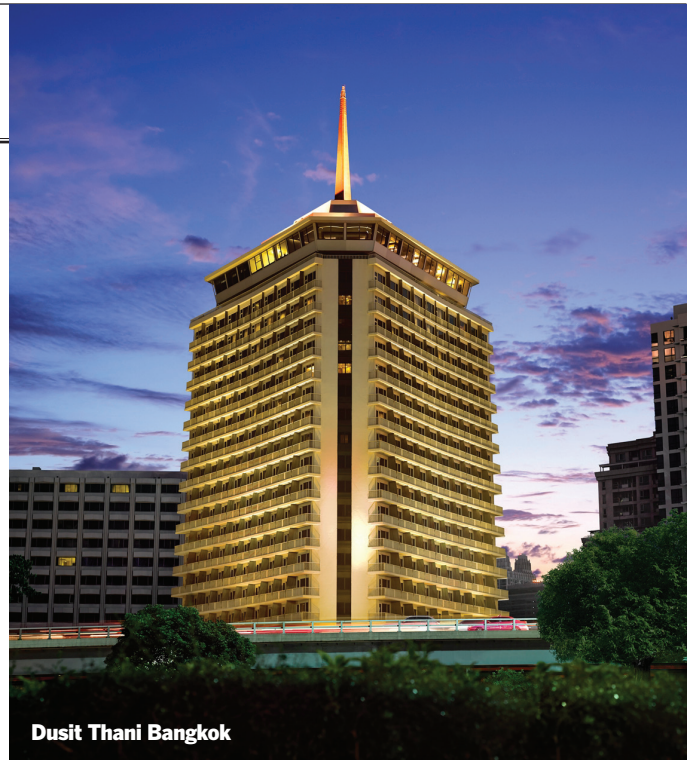
Centara Hotels & Resorts now has 38 properties in Thailand, the Maldives, Sri Lanka, Bali and Vietnam. Another 29 hotels are in various stages of development.

### Dusit International

Thanpuying Chanut Piyaoui opened the Princess Hotel in 1949, but Dusit International really came to prominence in 1970 with the opening of the flagship Dusit Thani hotel in Silom.

While the group has several brands, including Dusit Devarana and the trendy dusitD2, the Dusit Thani hotels are those most naturally suited to MICE. They are located near the CBDs or major attractions of the host city, and each have convention facilities and meeting spaces.

Dusit International now has 28 hotels in nine countries: Thailand, where the bulk is, China, Egypt, India, Kenya, the



Maldives, the Philippines, the UAE and the US. The group is embarking on an ambitious expansion plan, with more than 40 hotels set to open within the next five years in 21 countries spanning Asia, Australia and the Middle East.

## Vietnam

### H&K Hospitality

Vietnamese company H&K Hospitality is a hotels and resorts management company with three brands under its belt – Belle Maison, Royal Lotus and Royal Gallery.

Royal Lotus, best suited for the MICE market, was launched in 2010. It combines elegant contemporary design with a range of services for business travellers, such as convention rooms, entertainment facilities and dining options, in central locations.

The first hotel under this brand was the 147-room Royal Lotus Halong. Today it has three hotels, with the Royal Lotus Resort & Spa slated to open this year in Cam Ranh Bay, Nha Trang. Royal Lotus Hotels in Haiphong and Ninh Binh provinces are set to launch in 2017, and a 42-villa Royal Lotus Resort and Spa is scheduled for two years in Phu Yen.

### Saigontourist

Saigontourist started operations in 1975 in the capital as the city's first business in the tourism industry. In March 1999, the state-run operation launched Saigontourist Holding Company, incorporating a series of travel-based firms. Since then, the organisation's portfolio has vastly diversified.

Today, it manages eight travel companies, 28 restaurants, and a range of resorts and complexes and three-, four- and five-star hotels, targeting both leisure and business tourists, across Vietnam. Its hotels take in the prestigious Sheraton Saigon Hotel & Towers and the iconic Rex Hotel in Ho Chi Minh City.

With 13 resorts and 54 hotels in its portfolio, Saigontourist Company is Vietnam's largest homegrown hotel brand. It is currently seeking to expand the brand name into other South-east Asian countries, as well as upgrading existing facilities.

### TMG Hospitality

Vietnamese Thiem Minh Group (TMG) launched in 1994 with Buffalo Tours. In 2007, it opened its first property, Mai Chau Lodge in Mai Chau. In 2011, TMG acquired the upmarket Victoria Hotels and Resorts, establishing the flagship TMG Hospitality arm of the company. The same year, it expanded into Laos, opening Xiang Thong Palace (now Victoria Xiang Thong Palace).

Victoria Hotels and Resorts offers a blend of options catering to both leisure and business travellers.

In 2013, its property portfolio received another boost with the launch of EMM Hotels and Resorts in Ho Chi Minh City. A second property opened in June in Hoi An.

Altogether, TMG has 780 rooms spread across 11 hotels in Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia and 10 cruises covering the four- and three-star segments.

### Vinpearl

Launched in 2000, Vinpearl invested in the undeveloped island of Hon Tre, off the coast of Nha Trang. Vinpearl Resort Nha Trang set the standard for the luxury offerings that were to follow, opening in 2003.

Investing more than 10 years in developing the island, Vinpearl Luxury Nha Trang came next, with Vinpearl Premium Nha Trang opening in 2015. The island is also home to Vinpearl Golf Nha Trang and theme park, Vinpearl land.

Focusing on MICE packages, the island is equipped with a range of conference facilities, meeting rooms and banquet halls. The group has opened similar properties across Vietnam.

Vinpearl currently owns nine luxury hotel resorts in Nha Trang, Danang, Halong Bay and Phu Quoc. It has plans to continue developing its premium chain of resorts in Quy Nhon, Hoi An and Hanoi, with state-of-the-art facilities to cater to the rising MICE industry.



# Big boys are here to play too

From AccorHotels to Starwood, the South-east Asian MICE playground has benefitted from the presence of these international hotel chains. By **Karen Yue**

## AccorHotels

In Asia-Pacific, AccorHotels has 691 operating hotels and 133,715 rooms in 17 countries, with a strong presence in ASEAN member nations. More than 250 hotels are scheduled to open over the next five years in Asia-Pacific.

According to Kerry Healy, vice president sales Asia Pacific, AccorHotels is “increasingly growing our pipeline in second-tier cities that are opening up to major business in the region”.

Sofitel, Pullman, MGallery, Grand Mercure, Novotel, Mercure, ibis and ibis Styles brands are present in Asia-Pacific.

Healy said: “One of the best things about AccorHotels is that the group can offer clients a wide range of event hotels, from budget to luxury. For example, ibis hotels are increasingly including meeting rooms due to the (growing) demand for affordable meeting options. Meanwhile, Sofitel and Pullman hotels are offered to those looking for a more luxurious event (venue).”

Through AccorHotels’ Planet 21 sustainable development programme, planners can also incorporate sustainable Planet 21 Discovery experiences into their event programme.

## Hyatt Hotels and Resorts

The hotel company has 72 hotels in Asia-Pacific as of December 31, 2015, and these account for more than 26,000 rooms and 16 per cent of the total room count worldwide.

Among its various brands, the Grand Hyatt is best poised to support MICE because it boasts “a rich legacy of offering creative and memorable experiences for business delegates both in and outside meetings”, according to Carina Chorenge, senior vice president of brands and commercial strategy, Asia Pacific.

Furthermore, Grand Hyatt hotels around the region feature flexible venue capabilities to host events and meetings that accommodate groups of all sizes.

In South-east Asia, there are six Grand Hyatt hotels in Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore and Thailand.

## InterContinental Hotels Group

InterContinental Hotels Group (IHG) has nine hotel brands under its umbrella, with 5,000 properties spanning across nearly 100 territories and countries.

Part of the IHG global portfolio, the Crowne Plaza Hotels & Resorts brand is built with business events in mind. The dynamic upscale hotel brand is located in 65 countries around the world in major urban centres, gateway cities and resort destinations. In south-east Asia, the brand is present in Singapore, Thailand, the Philippines and Indonesia.

## Marriott International

In Asia-Pacific, Marriott International has 200 hotels in operation, contributing more than 62,000 rooms to the total inventory. The Marriott Hotel brand is most popular with business event planners, and properties are present in Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore and Thailand.

Marriott properties support business event planners through an innovative concept called *Meetings Imagined*, which ensures the seven purposes of meetings – celebrate, decide, educate, ideate, network, produce and promote – are accomplished.



## Preferred Hotels & Resorts

Preferred Hotels & Resorts is said to be the world’s largest independent hotel brand, representing more than 650 hotels, resorts, residences and unique hotel groups across 85 countries.

A number of luxury properties with the capacity to support business groups and events of all sizes are identified under its *Preferred Meetings* programme. The *Preferred Meetings* stable in South-east Asia comprises properties such as Discovery Suites in Pasig, the Philippines, which offers 220 suites and eight function spaces; Royal Plaza On Scotts in Singapore, which has 511 keys, eight function rooms and an award-winning Halal-certified restaurant; and The Landmark Bangkok in Thailand, which houses 399 rooms and 25 newly renovated private conference rooms.

## Shangri-La Hotels & Resorts

Hong Kong-based Shangri-La Hotels and Resorts currently owns and manages 98 properties under four brands – Shangri-La, Kerry Hotel, Hotel Jen and Traders Hotel, with a total room inventory of 40,649 worldwide and 38,212 in the Asia-Pacific. More than 26 per cent of these properties are in key gateway cities.

The company also offers one of the most extensive collections of inspired meeting and event venues, boasting more than 300,000m<sup>2</sup> of dedicated event space. All brands of Shangri-La Hotels and Resorts are suitable for business events, and the hotels are favoured venues for hosting heads of state, Fortune 500 companies, high-profile product launches and social events.

## Starwood Hotels & Resorts Worldwide

Starwood Hotels & Resorts Worldwide has about 27 per cent of their Asia-Pacific properties located in key gateway cities. Some Starwood properties are also conveniently connected to convention spaces such as the Westin Resort Nusa Dua in Bali, Indonesia and the Westin Langkawi in Malaysia.

According to a hotel spokesperson, all brands under the Starwood group are suitable for business meetings as all the properties aim to meet the varied needs of business event customers.

# Hardest MICE specialists

As the MICE sector grows in South-east Asia, so has the community of inbound and outbound specialists who help deliver world-class business events. **TTGmice reporters** reveal some of the region's most experienced and successful companies

## Brunei

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### Freme Travel

Freme Travel was established in 1971 by a former banker. In 1982, it was incorporated as a private limited company with a B\$3 million (US\$2.2 billion) paid up capital by Michael Lee and a former senior government servant as his local partner.

Since then, Freme has grown significantly from a single office with three staff to five offices and 94 full-time staff. In 2015, its turnover was about B\$50 million.

Spurred by the encouraging response for its MICE services, Freme expanded its range of services in 2015 to include accommodation and teambuilding facilities within a natural setting for

business event groups. Its recently refurbished Rainforest Lodge and Adventure Park in Batang Duri, Temburong District, are a hit with corporate clients in Brunei and overseas.

**Michael Lee**  
Managing director,  
Freme Travel



## Cambodia

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### Hanuman Travel

Hanuman Travel was launched as a travel consultancy in 1990 by Sotho Tan, who worked as one of the country's first post-war tour guides. She remains at the helm of the company, which has grown from a small family-run operation to an outfit with more than 100 employees. Headquartered in Phnom Penh, the company opened a branch office in Siem Reap in 1992.

Establishing itself during the United Nation's presence in Cambodia during the early 1990s – when it was responsible for the ticketing and travel arrangements of more than 7,500 troops and personnel – Hanuman built a strong reputation.

In the next decade, the company expanded into Laos, Myanmar, Thailand and Vietnam, offering unique, tailor-made tours. It has also designed a series of themed tours such as safari, adventure and cruises. Its wealth of experience in the industry has also bolstered its MICE offerings, with Hanuman organising a series of corporate events for clients, such as Gordon Ramsay's Great Escapes and Top Gear Vietnam.

### Angkor TK Travel and Tours

Angkor TK Travel and Tours was founded in 2001 by a group of Cambodians. Starting as a tour operator with a handful of staff, the company has grown to more than 100 employees.

The company's speciality is the cruise market, where it han-

dles ground operations for a series of leading cruise liners, such as Cunard and Arcadia. Managing director Chaiyapruk Phumimuang has been the official adviser to the Minister of Tourism in charge of cruise organising since 2008.

As well as group and FIT tours of Cambodia, its offerings extend into Thailand, Vietnam, Laos and Myanmar, with accommodation available in each country. The company also has a MICE division.

### PSD Travel

Established in 2005, President International Travel Co. – also known as PSD Travel – is a leading inbound travel agent. It specialises in a range of inbound tours, including sightseeing, photography and trips for a good cause. It is also one of the country's leading providers for inbound and outbound golf tourism and MICE packages.

In 2014, it introduced an outbound golf section, featuring golf in Malaysia, Thailand, Vietnam, Japan, Laos, Indonesia and the Philippines. It has handled a string of international and corporate tournaments such as the Prudential Astro Masters and Liberty Cup.

Its MICE division has organised large corporate events that involve dining at Angkor's temples to corporate functions in luxury ballrooms. The company's head office is in Siem Reap, and it has branch offices in Phnom Penh, Poipet, and Shanghai.

## Indonesia

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### Royalindo Expoduta (Royalindo Convention International)

Royalindo Expoduta was founded in 1989 by three entrepreneurs, Iqbal Alan Abdullah, SitiAksar and Evita Nursanty. At the beginning, there were only 10 staff and the company focused on conventions and exhibitions domestically and abroad.

The company, now led by Muhammad Reza Abdullah, has grown not only in the convention and exhibition business but also in other aspects. It now has more than 400 staff and sub-companies such as Royalindo MASA and My Global Trip.

The success of Royalindo can be traced back to the 1990s where the 39<sup>th</sup> ASPA Conference was held, and ahead to the 2015 Asia Africa Conference. In between, hundreds of events have been successfully delivered, such as the ASEAN Summit, WTO Ministerial Meeting, and Indonesia International Infrastructure Bali Democracy Forum.

Today Royalindo has offices in Bali and Singapore. It is also a member of the Asian Federation of Exhibition and Convention Associations and Indonesia Congress & Convention Association.



## Indonesia

### Pacto Convex

Pactoconvex Niagatama or Pacto Convex was founded in 1992 with an aim to become the leading PCO in Indonesia. It was established under Pacto Ltd., a business group formerly known as Pacto Tours and Travel, which was founded in 1967.

Pacto Convex started off with only three permanent staff. To support events operations, the company hired temporary staff from various university backgrounds.

Today, Pacto Convex has become a leading PCO, PEO and DMC in the country, providing a full range of services in the MICE spectrum. The headquarters in Jakarta is supported by five offices around Indonesia. It employs 100 people now.

Pacto Convex organises an average of 75 to 100 MICE events annually for groups that number from as small as 100 to a massive 5,000. Pacto also manages about 100,000m<sup>2</sup> of exhibition space, and this brings an economic impact of approximately US\$175 million.

For operations in South-east Asia and beyond, Pacto Convex opts for joint operations with local partners. This includes event management overseas and event marketing.

In the future, the company plans to set up a marketing representative office to manage events overseas.

**Susilowani Daud**  
President director,  
Pacto Convex



## Laos

### Visit Asia Travel

Ket Thipphachanh founded Visit Asia Travel in 1999 when he noticed the presence of "several top Lao hotels" but "few professional travel companies". He took up the challenge to close the gap, with his company specialising in handling inbound German travellers. He offered multiday tours, and the first booking took customers from northern Laos to the south on buses.

Visit Asia Travel branched into MICE in 2006 when Thipphachanh participated in a tradeshow and saw demand for this segment. However, due to a lack of experienced MICE professionals in the country, Visit Asia Travel's MICE division has yet to organise a large event. It mainly organises corporate functions with under than 200 participants and receives about 16 to 18 events each year.

## Malaysia

### Asian Overland Services Tours & Travel

This inbound tour operator was established in 1976 by Anthony Wong with three staff. Today it is one of the leading DMCs in Malaysia with a staff force of 120 people and offices in Kuala Lumpur, Langkawi and Sabah. It also has marketing offices in India, Sri Lanka and Indonesia.

In 1992, AOS Conventions & Events (AOSCE) was established as a PCO to provide conference management services to associations. AOSCE (Borneo) was incorporated in 2009. AOSCE currently has 14 full-time staff in the PCO business and is registered as a Tier 1 PCO with the Malaysia Convention & Exhibition Bureau (MyCEB). AOSCE has handled conferences as large as 8,000 delegates, such as The Federation of Gynaecology and Obstetrics 2006 medical conference, to smaller meetings of a few hundred.

### Within Earth Holidays

Within Earth Holidays was established in 2006 by Mustafa Al-Absi and Mohammed Basamh, both managing directors.

The business grew from a small office in Kuala Lumpur with three staff mainly handling leisure requests, to one with 30 staff today and a DMC specialisation in the markets of Turkey, Egypt and the UAE. In 2015, the company handled 20 incentive and meeting groups from the Middle East with over 60 people each.

Recently, the company invested in a B2B system which allows agents overseas to connect with its

staff on MICE-related enquiries and on customised programmes. In the future, the company plans to open an office in Jakarta as it sees growing interest from the Middle East to Indonesia.

### Mayflower Travel Group

Mayflower Tour was established in 1960 as an inbound tour company, and was merged with Acme Tours and Services to become Mayflower Acme Tours in 1973. Soon after, the company was appointed as a travel representative for American Express in Malaysia, thus kicking off its corporate airline ticketing services.

Mayflower Travel Group today has a staff strength of 550 people, working under its numerous travel companies. It is strong in both inbound and outbound MICE and corporate ticketing.

In 2014, its subsidiary, Mayflower Holidays, established its first regional office in Cambodia, taking the name of MAT Tours & Travel (Cambodia). With this successful expansion, Mayflower Travel Group is now working to do the same in Thailand and Myanmar in the near future.

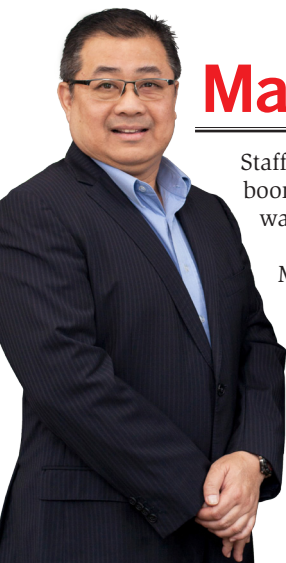
### Discovery Overland MICE

Discovery Overland MICE (DOM) started off in 2001 with Erik Ewe as managing director and Henry Wong as executive director.

### Anthony Wong

Group managing director,  
Asian Overland Services Toursim & Hospitality Group





## Malaysia

Staff headcount grew from two to five as business boomed and a portfolio of business travel products was created and enhanced.

Today, DOM specialises in creating unique MICE experiences. It has positioned itself as a strategic choice for multifaceted and multi-destination programmes in Malaysia and neighbouring destinations such as Singapore, Thailand and Indonesia. It has an office in Singapore, known as Emerging View Services, which does inbound leisure and MICE,

**Erik Ewe**

Managing director, Discovery Overland MICE

and three offices under the Discovery Aviation & Tours umbrella in Thailand which also handle inbound MICE and leisure.

### Apple Vacations & Conventions

Founded in 1996 by Desmond Lee, the current group managing director, the company cut its teeth on outbound tours to Japan and inbound tours from Taiwan, China, Hong Kong and Japan, as well as outbound incentive travel within South-east Asia. In the first decade of operations, it had around 50 staff.

Today it has 200 staff in the Malaysian office. The company's revenue in 2015 totalled RM260 million (US\$64.5 million). In 2010, it opened an office in Singapore called Apple Vacations Singapore and in 2011, established a presence in Indonesia called Apple Vacations Indonesia. Both offices handle outbound leisure, corporate and incentive travel.

## Myanmar

### Orchestra Travels Company Limited

Founded in 1994 by two young entrepreneurs, Orchestra Travels Company is based in Yangon and staffed today by an experienced multilingual team with representative offices in Bagan, Mandalay, Inle Lake and Thandwe. Aung Myat Kyaw leads the company as managing director.

A specialist in the European market, particularly that of Italy, Orchestra Travels Company offers a wide range of services

including seat-in-coach tours, tailored programmes, soft adventure and environmental focused tours, incentive programmes and corporate meetings. It also organises outbound incentives to Europe.

Orchestra Travels' business today touches accommodation through its Sandoway Resort in Ngapali Beach and Yandabo Home village resort along the Ayarwaddy River, and cruises through Ayravata Cruises Company Limited.

## Philippines

### Intas Destination Management Inc.

Intas started off with no capital 36 years ago when Teresita Henderson founded it. Since then, the DMC has risen to become one of the leaders in Philippine inbound, due to its high standards of personalised service, and creativity in organising MICE and other inbound programmes. It is now helmed by Henderson's daughter, managing director Sonia Lazo.

From a Manila-based operation, it now has branches in Cebu and Davao, along with representative offices elsewhere in the country. Intas has also won various awards, and is a two-time recipient of Kalakbay Award, the presidential award for creative excellence, design and execution of programmes.

### TeamAsia

Founded in 1992 by Michael and Monette Hamlin, TeamAsia started with a team of three that organised the Asian Management Awards. It has become an award-winning integrated marketing communication firm whose core businesses include event management, public relations and SEO services.

Today a 60-man team, TeamAsia handles MICE groups of all sizes, from intimate executive briefings to unique activations to large-scale global conferences.

### Corporate International Travel & Tours, Inc.

Corporate International Travel & Tours, Inc. (CITTI) was founded 23 years ago by Shan Dioquino David, who is currently the president. The company started as an outbound travel provider, but as Philippine tourism boomed, it built a thriving inbound business focused on European, Asian and Australian markets.

CITTI is developing new source markets from Eastern Europe and the Baltic States. Recently, CITTI was invited to be the sole

Philippine representative of 1 DMC Asia, an association of professional DMCs throughout Asia.

### Philippine Exhibits and Themeparks Corporation (PETCO)

Philippine Exhibits and Themeparks Corporation (PETCO) was founded in 1989 by Marisa Nallana. It later expanded to organise conferences, congresses and special events such as the World Karate Championship, Palarong Pambansa (National Games), and motoring events and festivals like Sinulog, MassKara Festival and Lantern. Today, PETCO handles events for numerous industries and manages event venues like the Cebu International Convention Center. It also collaborates with the Thailand Convention and Exhibition Bureau, and represents them, along with Taiwan, South Korea and Thailand, during MICE roadshows.

### Shroff International Travel Care Inc

Managing director Arjun Shroff established the DMC that carries his name 23 years ago. It specialises in MICE and corporate travel, and serves a huge chunk of inbound from India. Today, Shroff's daughters have taken over the reins of the company; Kristine for inbound and Sheena for outbound. The company is looking to expand in new markets in Europe, the Middle East and Asia-Pacific. The company is also the Accredited Travel Agency for Consular Services of Indian Embassy in the country.

### Arjun Shroff

Managing director,  
Shroff International Travel Care Inc





# Singapore

## MCI Group Asia Pacific

MCI is an independently owned company founded by chairman and president Roger Tondeur in 1987. Headquartered in Geneva, Switzerland, MCI has 1,900 professionals, based in 60 cities, working with clients across the globe. Its Asia-Pacific office is located in Singapore.

In 2015, MCI posted another year of steady growth with a 24 per cent increase of both turnover and gross margin. Over the past 12 months, MCI serviced 85 Fortune 500 clients and delivered 5,100 projects globally. The company expects to further expand in the Americas, and is looking forward to new developments in the digital and technology areas.

## Pacific World

Pacific World was founded in 1980 with its first office in Hong Kong. From there, it expanded into Greater China and South-east Asia before it was acquired by Tui Travel PLC in 2006, and saw continued expansion into Europe, Middle East and Africa.

The 350-employee strong company is now an integrated global destination and event management company that operates in 34 countries and more than 100 destinations. Its Asia headquarters is in Singapore.

It is also part of Hotelbeds Group, a leading provider of services to the global travel trade with key positions in some of the fastest growing segments in the industry.

Pacific World delivers more than 2,000 events per year that combine professional organisation with the unique flavours of the destinations.

## Tour East

Established in 1972, Tour East has risen to become one of Asia-Pacific's leading DMCs with over 500 tour specialists. It has a network of 13 offices, seven of which are in South-east Asia. The company's quest for constant innovation and readiness to reinvent has earned it numerous accolades, the latest of which is the Singapore Experience Awards by the Singapore Tourism Board. Tour East takes a holistic approach to invest-

ing in technology. It has an enhanced platform for distribution of hotel accommodation, tours and transportation services, and its investment extends to the MICE division via an event management system designed for PCOs and PMOs.

## MICE Matters Singapore

Founded in May 2005 by Melvyn Nonis and Michelle Seet, the team started with three staff. Today there are 18 members and MICE Matters Singapore has representations in Bangkok, Ho Chi Minh City, Kuala Lumpur, Las Vegas and Shanghai. Its annual sales revenue is over S\$10 million (US\$7.4 million).

The company is a key player in the life insurance industry, and has managed conferences and events in more than 30 cities around the world.

## East West Planners

The company started as Franco-Asian Travel in 1980, a creation of Digby Collis and Janet Tan-Collis. Currently known as East West Planners, the agency assists clients in the full realm of events and destination requirements. From a staff of 10, it now has 50. It expanded into Malaysia and China but to have an Asia-Pacific network, alliance partnerships with other operating owners was formed.

Last year, the company created and launched an interactive and integrated technology solution to assist clients in real-time. It also helped employees to improve timeliness, and cost and yield effectiveness.



**Janet Tan-Collis**

CEO, East West Planners

# Thailand

## Exo Travel

Three young entrepreneurs, Eric Merlin, Denis Colonna and Olivier Colomes, formed Exotissimo Travel in 1993. Starting operations in Ho Chi Minh City before expanding to Bangkok and beyond, Exo (as it later became known) leveraged its connection with French incentive houses to pioneer MICE operations in Vietnam as early as 1993.

Now headquartered in Bangkok, Exo has more than 800 full-time staff in 24 offices across nine Asian destinations. There are also sales offices in major cities such as London and New York. Its biggest offices are in key MICE destinations Thailand and Vietnam, with the latter proving the best for sales. Exo Travel had a record-breaking 2016 with sales of more than US\$11 million.

## Diethelm Travel Group

Etto Wettstein founded Diethelm Travel Group in April 1957. There were 19 people at the start, when Diethelm was a DMC with one market. Crucial to its early success was winning the right to be Swissair's travel agent in Thailand. Diethelm Events was launched in 1999 as a dedicated MICE division.

After nearly 60 years, Diethelm now boasts 600 employees in

Asia and has expanded to serve 12 markets, mainly in Asia. The total sales in 2014 was 1.43 billion Swiss francs (US\$1.48 billion).



**Olivier Colomes**  
Founder, Exo Travel

## Thailand

### CCT Group

Established in 1991 by Vichit Prakobgosol who still helms the company, CCT Group claims to be the first inbound tour operator in Thailand to exclusively target the Chinese market. It has since expanded and diversified, with health and golf trips, and the ownership of two five-star international hotels. The group's MICE division, CCT Express, opened in 2005.

CCT Group has three branches today, in Bangkok, Chiang Mai and Phuket, with a fourth office planned for Koh Samui. It handles about 100,000 inbound and 30,000 outbound customers annually. There are 150 full-time staff in the Bangkok headquarters, with 15 dedicated to the MICE department.

### Destination Asia

The Destination Asia Group had two tiny offices and 13 staff when it opened in October 1996. Company heads set out a plan to focus on three business streams – wholesale leisure/tours, MICE and cruises. The other key decision was to source customers from everywhere, rather than a business model based on a common language.

Destination Asia now has more than 700 staff in eight South-east Asian countries, Japan, Hong Kong and China. The China office also has a growing outbound travel unit. The Tokyo office opened nine days before the Fukushima nuclear disaster, but has

recovered to become the group's strongest sales and profit generator. Dnata purchased a stake in the company in June 2016.

### Asian Trails

Asian Trails was born on September 9, 1999, the brainchild of four shareholders who wanted to bring a sense of fun and flexibility to corporate-focused DMC.

Starting with 10 employees at the Bangkok headquarters, Asian Trails targeted German-speaking countries. In 2006, Zurich-based Kuoni Travel acquired a stake in the company.

As of 2016, Asian Trails has 33 offices in eight destinations with 680 full-time staff. Each destination has an executive, and in the case of China and Vietnam the managing directors are locals.

While 90 per cent of the business is leisure, and the bulk of it tailor-made experiences, the MICE component is growing and each office has a dedicated MICE team.

**Laurent Kuenzle**  
CEO, Asian Trails



## Vietnam

### Heritage Mice & Travel

For 12 years, the Ho Chi Minh City-based company has been specialising in providing inbound travel services for MICE and leisure. As well as land tours, air tickets, visas and hotel bookings, the company boasts a highly-trained MICE team, with this component today forming the majority of their business.

The company soon shifted its focus to corporate travel and management. By becoming an associate partner of HRG, Heritage Mice & Travel has developed its expertise in hosting a series of major customised events and conferences.

### Lac Hong Voyages

Founded in 2004 by Jonathan Tran and Robert Tan, Lac Hong Voyages is a wholesale tour operator with 30 core staff. Catering for inbound and outbound operations, the DMC and leisure travel specialist organises tours across Indochina. The company specialises in both domestic and international markets, offering land tours, cruises and MICE planning.

In 2013, it expanded operations, launching an events and marketing arm, JTR Events and Marketing Co, to organise travel trade events and marketing for the tourism industry, as well as to focus on MICE functions.

### Saigontourist Travel Service

Launched in 1975, the company is Vietnam's longest-running TMC. Operating as an affiliate of state-run, Saigontourist Holding



**Robert Tan**  
Owner, Lac Hong Voyages

Company, the organisation specialises in inbound, outbound and domestic travel.

In 2003, it became a member of Vietnam's MICE Club and is the official tour operator for business trips, working with Ho Chi Minh City authorities.

Today, its core operations centre around designing leisure tours, MICE and business travel, working closely with more than 400 travel companies and agents across the globe.

### Indochina Travel Services

Established in 1995 by director general, Tran Thi Thuy, Indochina Travel Services (ITS) was one of the first DMCs to be authorised by Vietnam National Tourism Authority. It currently has about 40 employees, with its headquarters based in Hanoi and operational offices in Danang and Ho Chi Minh City. It also has network offices in Cambodia, Laos and Myanmar, and marketing offices in Toronto and LA.

Today ITS boasts diverse offerings, specialising in group travel, FIT, and golf and MICE tourists. As a partner of MICE Vietnam, ITS has a separate division that deals with corporate events.

### Eviva Tour Vietnam

Eviva Tour Vietnam launched in 2004 as a locally-run DMC, specialising in high-end luxury, off-the-beaten-track and community-based tours. It organised its first conference in 2005, and quickly established itself as a leading MICE operator, using its strong partnerships to deliver a string of major national and international events. Today it offers extensive B2B and B2C travel consultancy, inbound travel throughout Vietnam and outbound tours options to Cambodia, Laos and Myanmar.

Headquartered in Ho Chi Minh City, Eviva also has offices in Hanoi and San Francisco, US. Its core team currently stands at about 20 employees, with additional guides, translators and administration staff on the books.



# New chiefs on the block

**TTGmice reporters** speak to next-generation MICE bosses in South-east Asia, and find out how they are changing the way they deliver events, and their aspirations



From left: Laurent Granier, Alexander Wong

## Laurent Granier

**Co-founder and general manager  
MICE People, Laos**

Seeing opportunity in Laos as a MICE destination, Laurent Granier, along with three up-and-coming travel professionals, established MICE People six years ago. Granier and his team zoomed in on well-travelled European incentive groups that are seeking something new.

As business grew, Granier went on to found Laos Mood and MICE People by Laos Mood, with 12 full-time staff. The backbone of his operation is “exclusivity in services” mixed with a “small is beautiful” approach. The company continues to focus on European incentives and small sized meetings.

While Granier is confident in Laos’ potential in growing as a MICE destination, he also recognises its limitations. In addition to his focus on traditional markets and products, he has gone high-tech to reach and please his clients.

“We began shifting from trade events to engaging in electronic networks, and we give all of guests smartphones to use, rather than maps,” he said.

“We try to stand out by offering something extra. Our guests are used to travelling, and they value experiences.”

## Jackie Han

**CEO and events manager  
Vietnam Events, Vietnam**

Jackie Han has been helping to revolutionise Vietnam’s MICE industry. He was recruited by travel operator Hoabinh Tourist in 2008, one year after it was formed, and rose to the ranks of deputy director general, a position he holds today.

As the market demand for large-scale events in Vietnam continued to swell, Hoabinh Tourist decided it was time to dive into the market. In 2014, the company launched a subsidiary dedicated to MICE, and that marked the birth of Vietnam Events, with Han at the helm.

“We wanted to develop and supply professional events services to our customers, as Vietnam is becoming a more attractive destination for events,” Han said.

By offering a combination of services, from events and conference management and planning, event staffing, equipment supply, exhibition services, branding and marketing, Han hopes to capture a large market share in the future. His eventual goal is to become one of the best MICE organisers in Vietnam and South-east Asia by 2020.

## Alexander Wong

**Operations director  
Asia MICE Production, Malaysia**

Alexander Wong left full-time employment with an advertising and events company to establish his own business in January 2015. This led to the birth of Asia MICE Production (AMP) in Kuala Lumpur, a full-fledged meetings, incentives, conference and events production house with a strong regional network, serving both local and overseas clients.

Taking on a modest job title of operations director, Wong runs a team of eight full-time staff and, depending on the size and complexity of an event, several capable and experienced part-timers. He prefers to be seen as being part of the team instead of the boss, and describes himself as a detailed person. However, he is not one who micro-manages.

“I encourage teammates to show their creativity and communication skills in organising an event and securing new projects,” he said.

“I believe in keeping the team motivated, but this is not always easy. We organise sports activities and social events over the weekends to keep the team spirit high and to strengthen the bond between colleagues.”

So as not to “offend or demotivate any of the younger team members”, Wong deals with conflicting ideas and differing perceptions in a sensitive manner.

Wong believes the AMP has fared above expectations. He expressed gratitude to “clients who believe in our services even though we are a young company”.

“One of the lessons I have learnt being in the travel industry is the power of networking and relationships. I would not have risked leaving full-time employment to start my own business this year if I did not have strong business contacts who said they would support me in my new venture. And indeed they have,” he added.





From left: Andrew Koh; Kevin Jemel Hinahon; Muhammad Reza Abdullah

### Andrew Koh

**Managing director  
Events Architects, Singapore**

Andrew Koh leads Singapore-based Events Architects as managing director and has handled a variety of events, from the opening of Unilever's Four Acres Singapore global leadership development centre to Harley-Davidson Asia Pacific's regional media launch.

Koh works with a team of 12 which comprises a mix of event veterans and newbloods in their 20s.

"In people management, there can never be a one-size-fits-all policy to please everyone. The right or necessary policy might not be the most popular one. While the top-down communication process is extremely vital to keep everyone aligned to the goals and vision of the company, convincing everyone to sing the same tune is very difficult," Koh said.

Acknowledging that every staff has a different personality and a different style of working, Koh said it was necessary to "adapt to these (differences) so that the person can perform better".

Offering an example, Koh said a teammate who isn't a morning person and who works better at night, is allowed a different work schedule.

"At Events Architects we are result driven rather than process driven," he remarked.

### Kevin Jemel Hinahon

**Marketing manager/manager of MICE  
Intas Destination Management,  
The Philippines**

Kevin Jemel Hinahon is seen as the rising star in Intas Destination Management Inc in the Philippines. He took on the roles of marketing manager and manager of MICE in June 2014, after rising through

the ranks from the humble position of reservations officer. Throughout his time with Intas, Hinahon had moved from operations to marketing and MICE.

But Hinahon's contribution to Intas began even when he was still a student of tourism management, as he had churned out some projects for the DMC then.

Intas has a bevy of 13 millennials in its MICE, group and adventure, and leisure divisions – many of whom are Hinahon's college classmates and batchmates – which makes managing less daunting. They speak the same language and are friends.

Yet this common ground can also pose a challenge for Hinahon when it comes to managing his team.

"Sometimes it's difficult to implement policies... because we're all friends and of the same age," he admitted.

Thankfully, everyone is professional, he added.

Hinahon said he is happy with his performance so far. "We're doing better now; we're getting more MICE projects and the field offers a lot of room for personal and professional growth," he remarked.

One big lesson he has learnt is that he "cannot please everyone". How does he cope with that? "I guess I have to believe in my gut instinct and have the skills to read people in general," he replied.

### Muhammad Reza Abdullah

**President director/CEO  
Royalindo Convention International/Royalindo Group, Indonesia**

The young Muhammad Reza Abdullah was born into the business of events management. In 2009, he took over the reins of Royalindo Convention International from his parents, Iqbal Allan Abdullah and Evita Nursanty, who founded

the company in 1989. His parents had stepped down after becoming members of parliament.

Besides being the president director of the company, Reza is also CEO of Royalindo Group, which comprises nine subsidiary companies with some 200 staff.

"Retaining good staff and finding the right people, especially for middle-management positions, are my biggest challenges," Reza shared.

"The event management business in Indonesia has been growing so fast in the last decade or so, in line with the country's economic growth. This has triggered the mushrooming of MICE organisers, and those backed by huge capital investment are able to lure talents over with high salaries," he said.

To retain his staff, Reza offers opportunities for skill improvements, dishes out job incentives and focuses on communication and engagement.

What Reza has on his side is his youth, as well as the general youthfulness of his staff.

"My staff have told me that the one good thing about the company is that most of us – from the frontline staff to the management personnel – are young, which makes communication easier," he said.

"Therefore, I have been cutting down communication barriers. Everyone contributes to the company's well-being, so everyone – whether an office boy or a manager – should be able to voice his or her thoughts and ideas to the management, without having to go through a hierarchy," he said.

To encourage open discussions, Reza's office has a glass door which allows anyone to look in and drop in at anytime.

Moving forward, Reza intends to fill more important positions in the company from within, by motivating staff towards healthy competition.