

A wealth of developments

Major redevelopment plans on Sentosa Island are set to lower costs and draw more business events to the destination, writes **Pamela Chow**

Upcoming developments slated for Sentosa Island are poised to mould Singapore into a stronger magnet for meetings, conferences and incentives, as the island prepares to welcome new facilities catering to the mid-tier business segment.

The first of these developments are three mid-range hotels operated by Far East Hospitality (FEH). They are Village Hotel at Sentosa, offering 606 rooms; as well as The Outpost Hotel with 193 keys, which features a stylish adults-only colonial island concept.

In 3Q2019, the old-school luxury-styled Barracks Hotel will accompany its sibling properties along Artillery Avenue, bringing 40 rooms within a conserved colonial building. These three properties will raise Sentosa's total room count to more than 4,000.

With the entry of FEH's more affordable accommodation options, Sentosa is expected to gain points with the business events segment.

FEH's CEO, Arthur Kiong, said: "Sentosa is a driver of business and is very popular, but it's interesting that 90 per cent of its 3,200 rooms are in the luxury class. (Our new



Far East Hospitality

From top: The Commune is an event space housed within the new Village Hotel at Sentosa; an aerial view of Sentosa island



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cluster) caters to families, groups, MICE and niche segments.”

He added that the rooms will be “egalitarian” and “priced effectively”, and that FEH is “working on establishing key partnerships with attractions on Sentosa”.

For the past decade, midscale conventions were largely limited to facilities at Resorts World Sentosa, said Judy Lum, general manager, Diethelm Travel (Singapore).

“Sentosa is a great MICE destination. Greater availability of midscale properties should stabilise hotel pricing on the island, which would in turn be able to attract more events,” predicted Lum.

Cyril Constantino, Asia Pacific supplier management lead, CWT Meetings & Events, concurred.

He said that while Resorts World Sentosa and Shangri-La's Rasa Sentosa Resort are popular choices for corporate events, “the hotels in Sentosa are typically priced slightly higher than those in the city”, and that “rates have been rising significantly on the island due to limited availability”.

He added: “We expect that Village Hotel at Sentosa will generate considerable interest for corporate meetings and events, as it will provide a more cost-effective option compared

with most of the alternatives which tend to be high-end luxury properties.”

This range of more affordable accom-



“We always say that we are a world-class destination, but this will bring us to another level.”

Chin Sak Hin

Assistant chief executive and chief financial officer, Sentosa Development Corporation

DEVELOPMENTS TO WATCH

1 SingEx Venues (SingEx) has been appointed by the Singapore Tourism Board as the operator for the Singapore Expo Convention & Exhibition Centre (Singapore Expo) for up to 10 years starting January 2019. SingEx will continue to operate the venue, and will soon reveal plans for commercial and business events to be held in Singapore Expo.

2 Jewel Changi Airport, a mixed-use development, is due to open in 1H2019. The complex will boast more than 280 retail and F&B units, floral landscapes, accommodation, as well as aviation facilities. Linking Terminal 1 Arrivals Hall and Terminal 2, and connected to Terminal 3 via pedestrian linkways, Jewel is poised for travellers and visitors to enjoy Singapore's largest air-conditioned indoor garden.

3 Raffles Hotel Singapore has confirmed a mid-2019 reopening, which will see its venues renovated to markedly increase the hotel's event space. For instance, the theatre-style Jubilee Hall will be converted into a 302-pax ballroom, while the original ballroom will be refreshed and expanded to seat 200 pax. The East India ballroom and the outdoor lawn have also been given a modern update. Room inventory will also increase by 10 per cent from 103 to 115 keys, which includes two Presidential Suites – also bookable for events.

modation will appeal particularly to the European and UK markets, opined Guy Allison, director of procurement, Tour East Holdings. He observed that in recent years, European and UK visitors have eschewed five-star luxury accommodation for three- to four-star boutique hotels.

He remarked: “Sentosa is starting to attract people to stay in Singapore for not just one or two nights, but three or four – maybe even a week. With the new developments, it might even become a destination in itself.”

He also expressed assurance that while Singapore is costlier compared to its neighbours, the country is “becoming more value-for-money”, and more affordable, compared to five years ago.

In the near future, Sentosa will be expanded to provide more leisure and business facilities.

Sentosa Development Corporation's (SDC) assistant chief executive and chief financial officer, Chin Sak Hin, told *TTGmice* that in these plans, the nearby Pulau Brani will be “transformed” into a part of Sentosa, “retaining the island charm with new attractions and nature zones”.

“We always say that we are a world-class destination, but this will bring us to another level. We are

TALKING NUMBERS

\$S218.80

The average room rate from January to November 2018, equivalent to US\$161.30, marking a 0.9 per cent increase from 2017

6,000

The number of expected visitor arrivals for the Intelligent Transport Systems World Congress 2019

16.9 million

The total visitor arrivals into Singapore from January to November 2018, up by 6.6 per cent year-on-year from 2017

working closely with other government agencies on planning this whole area, and we are now at the masterplanning stage,” said Chin. SDC is also currently developing the Sentosa 2030 masterplan.

The tides of change are also rolling beyond Sentosa. In October last year, senior minister of State for Trade and Industry Chee Hong Tat announced major rejuvenation plans for the nearby Tanjong Pagar waterfront.

This 1,000 hectare area, which Chee said is “as large as Sentosa island itself”, will be branded the Southern Gateway of Asia.

FEH's Kiong commented that this development is set to be “the harbinger of very, very exciting developments for Sentosa, as well as the rest of the precinct”.



From left: The Golden Bridge is a popular tourist attraction in Ba Na Hills; the annual fireworks festival over Danang

Makings of a MICE hub

Heavy investment in infrastructure, tourism products and attractions are helping to mould Danang into becoming a major player on the global MICE stage, writes **Marissa Carruthers**

Danang has seen a rapid growth in its business events sector in recent times, and there is no sign of abating.

According to the latest figures from Danang Department of Culture, Sports and Tourism, the city welcomed more than 7.6 million visitors in 2018, a 15.5 per cent year-on-year increase. Of these, 2.8 million were

international arrivals, a rise of 23.3 per cent year-on-year.

Jeff Redl, managing director of Diethelm Vietnam, said: "In recent years, Danang has seen a dramatic growth in MICE tourism. Danang is now recognised as an important hub for luxury MICE."

Also indicative of Danang's development is the rapid rise in hotel developments. Figures show the number of five-star keys increased 78.3 per cent, with 6,832 rooms available as of June 2018, compared with just 3,832 in June 2017. This is predicted to increase by another 25 per cent to 8,574 in 2019.

Nguyen Duc Quynh, vice chairman of Danang Hotel Association, said: "At the end of 2018, Danang overcame the capital city of Hanoi to be ranked number two in Vietnam,

after Ho Chi Minh City, with 785 accommodation units providing 35,615 rooms."

Meanwhile, South Korea visitors dominate the market, with almost half of international arrivals from the country, fuelled by the more than 100 weekly flights available.

In April 2017, a new international terminal at Danang International Airport opened, increasing capacity from 13 million to 28 million. Better flight connectivity is another force driving Danang's rise.

New routes, such as Qatar Airways' four-times-weekly connections with Doha – launched last December – is predicted to lure more longhaul business travellers.

Matilda Otsuki, director of sales and marketing at Novotel Danang Premier Han River, said: "This allows corporates from Europe and the Middle East to consider holding meetings, events or incentive trips in Central Vietnam."

Meanwhile, the Sheraton Grand Resort Danang, which opened in January 2017, has become the city's

TALKING NUMBERS

43,131

The total number of hotel rooms in Danang by the end of 2019, a 37 per cent year-on-year increase

328

The number of weekly flights to Danang International Airport, 86 more than in 2017 thanks to the addition of a new terminal

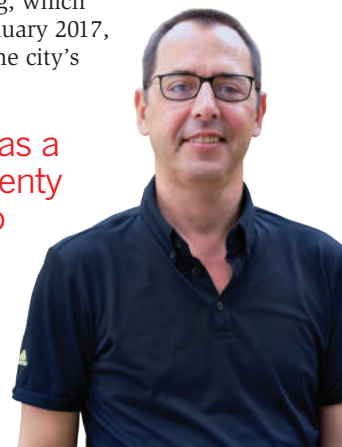
8.2 million

The number of tourists Danang aims to welcome in 2019, a 6.9 per cent year-on-year increase

"Danang can positively position itself as a new MICE hub in Asia as it still has plenty of hidden attractions left for visitors to discover."

Jeff Redl

Managing director of Diethelm Vietnam





largest luxury hotel conference venue with 3,300m² of meetings space. The addition of luxurious venues such as these, have helped plant Danang firmly on the business events map. Other projects in the pipeline include JW Marriott Danang and Courtyard Danang Han River.

“(Danang is) not just a city with large convention spaces, it has welcomed new levels of luxury in its meetings venues that provide meeting planners with options for for large-scale, high-level meetings,” Redl added.

Since its opening in October 2017, Ariyana Convention Centre (ACC) has also attracted a swathe of international events. These range from APEC 2017 through to the 6th Global Environment Facility 2018, with 1,500 delegates from 183 countries.

The ACC forms part of Ariyana Danang Tourism Complex, which takes in the luxurious 1,400-key Ariyana Beach Resort & Suites Danang (slated to open late-2019), and the existing 254-key Furama Resort and Furama Villas. It is also connected to Furama Danang International Convention Palace – Vietnam’s largest conference and exhibition complex – which boasts a Grand Ballroom that seats 2,500.

In April 2018, Nicklaus Course opened at BRG Danang Golf Resort as Asia’s first bulkhead course, adding to the destination’s appeal.

Two other key projects are Empire Group’s Tourism Entertainment Complex CocoBay Danang, a US\$1.1-billion investment, and Soleil Danang’s five-star hotel and luxury apartment complex at My Khe Beach. This will stand as Danang’s tallest building,



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with a 58-storey five-star hotel and three 47-storey apartments, and will launch 1,000 luxury flats in 2020.

Redl opined: “Danang can positively position itself as a new MICE hub in Asia, as it still has plenty of hidden attractions left for visitors to discover.”

Rolling out a range of cultural events, festivals and attractions have also helped entice visitors, said Sheraton Grand Resort Danang general manager’s Frank Bochmann.

Since its inauguration in June 2018, the Golden Bridge at Ba Na Hills has attracted global attention, with the annual Danang International Fireworks Festival, Danang International Marathon and Ironman 70.3 Vietnam also gaining momentum.

Said Bochmann: “The tourism marketing board is starting to hold many more events to bring people into Danang, which as a destination has a lot going for it. Hue is up the road, there is Ba Na Hills and historic Hoi An. These are all great day destinations for MICE delegates.”

However, Otsuki said more can be done for Danang to retain its competitive edge: “The government needs to source more international events or conferences to benefit the entire city... and continue to offer new attractions to maintain competitiveness from new destinations within Vietnam, such as Phu Quoc.”

DEVELOPMENTS TO WATCH

1 Ho Chi Minh City’s Tan Son Nhat International Airport is set to undergo expansion plans that include the addition of a third terminal and a 250 hectare expansion of the airport to 791 hectares.

The new terminal will be able to handle 20 million passengers annually, while expansion work to Terminals 1 and 2 will raise their combined capacity to 30 million. The work is slated for completion by 2020.

2 A masterplan for tourism development in the southern coastal province of Ba Ria-Vung Tau by 2025 has been approved by authorities.

As part of the plans to develop Vung Tau into an environmentally-friendly centre of tourism, finance and trade, with a developed maritime economy, there will be a focus on turning Xuyen Moc district – already home to upscale accommodation and facilities – into a business events hub.

3 Vietnam’s eVisa project has been extended for another two years after the pilot scheme was expired in February 2019.

Visitors from 40 countries, including China, Japan, India, the US, Germany and Sweden can apply for the online visa, which offers a 30-day, single-entry visa for leisure and business. The cost is US\$25.