



13

**GUIDE TO**  
Mega hotels



17

**DESTINATIONS**  
Philippines,  
Australia  
and Indonesia

# Raising a young society

Wong Peng Cheang, secretary general of Asia-Pacific's first society for fertility clinicians and scientists – and a very young society in the medical sphere at just 10 years old – shares a coming-of-age tale of his organisation



# TTG associations

July 2018  
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# Growing with you

When this magazine was first launched in April 2014, our intention was to produce a publication that will arm you with all the knowledge you need to bid professionally for your next global meeting, and to plan and execute it with finesse. Hence, our features on products that support association meetings, convention bureau support programmes and destinations that are gunning for association congresses.

Four years on, this region's association executives have become more savvy and critical, and more aware of what the extensive benefits hosting regular meetings – or potential ones – for their members can bring to their organisation and the professional community in general.

This region's association executives are increasingly recognising that they are professionals themselves and what they do is a specialisation; association executives are no longer mere administrative staff. This is evident in the formation of more national and regional associations for association executives, giving these professionals a stronger, louder voice.

And you – our readers – are desiring big picture reads that get you thinking deeper about what you do and can do.

We see this transition and we hear your desires. So in this issue of *TTGassociations* a new section makes its debut.

*Talking Point* carries content that takes

a deeper look at matters affecting association development, growth opportunities and meetings in Asia-Pacific, written either by our team of editors and journalists, or by thought leaders in the association meetings industry.

To kick things off, we present two *Talking Point* features in this issue. They discuss the impact of two critical developments in China's political and global trade policies on trade associations – the delinking of commerce, trade associations and professional bodies from the government, and the much talked about Belt and Road Initiative.

These are not issues impacting only Chinese trade associations. Imagine: newly independent Chinese trade associations could now be seeking overseas peer support for their trade missions, and training for their survival and growth while the more welcoming global trade policy of China might just be what many international trade associations need to finally take a big step into the complex market.

Would these present business opportunities for your association and members?

We hope these reads, along with our regular sections, continue to inspire you and your work.

If there are other big reads you'd like to see in upcoming issues of *TTGassociations*, please reach out to me at karen.yue@ttgasia.com.



**Karen Yue**  
Group Editor



## PROFILE

### 10

#### Raising a young society

Wong Peng Cheang, secretary general of Asia-Pacific's first society for fertility clinicians and scientists – and a very young society in the medical sphere at just 10 years old – shares with **Karen Yue** a coming-of-age tale of his organisation



## GUIDE TO

### 13

#### Mega hotels

With a healthy stable of no less than 800 guestrooms, supported by a plump inventory of convention and meeting spaces, these mega hotels are ever-ready to welcome large association gatherings



## DESTINATIONS



### 17

#### Philippines // See the other side of Iloilo

More than just a destination where vibrant local festivals thrive, Iloilo is gearing up to capture the attention of association meeting planners, writes **Rosa Ocampo**



### 19

#### Australia // What's next for Melbourne?

Melbourne Convention Bureau has a rosy forecast but association meeting specialists in the city are more cautious about their future. By **Adelaine Ng**



### 21

#### Indonesia // Dancing to a meetings tune

An expanding inventory of meeting facilities has allowed Yogyakarta to support a growing number of association gatherings, discovers **Tiara Maharani**

## DEPARTMENTS

2 To our readers

4 News

9 On the shelves

3 Contents

6 Talking point

23 Case studies



# Governance tightens for associations in Australia

By **Adelaine Ng**

Australian associations are giving greater scrutiny to their governance standards following high profile cases that have brought some established associations into disrepute, possibly costing them in membership numbers and future corporate sponsorships, say observers.

Associations Forum manager of client services Denys Correll told *TTGassociations* there is now “a lot more pressure” on organisations to have a good standard of governance after scandals over the misuse of member funds by established associations like CPA Australia (for accounting professionals) and the RSL New South Wales (for army veterans) were prominently profiled by local media.

“There is pick up in organisations wanting to improve their governance and transparency,” said Correll. “I did 15 governance sessions with boards last year. (This year) I’ve either done or am about to do 17 and it is only May.”

CPA Australia’s 2017 report admits a need to rebuild trust with its members and has promised to reform, after allegations of workplace bullying, its excessive A\$1.7 million salary (US\$1.3 million) to CEO Alex Malley and an overpaid board grabbed headlines across the country.

Malley has since been dismissed with a A\$5.8 million payout (another point of member contention) and the CPA board forced to resign.

“It’s been an emotional rollercoaster (for members),” said Edmund Tadros,

who has been reporting on CPA’s activities as the accounting and consulting editor for *The Australian Financial Review*.

“They were very upset with what they felt was indiscriminate spending of their money and the loss of purpose to what the accounting body should stand for,” Tadros added.

He also told *TTGassociations* that about 1,000 members have moved to rival body Chartered Accountants ANZ, the second largest accounting body in Australia following the revelations.

Steven Bowman, managing director at Conscious Governance which advises associations, believes the impact from the high profile fallout for CPA and RSL NSW will be felt in the short- to medium-term.

“There are two major sources of revenue for associations: first, exhibitors and sponsors and second, the sheer number of people coming (to conferences). If people are a little disgusted by what’s going on then they’ll tend to show that by not attending some events. Some sponsors might pull out because they don’t like the way the funds were being misused,” said Bowman.

“But I can’t imagine that would go on for more than 18 to 24 months,” he added.

So far there is no evidence that CPA’s major commercial partners such as Australian Tennis Open and Qantas magazine are reconsidering their business dealings with the embattled accounting body.



**Correll: more attention paid to governance now**



## APSA, Thailand strengthen seed-related research in Asia-Pacific

The Asia and Pacific Seed Association (APSA) and the Department of Agriculture (DoA) under Thailand’s Ministry of Agriculture and Cooperatives have formalised mutual cooperation to strengthen seed-related research initiatives in the Asia-Pacific region.

A Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) to this effect was signed on May 21 by APSA’s executive director Heidi Gallant and the DoA’s director-general Suwit Chaikiattiyos.

The MoU provides a framework for APSA and the DoA to build capacity in national and regional quality seed production through information exchange, and organisation of research, conferences, workshops and training programmes.

Discussions between representatives from the two organisations on future steps brought up several priority areas, including the exchange of information covering country-by-country regulation updates and trends; and organising capacity-building activities that focus on everything from the latest techniques used in gene bank and germplasm management, to genetic purity, seed pathology, and diagnostics.

## Tripartite project to make events more inclusive

BestCities Global Alliance, Rehabilitation International and GainingEdge are conducting a joint study that aims at producing a reference for meetings organisers and suppliers to remove barriers to participation in meetings and conventions for delegates with special needs.

To be facilitated by GainingEdge, the report will set the background on accessibility issues in the meetings industry, focusing specifically on venues for meetings and conventions.

BestCities partners, as members of the world’s leading convention bureau alliance, will lead the project, trailblazing the way for other destinations to make significant improvements in accessibility. This will be achieved through knowledge sharing and robust case study examples on good practice on accessibility in the meetings industry.

Rehabilitation International will act as the technical advisor. Its world congress which took place in Edinburgh in 2016, and left a multitude of legacies, will be featured in the report.

With accessibility an emerging area of research and industry practice, the project aims to comprehensively address broader issues that can impact visitor experiences and capacity in the visitation industry for full economic and social benefit realisation.

Paul Vallee, BestCities managing director, said: “We’re always striving to improve the purpose of meetings and events and hope this campaign will educate many on the importance of accessibility. Creating inclusive environments should be a fundamental aspect in the management of events and we hope to see more incorporating this into their planning.”

The report is due to be completed later this year.



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# International Trademark Association picks Singapore for 2020 meeting



The International Trademark Association (INTA) will hold its 142<sup>nd</sup> Annual Meeting – the world's largest trademark event – in Singapore from April 25 to 29, 2020, at the Marina Bay Sands.

This marks the second time INTA is bringing its Annual Meeting to Asia, and the first time that the organisation will host the event in South-east Asia.

INTA CEO Etienne Sanz de Acedo made the announcement at the opening ceremony of the 140<sup>th</sup> Annual Meeting in Seattle, the US.

“Bringing the Annual Meeting to Sin-

gapore in 2020 offers our global membership the opportunity to once again meet in an optimal location to learn, network, and discuss issues of interest to IP professionals, government officials, consumers, and society at large,” said 2018 INTA president Tish Berard.

INTA said Singapore was chosen for its “vibrant environment, cultural diversity, ease of accessibility, and achievements in the field of IP”.

INTA, whose international membership now spans 191 countries, opened an Asia-Pacific representative office in Singapore in March 2016.

Commenting on the meeting's legacy for Singapore, Daren Tang, chief executive, Intellectual Property Office of Singapore, said: “This mega conference will connect the Singapore innovation ecosystem to the global community of trademark experts and IP professionals who will build on each other's best practices and expertise, sharing thought leading conversations on creating strong (and differentiated) brands.”

## TMG, Plan it! India get into joint venture

US-based Talley Management Group (TMG), a full-service association management company, and India-based Plan it! Meetings & Conferences India have jointly launched Vraata – Excellence in Association Management to enhance and expand association management services available to new or existing Indian associations and global organisations wishing to grow the Indian market.

“This partnership will change the association management industry here in India,” said Anuj Wadhwa, chief operating officer of Plan it! and Vraata's chief operating officer India. “Combining TMG's ideas and best practices with the local knowledge of Plan it! will allow Vraata to provide clients with the solutions needed to excel in India.”

Anuj revealed that Vraata will market its brand within the India sub-continent, North America and globally. Other goals for 2018 include establishing brand recognition, participation at key industry



From left: Plan it! India's Anuj Wadhwa and TMG's Gregg H Talley

events in India and beyond, and building up a client portfolio.

When asked why TMG chose India to extend its reach, Gregg H Talley, Vraata's managing director USA, and TMG's president and CEO, told *TTGassociations* that India offers strong growth opportunities today and in the future, and that Plan it! shares TMG's values and business ethics.

– Rachel AJ Lee

## { Bureau brief }

### Seoul's CVB gets new legal status

Seoul Tourism Organization has shed its former structure as a public-private partnership and government-invested corporation to become a fully government-funded foundation on May 1. Helming it is Jae-sung Rhee, former executive vice president of the Korea Tourism

Organization, who will serve a three-year term as president and CEO.

### Hiroshima gets refreshed

Hiroshima Convention & Visitors Bureau (HCVB) now sports a new logo which features an *orizuru* (folded paper crane) and boasts a revamped website that provides meeting planners with ample information on holding events in Hiroshima City.

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# A bridge to the world

China's pro-trade Belt and Road Initiative has resulted in more overseas activities undertaken by Chinese trade associations, as well as the arrival of more global meetings on China's shores, writes **Caroline Boey**

China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), launched in 2013, has led to an increase in Chinese domestic association activity with their overseas counterparts, boosted business to Chinese cities and spurred second- and third-tier Chinese cities to "aggressively" tap international association meetings.

These positive trends were highlighted by two leading PCO chiefs in China, who also told *TTGassociations* that BRI was driving outbound travel among Chinese association members in industries such as AI, automotive, banking, healthcare, new technology and transportation.

Chinese associations are using the opportunity created by BRI to raise their brand profile and recruit new members, they observed, while city branding was helping to attract investments, increase industrial activity and grow GDP.

Cities like Hangzhou, Suzhou and Sanya, which are enjoying strong local government support, are hungry for international association meetings, according to Vivian Zhang, director of MCI China's PCO business.

"Traditional tourism destinations like Qingdao and Xi'an are also stepping up efforts to tap (business events), including association meetings," Zhang said, and MCI's inbound business is expected to increase rapidly with the company's high-level involvement in advising US bodies like Chicago-based PCMA on how to organise association meetings in China.

Alicia Yao, general manager, IME Consulting, commented that BRI was contributing to improved cross-cultural understanding, two-way knowledge exchange and two-way travel.

Yao, who is also vice president of China Business Event Federation, continued: "As a result of BRI, we are seeing more site inspections (along the trade zone), which in turn have led to the setting up of more meetings and forums to ex-



Many Chinese cities, such as Hangzhou pictured here, are gunning for more meetings

change ideas, and investments are being committed to organise tradeshows."

She named the Chambers of Commerce in Hangzhou and Xiamen as examples of entities that are stepping up their level of activity.

Yao noted: "At the national level, many Chinese associations are setting up international relations departments to handle international association meetings."

Meanwhile, international association meetings coming to China because of BRI include the International Gas Union (IGU).

Rodney Cox, events director, said IGU would be hosting its largest event in Beijing come 2024 with an expected turnout of 12,000 delegates.

Cox also shared that the association is appointing not only its first Chinese president, but also the first woman to helm the organisation for the 2021 to 2024 term.

Li Yalan, vice chairman, Beijing Gas Group and one of four China members of the union, will be appointed vice-president at its Washington DC event this year and will assume the presidency in three years' time.

Cox added BRI presented "signifi-

cant opportunities" for trade, the use of natural gas for transport, as energy for industry and manufacturing and as a clean source.

"In China, IGU is prioritising its focus on the industry itself, advocacy, technology and innovation and education," he said, adding that IGU, together with the Gas Technology Institute and the International Institute of Refrigeration, is organising the 19<sup>th</sup> International Conference and Exhibition on Liquefied Natural Gas in Shanghai from April 1 to 5 at the Shanghai World Expo in 2019 and a turnout of between nine and 10,000 attendees are expected.

Lulu Luo, representative of the World Federation of Acupuncture-Moxibustion Societies (WFAS), who also spoke at the Association Day of IT&CM China, held in Shanghai in March, noted that the federation started leveraging on BRI in 2015 to promote itself worldwide.

WFAS is affiliated with the World Health Organization and ISO and celebrated its 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 2017.

Luo continued: "As a result of BRI, we have met leaders in Mauritius, and have visited countries like Hungary, Canada and Australia, which have legalised acupuncture."

IEEE, the Institute of Electrical and Electronic Engineers organises some 1,900 international events, with 30 per cent held in Europe and 30 per cent in Asia, and Ning Hua, senior director, Asia-Pacific business operations, IEEE observed that BRI is reinforcing the link between the two regions.

Some 200 international conference of 300 to 3,000 attendees are organised in China.

Hua said: "IEEE will be identifying specific areas to organise technical conferences in China over the next one to two years in the areas of high-speed rail, AI, ultra high-speed electricity, etc."

**"At the national level, many Chinese associations are setting up international relations departments to handle international association meetings."**

**Alicia Yao**

General manager, IME Consulting





# TTGmice

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# China's delinking effect

The Chinese Ministry of Civil Affairs has set in motion the delinking of local chambers of commerce, trade associations and professional bodies from their ministries, impacting the way these organisations function, as well as the meetings supply chain.

By **Roy Ying**



**S**eventy-thousand chambers of commerce, trade associations and professional bodies across China will be delinked from their reporting line ministries or administrations starting this year. Although the industry has braced for this since the announcement was made by the Chinese Ministry of Civil Affairs in 2015, many association managers have not gotten ready for this change and are unable to capture the opportunities or at least soften the impact to their organisations.

I support this policy as it will fundamentally change the way Chinese association managers approach their jobs in the future. In the past, Chinese associations acted like a regulator for the industry they represent. Association leaders were often retired government officials and funding was guaranteed from the government. As such, these associations had little to worry about in terms of financing or membership. In some cases, being a member of an association meant getting a license to operate and therefore membership is almost mandatory.

## Not entirely out on their own

It is important to understand that this does not mean that Chinese industry associations are no longer related to the ministries. The delinking policy changes associations' financing as it terminates funding or the transfer of public assets from government agencies.

Chinese associations must operate on commercial terms going forward, while still having the remit of regulating the industry. They will have to continue to raise professional standards, provide

technical training, and ensure compliance and ethics.

Association leaders may continue to be retiring government officials who possess extensive personal network. As such, the associations should still have a fairly good competitive advantage when it comes to organising major conferences and training because they will retain access to high-level government officials as speakers and, because their events are usually closely linked to future government policies or directives, will continue to attract a sizeable audience.

## Mandatory membership vs membership value

With the delinking policy, Chinese associations are no longer considered the regulatory agency and membership is no longer mandatory. They now need to create value for their members who will look for satisfactory service and value to justify the annual subscription. Members now have a choice to attend events and training based on their needs instead of being told to do so.

Many Chinese business chambers and associations are undergoing structural evolution. Many are seeking alternative revenue streams through events as well. A number of them will struggle but those that are taking advantage of the government's grace period to improve their service will certainly have a better chance of survival. In fact, some have succeeded by setting up an internal team of professional event management staff while others have chosen to outsource this function to Professional Conference Organisers (PCOs).

However, not all 70,000 Chinese associations are on track, and there will be association managers who will be faced with the nightmare of diminishing funds. I expect this struggle to be a short-term effect of the delinking policy, as I foresee a higher level of professional event services resulting from collaboration between local and foreign business chambers, and between local industry associations and global professional bodies.

## The impact on the supply chain

Exhibition and convention venues could expect a small drop in demand from Chinese associations. Without the ability to make event attendance compulsory, many associations may opt to scale-down the size of their events to ensure a break-even event budget.

For PCOs, however, the outlook is rosier as there could now be a vast pool of prospective customers. But first, PCOs will need to invest in education and communication with Chinese association chiefs to convince them that they need professional help in running successful events.

In the past, most Chinese associations were only willing to pay for tangible event services such as venue rental, F&B, AV equipment, transportation and hotel guestrooms for participants. Association leaders knew that the audience would have to attend even though they had only done a half decent job. There was little motivation on the part of the Chinese association to pay for a PCO's event planning, content strategy and marketing expertise.

Moving forward, Chinese associations will realise that they lack the capacity to deliver professional events on their own and will open up to the idea of engaging PCOs. But a result of this is the serious shortage of qualified PCOs in China.

The tides are turning for PCOs in China, and those that are most prepared and committed to working with their clients in delivering quality events will reap the biggest rewards.



*With over 20 years of regional event management experience in Asia, Roy Ying is the senior corporate communications manager of a blue chip company, and the former head of communications and external affairs for a global professional institution. He is also a part-time lecturer, and a contributing author to business events magazines.*





## Marriott grows its Bangkok portfolio

Marriott Hotels has opened the Bangkok Marriott Hotel The Surawongse, its 10<sup>th</sup> property in Thailand's capital city.

Located on Surawong Road, the new-build comprises 197 well-appointed guestrooms and 106 deluxe suites across 32 storeys. Facilities on the property include four dining options, Quan Spa, a fitness centre and an outdoor infinity pool.

Meeting planners can make use of the hotel's event spaces, spread across 1,555m<sup>2</sup>. Venue options include two ballrooms, nine meeting rooms, a colonial-style courtyard and an outdoor garden. Each venue is equipped with the latest audiovisual technology. The hotel's boasts an inhouse events team to assist associations with any type of function.

## Raffles City Convention Centre rolls out event app for meeting planners

Raffles City Convention Centre in Singapore has launched a mobile application for meeting planners, designed to improve communication with its staff during events.

With this application, meeting planners can convey their requests directly to the banquet operations team throughout the duration of their event via a live chat function.

In addition, anticipating the common needs that may arise during any major event or conference, a curated list of frequent requests has been built into the application, allowing meeting planners to place such requests at the touch of a button. They include adjustment of room temperature; provision of extra tables or chairs; assistance with projector or Wi-Fi connectivity, etc.

On the back end, the hotel's banquet operations team is able to track all requests

and ensure that each of them is attended to in a timely fashion. A report is also available to assess which are the most frequent requests and measure productivity.

The 6,500m<sup>2</sup> Raffles City Convention Centre offers 26 fully equipped meeting rooms and is complemented by two hotels – Swissôtel The Stamford and Fairmont Singapore.



## Bengaluru now home to a Sheraton Grand property

Marriott International marks its 100<sup>th</sup> hotel in India with the recent opening of Sheraton Grand Bengaluru Whitefield Hotel & Convention Center.

The property offers 360 guestrooms including 39 suites, across eight categories.

All rooms include high speed Internet access, a 48-inch LED flatscreen TV, The Sheraton Signature Sleep Experience, and a minibar. Club Room guests enjoy an extra study room, terrace and kitchenette in their living space, as well as access to the Sheraton Club Lounge on the sixth floor.

Recreational amenities include a swimming pool, fitness centre, and the Shine Spa for Sheraton with five treatment rooms. There are also six F&B options ranging from the pool-side bar to a grill and barbecue restaurant.

Meeting planners will be able to make use of the hotel's 6,072m<sup>2</sup> of space across 12 meeting rooms, including 2,602m<sup>2</sup> in the adjoining convention centre. The Grand Ballroom can accommodate around 2,000 guests.

The Sheraton Grand Bengaluru Whitefield Hotel & Convention Center is located close to the International Tech Park Bengaluru, Manipal Hospital and the Export Promotion Industrial Park Whitefield, within the integrated township of Prestige Shantiniketan.

## Mercure debuts in Myanmar

AccorHotels' first Mercure-branded property in Myanmar has opened in Yangon's prime district.

The seven-storey Mercure Yangon Kaba Aye features 183 spacious rooms and suites ideal for long-staying guests.

It offers function spaces that can accommodate up to 210 guests. As well, the hotel features a 'Ready to Work' space for business travellers working on-the-go, from single seats available for an hourly fee to a monthly office rental for up to six people.

Other facilities include MiCasa Restaurant & Bar where all-day dining options are available, Sweat Club fitness facility and a 21-metre lap pool with an adjacent pool bar.



## Sedona Suites opens in HCMC

Sedona Suites Ho Chi Minh City's Grand Tower has commenced operations at the Saigon Centre mixed-use development. Located in the heart of HCMC's CBD in District 1 along Le Loi Boulevard, the Grand Tower offers 195 luxury serviced suites housed within levels 28 to 42 of Saigon Centre Tower 2.

Studio, one-, two- and three-bedroom suites are available. They feature fully-equipped kitchens, as well as floor-to-ceiling windows.

Guests enjoy 24-hour concierge and security, laundry and dry-cleaning services, room service, airport transfers, and more.

Long-staying association executives will appreciate access to KLOUD, Keppel Land's new generation serviced co-office located on level 21, available at preferential rates.

Meanwhile, memorable dining experiences are promised at Sky28 on level 28. It specialises in contemporary South-East Asian and Vietnamese cuisine.

## Hong Kong Airlines flies daily to Manila

Hong Kong Airlines has commenced daily flights between Hong Kong and Manila on June 1.

On Tuesdays, Fridays and Sundays, HX781 departs Hong Kong at 21.10 and arrives in Manila at 23.00. On the other days of the week, HX781 departs at 21.30 and arrives at 23.00.

Return flights adopt the same timing, where HX782 departs Manila at 06.55 and arrives back in Hong Kong at 08.55.

Hong Kong Airlines has deployed an Airbus A320 on the new route, which is outfitted with a single-class configuration and offers 174 seats in Economy Class.





**Wong Peng Cheang**

# Raising a young society

Wong Peng Cheang, secretary general of Asia-Pacific's first society for fertility clinicians and scientists – and a very young society in the medical sphere at just 10 years old – shares with **Karen Yue** a coming-of-age tale of his organisation



## How would you describe Asia Pacific Initiative on Reproduction's (ASPIRE) accomplishments so far since its establishment?

ASPIRE was officially formed in 2008 although it was in 2001 when a group of us came together to meet for common objectives. We held our first congress in 2006, and that sparked our serious intentions to start a formal society.

We are merely 10 years old now. I must say that things have gone really well for ASPIRE. Initially we thought we wouldn't be able to sustain a yearly meeting, so we ran the congress every two years. The first congress was in China (Changsha, Hunan); 2008 in Singapore; 2010 in Bangkok; 2012 in Osaka; 2014 in Brisbane; 2016 in Jakarta. After that, we turned the congress into an annual event. Last year the congress was held in Kuala Lumpur and this year, just this April, was in Taipei.

That's a reflection of how we've gathered momentum. ASPIRE is more active now, more people know about us and are getting engaged in our activities, and our level of activity has gone up.

## What motivated the establishment of ASPIRE?

A few of us opinion leaders from different countries in Asia felt that the region needed such a society. We have been learning from other specialists in the US where there is the American Society of Reproductive Medicine (ASRM), and in Europe where there is the European Society of Human Reproduction and Embryology (ESHRE). They are way ahead of us and are very successful in what they do. We felt that Asia-Pacific lacked such a society, so the few of us decided that we should get something going.

## Does ASPIRE have an affiliation with ASRM and ESHRE?

No, but we have a fairly good collaboration with them. Every alternate year one of them will host a session at our congress, and the following year we will do the same at theirs. This is good for all congress attendees, as they get a global perspective on issues.

Many of our members are also members of these societies. I am a member of both.

## Since ASPIRE members are also members of ASRM and ESHRE, do you see your association having to work harder to demonstrate its value?

Oh yes! ASRM and ESHRE are our benchmark. ASRM meetings attract 7,000 to 8,000 people each time, while ESHRE meetings attract 10,000. In terms of population, Asia-Pacific has a larger population than Europe, so hopefully ASPIRE will one day draw a much larger audience.

However, I don't think we want ASPIRE congresses to be as big, just 2,000 to 3,000 people will be ideal. Our congress this year drew 1,500, so 3,000 is achievable.

## This must be an critical time for ASPIRE, as the population is shrinking in several Asian economies. What opportunities does this situation present to your work?

We have a huge population here and correspondingly have many doctors. Fertility is a problem in Asia-Pacific, so there is high demand for the specialisation and services we offer. In fact, the

## A shining star

Professor Wong Peng Cheang is regarded as a pioneer in the fields of infertility and assisted reproduction. He was part of the team that helped to bring about Singapore's first in-vitro fertilisation baby in 1983.

He conducted successful research on Gamete Intrafallopian Transfer (GIFT), and his work on the same at Singapore's National University Hospital (NUH) led the Obstetrics and Gynaecology Department to produce the first pregnancy in Asia via GIFT.

Some of his other accomplishments include infertility research with the World Health Organisation (WHO) Task Force on the Diagnosis and Treatment of Infertility; establishment of the Centre for Reproductive Education & Specialist Training in NUH in 2010; and attainment of honorary membership to the International Federation of Fertility Societies in 2013.

He has co-published several papers.

He was the first president of ASPIRE.

He holds appointments: professor, Department of Obstetrics & Gynaecology, the National University of Singapore, Yong Loo Lin School of Medicine; and senior consultant, Department of Reproductive Endocrinology & Infertility, National University Health System.



demand for fertility services is just on the rise. And because of that, the number of doctors that specialise in this field will also increase.

What we are providing – the continuing medical training – becomes critical and so relevant.

### What are the challenges then?

Attracting and engaging members. We are now trying to build up our membership. In doing so, people will always ask: what is in it for us; why should we join you and pay for it?

ASPIRE needs to have something to attract them. One obvious benefit of joining ASPIRE is the heavily discounted congress registration fees, which is S\$100 (US\$75) less than what a non-member pays. Our membership fee used to be S\$90, so attending one congress already offsets that amount paid.

Earlier this year, we ran a membership drive and reduced the membership fee to only S\$10. The whole idea is to get professionals to join us and participate in our activities.

In between our congress we also run two masterclasses per year. These are smaller, for about 100 people, and focus on a niche topic. For example, a masterclass on repeated miscarriages or male infertility. Masterclasses are meant to attract professionals with a narrow interest.

Our masterclasses rotate across the region and give cities that cannot host our major congress a chance to contribute. Vietnam, for example, lacks a convention facility for 1,500 people although it is building one, so it hosts some masterclasses.

Soon, we will start a journal that publishes research articles by our members or professionals in our field.

We also help members with industry attachments.

### With membership fees so low, where does ASPIRE get its operating funds?

The ASPIRE Congress is our one ma-

nor source. That's where we get money from sponsorships and sale of exhibition booths. We are fairly lucky because there are many pharmaceutical and equipment companies that supply clinics and want to have a presence at our congress.

Of course, we are quite prudent with our expenditure, which ensures a surplus is generated at the end of our congress. We don't make a lot of money though, just enough to run the organisation and our activities.

### Disruption is a hot word today. What would be the biggest disruptor for ASPIRE or the professionals you represent?

The Internet has been a great disruptor for us. Back then, congresses offered an early bird discount six months ahead and people would write in to apply. So, six months before the congress organisers would know what the turnout was going to be like.

Now, nobody registers six months ahead. They register and pay online at the very last minute. When we did our recent congress in Taipei, we were still nervous two months before the event because we didn't know how many people would be coming.

The other impact of the Internet is making more information readily available online. Studies and research papers can now be uploaded by the authors and accessed by all. At ASPIRE, we upload all lectures from our past congresses, making them available to members who had missed the events.

The journal we are planning to do will be electronic. Information dissemination today is so easy because of the Internet.

Naturally, the concern now is with everything available on the Internet, will people still bother to attend our events?

They will. Firstly, it is always better to see things live – to see and hear from the expert. You can also approach him later with your questions. Secondly, the event is a chance for you to catch up with your

friends from around the world, whom you may see only once a year.

That opportunity for interaction is so important because attendees can tap each other's brains.

The Internet cannot replace these two things, so congresses will continue but there will be fewer mega ones. People now favour smaller, focused congresses. They'd rather meet short but intensively. Those meetings of 10,000 people with 10 simultaneous conference sessions will see tougher times because people realise that they can only be in one room at one time, and will therefore miss out on other sessions.

### With information distribution now so easily, how does this impact your live events?

Organisers must now produce a very strong scientific programme. At ASPIRE we have an excellent scientific committee, and we select high quality content that is appealing to our Asia-Pacific members.

We think we know what our members like. Our members in this region are very keen on clinical topics that will benefit their practice.

In Europe, there is a slight leaning towards basic scientific stuff. These are good but are more suited for researchers.

We design content that matters, and we know we are on the right track because our attendance has been rising 10 to 20 per cent every edition.

### You said the social aspect of congresses is important. Is there a need to provide more or longer social sessions?

There must be a balance. Longer, more frequent coffee breaks will make our exhibitors very happy because they will get more exposure time with our attendees. But we lose out on academic time.

In the past, medical congresses stretched across five days. People today are pressured for time. Most congresses are now three days.



## So what's the ideal ratio of social to academic time?

I don't know whether we've found the perfect model, but for ASPIRE's congresses our coffee breaks are twice a day, 30 minutes each. On Day 1 our lunch break runs for 1.5 hours, and we serve lunch in the exhibition area so participants can look around and interact with suppliers. Day 2, lunch is down to one hour.

## What are your members wanting out of ASPIRE now, and have their needs changed?

Our members still want the same, that is to keep abreast of developments. How do we do that? First, we read journals. Second, we go online to look things up. If one is not so studious, then one attends a congress where for three days experts will talk about issues that matter.

## Have ASPIRE's events been useful in meeting that need?

Oh yes. We positioned our annual congress in April for a reason. ASRM's congress is in October while ESHRE's is in early July. So every few months there will be one major congress in our field, and we like to say that the ASPIRE congress is one of the big three. (Laughs) Well, that's the status we hope to attain for our congress.

## In 2013, international medical meetings, particularly those with US and European attendees and corporate participation, were made to be more transparent on their payments and transfers of value made to physicians. Did this impact ASPIRE events?

That affected sponsored attendance for doctors. In South Korea, doctors are not allowed to accept sponsorships to attend congresses unless they are presenting a paper. In Singapore, doctors working in public hospitals are only allowed to accept one event sponsorship a year and it must be assigned to them by their chief or head of the medical board.

Resorts are out for medical events in general. No Bali, for instance. We can choose to hold an event in Bali, but we will not get sponsors.

ASPIRE congresses are only held in major convention cities.

## Tell me about your Taipei congress.

The 8<sup>th</sup> Congress of ASPIRE was held at the Taipei International Convention Centre. It was in a good part of the city, with many hotels nearby so delegates can walk to the venue and back.

Airport clearance was smooth, transport to the city was swift, hotels and convention centre were of good quality, food was plentiful in our vicinity – all in all a great destination, a great experience.

We had an excellent PCO in GIS.

We had a faculty dinner in the National



Palace Museum, which started with a one-hour tour of the exhibits and then dinner in a restaurant. Homegrown entertainment was featured.

I know, too, that many of the delegates explored Taipei's night markets.

## It sounds like the fun part of the destination matters a lot to you and your attendees.

Of course! When people travel overseas for a meeting, they hope to also have one or two days of leisure. If they don't have the luxury of time for an extension, then they would hope to have something fun during the social evenings.

We had a big group of Pakistani participants. Pakistanis need an exit visa to travel, and that process takes time. So naturally, when they left Pakistan for our congress, they hoped to also extend a couple of days for fun.

## What future congresses are you working on now?

Hong Kong in 2019 and Manila in 2020. For our 2021 edition, we now considering destinations. We try to go around the region before returning to a country the congress was held in before. Osaka hosted in 2012, so we might head back to Japan in 2021 or 2022.

## Where in Japan, if you do go back?

Maybe Tokyo.

## What do you look for in a destination for ASPIRE's congresses?

First, the ease of access – the direct flights and the ease of visa applications. Second, how expensive the city is. Third, the range and quality of convention facilities. Fourth, whether or not we can generate a surplus from the congress. Fifth, the type of tourist attractions in the city. And finally, whether ASPIRE's been there before.

As mentioned before, the congress is ASPIRE's main source of income so we must make sure it will attract enough attendees and generate a surplus.

## Would priority be given to destinations with a convention bureau that dishes out financial support?

Ultimately we must get a surplus (from our congress takings), no matter how it comes about. It could be from sponsor-

ships and exhibition sales, from savings by using a cheap venue, or from support provided by the convention bureau or city government.

Financial grants are very useful, but should the convention bureau or city government not do that, in kind support is appreciated too. For example, destination promotion efforts in the lead up to our congress. When we held our congress in Taipei this year, the Hong Kong convention bureau came to support our event and talk to delegates about 2019's edition.

I'd like them to also be gracious hosts, for example by having a destination helpdesk at our event. Or perhaps, provision of complimentary bus or train tickets for delegates to use and explore the city for a day. These aren't expensive but they are very useful and they put the city in a great light.

## Has any convention city done that for ASPIRE congresses?

No. I got that at a Geneva congress. I was given a three-day ticket for public buses and trains.

## Would destinations with a large community of fertility and reproduction technology specialists get priority?

Yes, but sometimes this is uncertain. In China and India we should have thousands of fertility experts, but how many of them would actually turn up at our congress?

## ASPIRE also hopes to educate the public. What has been done in this direction?

We have four target audiences: the doctors, the embryologist or the scientists, the fertility nurses, and finally the public.

So far, we have been targeting the doctors and the scientists. For our congress in Hong Kong next year, we will be introducing some content for nurses.

Patient-facing programmes are slowly coming on. We are forming a community to look at cross-border healthcare services, to understand what is needed by such patients.

All our work is being done by volunteering professionals, so we have to take one step at a time. That said, ASPIRE is making great progress.



Above: one of the ballrooms in JW Marriott Marquis Dubai  
Below: Raffles City Convention Centre's Fairmont Ballroom

## Fairmont Singapore & Swissôtel The Stamford, Singapore

Fairmont Singapore and Swissôtel The Stamford jointly house the Raffles City Convention Centre, which offers more than 6,503m<sup>2</sup> of meeting space across 27 function rooms and ballrooms. The largest ballroom can take up to 3,200 people for a standing cocktail session.

There are a total of 2,030 guestrooms between Fairmont Singapore & Swissôtel The Stamford, often seen as one hotel complex; the former has 769 keys while the latter has 1,261.

Special arrangements for groups are available, such as an exclusive check-in space within a meeting room, an off-site catering for sessions, or a gala dinner outside of the hotel.

Its size and level of in-house support allowed Raffles City Convention Centre to host seven association meetings last year, including Association Management Solutions for IETF's 100 Conference 2018, and the International Cotton Association Congress 2017.

## JW Marriott Marquis Dubai, UAE

The JW Marriott Marquis Dubai is the world's tallest full-service hotel standing at a height of 355 meters, 26 meters shorter than Empire State Building.

The property is the first in the UAE capable of hosting groups, meetings and

# Mega hotels

With a healthy stable of no less than 800 guestrooms, supported by a plump inventory of convention and meeting spaces, these mega hotels are ever-ready to welcome large association gatherings







**Above: a guestroom within Renaissance Kuala Lumpur Hotel**  
**Left: the exterior of Shinagawa Prince Hotel**



The largest venue option is the pillar-less Grand Ballroom, which measures 1,430m<sup>2</sup> and can accommodate up to 1,800 people for a cocktail reception or 750 people for a sit-down banquet.

For large groups, a group check-in can be arranged. Additional perks include a dedicated event manager for every meeting, access to an app that allows planners to communicate with key hotel operation staff in real-time, and support from Marriott International's Global Meeting Strategy which promises to transform any meeting – big or small – into an experience.

## Hyatt Regency Sydney, Australia

Hyatt Regency Sydney's recent redevelopment makes it the largest upscale, full-service hotel in Australia.

Large groups are easily serviced with 892 guestrooms and over 3,700m<sup>2</sup> of state-of-the-art meeting spaces, including two ballrooms offering panoramic views of Darling Harbour which seat over 1,100 each. The two ballrooms also offer separate bathrooms, entrances, escalators and pre-function areas and goods lifts for easy access and complete privacy.

In addition, there are 21 meeting or breakout rooms, each equipped with multiple electrical, microphone and phone outlets, as well as high-speed wireless Internet access. The hotel also provides in-house audiovisual services.

Planners work with an assigned event manager from the hotel to ensure a smoothly-run event.

There are six restaurants and bars to cater to hungry hordes, including a 272-seat all-day dining restaurant, Sailmaker.

A separate bus bay entrance for large groups, as well as a dedicated group check-in are available on request.

conventions of up to 1,000 people, where delegates can meet, eat and sleep in one location.

With over 8,000m<sup>2</sup> of indoor and outdoor event space, the property can accommodate small to large-scale meetings and conferences. Two ballrooms and 32 flexible meeting rooms provide state-of-the-art venues for every agenda.

Alternatively, three stunning outdoor venues with incredible views over Downtown Dubai, and the newly extended Dubai Water Canal can help set the stage for an unforgettable event.

The 1,608 guestrooms are designed around the needs of today's modern traveller, achieving a balance of effortless style and modern functionality. There are also 17 restaurants, bars and lounges within the property.

The hotel has hosted multiple association meetings from around the world, notably from the US, Europe and GCC countries. Association meeting sizes typically range from 500 to 1,500 guests.

For large meetings, designated group check-in, and a private dining area for breakfast can be arranged. To help ease

the set-up process, Dubai Ballroom on Level 2 has its own private access and private valet parking.

There is also a travel desk located in the hotel for organisers to book excursions and activities, and complimentary shuttle services to The Dubai Mall. To ensure the smooth running of an event, organisers will have a dedicated event planner to assist them throughout.

## Renaissance Kuala Lumpur Hotel, Malaysia

With an inventory of 921 rooms, Renaissance Kuala Lumpur Hotel is the largest single hotel property in Kuala Lumpur.

On-site facilities that matter to meeting planners include five F&B outlets – which offer a variety of Asian and International cuisine – as well as 28 function rooms spanning 3,715m<sup>2</sup>.

The property has staged many meetings organised by associations and councils since its opening in June 1996. An example is the Malaysia Sports Council in August 2017 for 1,000 people.



## Grand Hyatt Incheon, South Korea

As the largest Hyatt hotel outside North America, Grand Hyatt Incheon packs in 1,024 guestrooms across two towers that are connected via a sky bridge, 26 individual event spaces totalling 4,566m<sup>2</sup>, and five F&B venues.

Within the East Tower sits a ballroom for up to 540 banquet guests, 11 event rooms, two hospitality suites and three boardrooms. Across that, in the West Tower – which was launched in 2014 – features a Grand Ballroom with a capacity of 830 people in a banquet setting, a large pre-function foyer, two large conference rooms, two drawing rooms, three meeting rooms, and the Garden Event Deck and Pool House, a dramatic space for up to 500 people, surrounded by cherry and pine trees and offering ocean views.

All event spaces feature modern multimedia and conference equipment as well as high-speed Internet access. Meanwhile, associations looking to host a meeting there are provided with support from an experienced in-house events team.

As well, Grand Hyatt Incheon maintains the Hyatt's sterling reputation of catering excellence, promising association events memorable dining experiences that can be delivered beyond the hotel's F&B establishments.

Recent association meetings held at the five-star hotel include the 11<sup>th</sup>

Annual Meeting of Society of Gastrointestinal Intervention in September 2017 the Korean Transplantation Society's Asian Transplantation Week in October 2017; and the Liver Week conference jointly hosted by the Korean Association for the Study of the Liver, the Korean Association of HBP Surgery, the Korean Liver Cancer Association, and the Korean Liver Transplantation Society in June 2018.

## Shinagawa Prince Hotel, Japan

Just outside Shinagawa Station, with easy access to Narita and Haneda International Airports, the Shinkansen network, Tokyo Big Sight and Tokyo International Forum, the size of Shinagawa Prince Hotel befits its location.

The hotel has 3,626 rooms and meeting spaces totalling 2,046m<sup>2</sup>. In the annex tower, nine rooms can be broken down into various sizes or stand as one mega room. Additional function space is available on the eighth to 36<sup>th</sup> floors of the main tower as well.

The hotel also boasts 10 F&B outlets, and recreational facilities such as a bowling alley, swimming pool, indoor tennis and golf facilities, and a cinema.

A dedicated business events service called Prince Tokyo MICE City caters to association needs, offering facilities nearby including Aqua Park Shinagawa (aquarium) and Stellar Ball (live

concert venue). Event delegates can be transferred post-meeting to the group's hotels across Japan, where they can enjoy golf, hot springs, skiing or nature.

The largest association meeting hosted to date at Shinagawa Prince Hotel was a three-day medical conference that welcomed 3,000 guests per day.

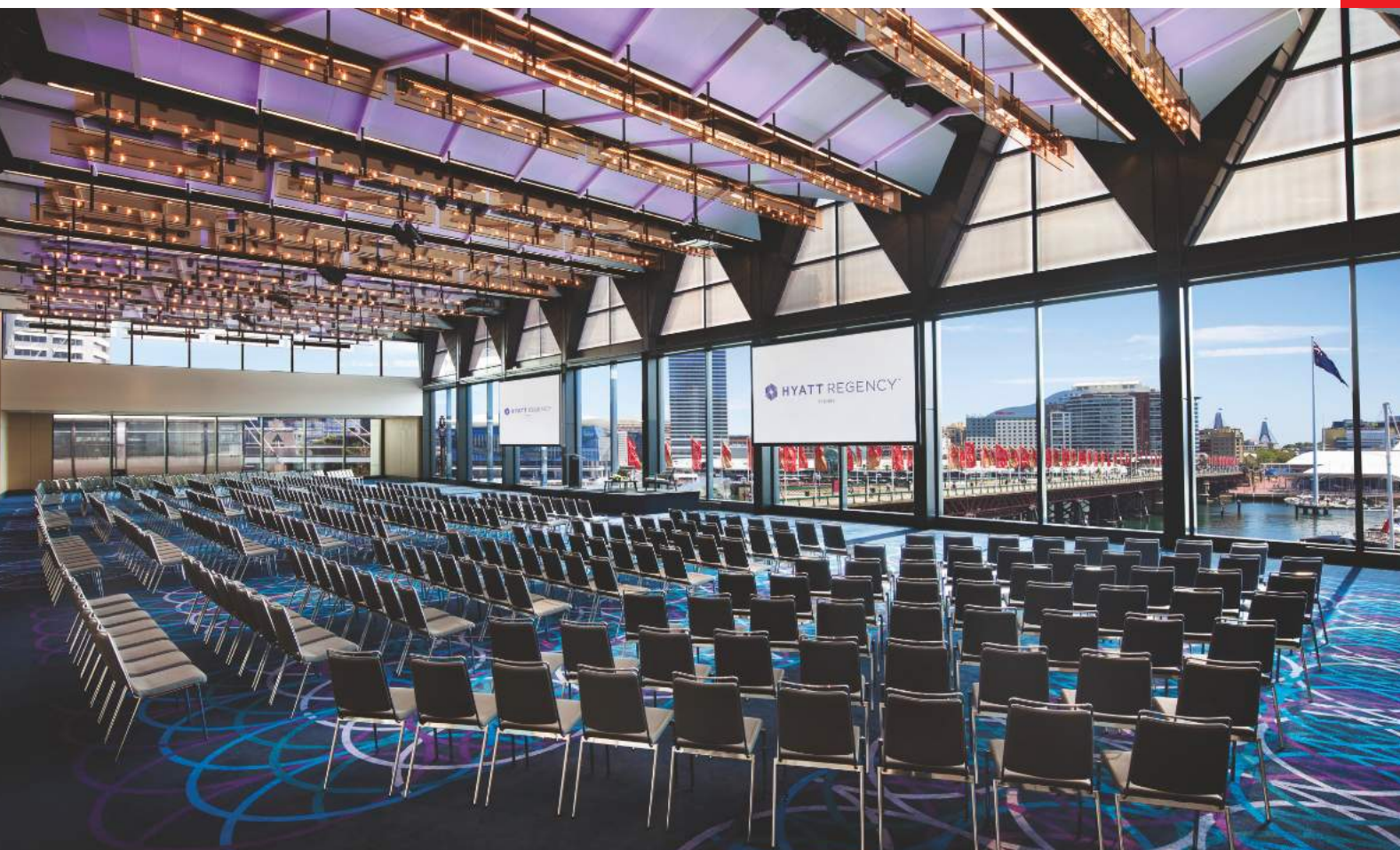
## Bangkok Marriott Marquis Queen's Park, Thailand

The sprawling Bangkok Marriott Marquis Queen's Park is Marriott Hotels & Resorts' first Marquis-designated property in Asia. The Marquis designation is reserved for B2B-ready properties that satisfy seven key requirements such as being in a gateway city, occupy an iconic building, are of exceptional size and offer spectacular facilities.

With 1,360 rooms and 35 different function rooms offering more than 5,000m<sup>2</sup> of space, the Bangkok Marriott Marquis Queen's Park is the largest hotel in Bangkok. Its sheer size allows large-scale residential meetings to accommodate all delegates under one roof, saving logistical resources.

The largest venue space at the hotel

**Below: Hyatt Regency Sydney's Grand Ballroom**





is the Thai Chitlada Grand Ballroom, capable of hosting a 1,300-pax theatre-style conference.

The hotel is also brandishing its variety of dining options for business events as a major selling point, especially at a time when delegates are increasingly expecting unique dining experiences. There are eight F&B outlets at the hotel, including five full-service restaurants.

Recent association meetings held at the hotel include the 24<sup>th</sup> Asian Seed Congress, and the 2017 IFLA Asia Pacific Regional Congress in November 2017.

## Seoul Dragon City, South Korea

Hotel giant AccorHotels launched a 'hotelplex' in Seoul's Yongsan district last year, where four brands of different price points are housed under one massive roof.

Named Seoul Dragon City, the complex comprising Grand Mercure (202 rooms), Novotel Suites (286 rooms), Novotel (621 rooms) and ibis Styles (591 rooms), offering a total inventory of 1,700 keys, two multifunctional grand ballrooms, 17 meeting rooms, 11 F&B outlets, and a four-storey sky bridge that houses a cluster of uniquely themed, world-class lounges that welcome private events.

Seoul Dragon City's event facilities are located across levels three and five, all connected by escalators and away from other non-event guest facilities.

The two grand ballrooms are named Hanra and Baekdu, each able to accommodate 1,972 guests in a theatre setup. The former can be split into three smaller spaces. The elongated foyer of Hanra and

Baekdu can also support accompanying exhibitions that are sometimes part of association congresses.

It is said that all event facilities combined can take in 4,900 attendees.

Seoul Dragon City has welcomed several association meetings such as Asian Critical Care Conference in April this year, and Unleashing Print Seoul by DSCOOP, a conference for professional print service providers and users, in May. Coming up in October, Seoul Dragon City will host the 38<sup>th</sup> Congress of Société Internationale d'Urologie.

## Hotel Mulia Senayan, Jakarta, Indonesia

The 40-storey Hotel Mulia Senayan, Jakarta boasts 994 keys and meeting facilities such as The Grand Ballroom – one of the city's largest – which

2,500m<sup>2</sup> of space and can comfortably accommodate up to 4,000 people. It is also easily accessible via its own entrance or from the main lobby.

In addition, 18 other meeting and function rooms are available in varying sizes. If those are not enough, Jakarta Convention Centre is located just across the street

For group check-in, the hotel has a dedicated airport representative team at the airport with a fleet of limousines that can cater to VIPs and groups of all sizes. Dedicated group check-in counters can also be arranged at function rooms.

The hotel has nine F&B venues to choose from, serving a multitude of cuisines from Sichuan to French.

The hotel has hosted a number of insurance, oil and gas, social organisations association events, but the largest so far was by an automotive industry association that welcomed 800 people.



**Right: the indoor pool at Seoul Dragon City Grand Mercure. Below: the grand lobby at Bangkok Marriott Marquis Queen's Park**





# See the other side of Iloilo

More than just a destination where vibrant local festivals thrive, Iloilo is gearing up to capture the attention of association meeting planners, writes **Rosa Ocampo**

**T**he city of Iloilo in western Visayas now merits a second look from meeting planners after the dramatic transformation of its tourism landscape within a short period of time.

While tourism was based mainly on festivals in the first quarter of every year, Iloilo was relaunched in 2015 as a year-round business events venue built upon the strength of an active collaboration between the local government unit (LGU) and the private sector, as well as an ongoing construction of necessary infrastructure.

Maria Lea Victoria Lara, executive director of Iloilo Business Club, said plans are afoot to “activate” the Iloilo Convention and Visitors Bureau (ICVB) to institutionalise support for meetings and attract international groups. The

brainchild of former tourism secretary Narzalina Lim in mid-2000, ICVB failed to progress due to leadership changes within the Department of Tourism.

Lara said the city over the past three years has been getting mostly national conferences and conventions hosted by professional organisations, associations and various government agencies as the LGU is easy to approach for support such as airport welcome, dinner reception and other perks.

Iloilo has welcomed a few Asian meetings, including a cardiovascular convention in February this year, and hopefully, a 12-Asian country convention in November.

But the equation can change as the Iloilo International Airport in Cabatuan, just 20km away from the city, is getting busier with domestic flights and direct services from Singapore and Hong Kong while the newly-minted Iloilo Convention Centre in Mandurriao – on the site of the old airport which is now Iloilo Business Park – can accommodate over 4,200 pax.

The city’s first international hotel, 326-key Courtyard by Marriott near

the convention centre and within Iloilo Business Park, debuted in May this year, expanding the city’s hotel inventory to 5,300 rooms even as highways are being widened, roads paved, and public spaces spruced up.

Its general manager Cleofe Albiso said Marriott group’s global sales offices are helping to promote Iloilo worldwide.

She added that “business events are really growing here and the interest is high” as more businesses open. Iloilo is also an alternative venue for business events as the cost is lower than in Manila, she pointed out.

The city is an impressive work in progress. Great Sights Travel managing director Paul So said the new lifestyle centres, commercial and business developments in the new township are being done “tastefully”, the design, architecture and town planning blending seamlessly with the “old” Iloilo which is renowned for its heritage edifices and antique landmarks.

The makeover also covers the clean up of the river and the creation of the 1.2km Iloilo River Esplanade favoured by tourists and locals alike for catching the sunset, jogging and strolling or having a meal in the nearby F&B outlets, beautification of Sunburst Park in front of the old Customs building to open more



**Left: Iloilo Convention Centre.**

**Below: The Baroque-style Miagao Church was opened in the 18<sup>th</sup> century**





**Impressive as they are, Iloilo's traditional festivals are no longer the centre of attention in destination promotion efforts now**

spaces for arts and heritage, and restoration of heritage sites.

But two more things need to be done to pull in more and bigger meetings: add hotels to its limited stock and beef up the number and quality of tourist transport.

Joey Bondoc, Colliers International research manager, recommended developing small hotels targeted at major foreign visitor markets like South Korea and China. They can be designed "based on what clients want", he said, adding that hotel developers can also target meetings from South-east Asia and even small conferences for doctors, surgeons and the like.

Bondoc also suggested recalibrating and upgrading existing hotels in Iloilo "in the mould of Seda", a homegrown brand of quality lifestyle hotels which already has a presence in Iloilo.

Concurring, Rajah Tours president Jojo Clemente said that while Iloilo "definitely has the infrastructure" for meetings, he foresees a shortage in accommodation and transport.

He explained that planners of international meetings tend to hold high expectation of hotels, but the destination's collection of hotels are generally not yet up to scratch.

He added that for bigger events with 500 to 1,000 attendees, organisers "will need a good mix of large-, medium- and

small-sized vehicles, and I'm not sure if Iloilo has enough inventory", and if their buses were up to standard.

Besides the need to resolve these two logistical issues, Clemente said for Iloilo to rise up in the minds of international association executives considering future meeting destinations, it should be included in the destination development and marketing programmes of the Department of Tourism.

The good news is, progress is being made here, with Iloilo City being primed to be the next venue for MICECON, the Philippines' premier conference for business events managed under the baton of the Tourism Promotions Board.



Kobby Dagan/shutterstock

## { Need to know }

### 1 It is acceptable to dress light

Unless specified, dress code for business events in Iloilo is smart casual as a concession to the warm climate and the city's casual and laidback lifestyle.

### 2 Get to know the destination through the belly

Food, very affordable and varied, is Iloilo's biggest selling point year-round. The cuisine is a mix of Spanish, Chinese and local influences. It is the place to taste the freshest seafood, while fruits are bountiful. Take this chance to make every dining function an introduction to the destination.

### 3 Gateway to many lands

Explore the Visayas via Iloilo, the gateway to destinations including Capiz, Antique, Aklan, Guimaras, Bacolod, etc. Travel can be overland, by ferry or by plane. Iloilo has islands and beaches worth exploring, including Gigantes Island, Concepcion and Guimbal.



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ASEAN

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## { Pre/Post }

### Garin Farms calls on holy power

Garin Farms in San Joaquin, about two hours from the city of Iloilo, is a thriving farmland that also raises animals like goats and chickens. In recent years, the owners added a biblical theme park with scenes from the genesis and the life and death of Jesus Christ culminating in the 'heaven' on top of the hill. The theme park is kitschy but highly instagrammable and offers a scenic view of the surrounding areas below.

#### Contact

[www.garinfarm.com](http://www.garinfarm.com)



K Abejuela/shutterstock

### Drive, cruise options to come

By the middle of June, the DOT will have launched the cruise and drive circuits in Iloilo City and Guimaras, Capiz and Northern Iloilo, Lipata Port and Culasi, Antique and the Manapla-Cadiz-San Carlos City, and Sipaway Island in Negros Occidental. The circuits will use speed boats and other boats in Boracay that were replaced due to its closure.

#### Contact

[www.tourism.gov.ph/regional\\_offices.aspx](http://www.tourism.gov.ph/regional_offices.aspx)

### See the heritage sites

The province of Iloilo is dotted with antique churches and heritage houses dating back to the Spanish era. Within the city, head off to Calle Real, the old CBD, and the downtown area called Plaza Libertad. Elsewhere are the UNESCO World Heritage Site of Miagao Church, Jaro Cathedral, Molo Church as well as countless ancestral houses and mansions.

#### Contact

[www.tourism.gov.ph/regional\\_offices.aspx](http://www.tourism.gov.ph/regional_offices.aspx)

### Head up to the highlands

Satisfy the thirst for cooler climate, mountains, waterfalls, pine forest and exotic flora at Bucari in the highlands of Leon, about three hours from the city. Camping sites and a couple of resorts are available, while organic food come fresh from the fruit and vegetable terraces planted on sides of the hills and mountains.

#### Contact

[www.tourism.gov.ph/regional\\_offices.aspx](http://www.tourism.gov.ph/regional_offices.aspx)

Federation Square, a mixed-use space in the inner city of Melbourne



Gagliardiimages/shutterstock

# What's next for Melbourne?

Melbourne Convention Bureau has a rosy forecast but association meeting specialists in the city are more cautious about their future. By **Adelaine Ng**

**T**he health of the associations industry in Melbourne these days may well depend on who you ask. The sector is facing challenges including those that echo global trends but not everything points towards decline, painting a picture of an industry that is changing shape as we speak.

"I'd say we're in a very healthy place," offered Karen Bollinger, CEO of the Melbourne Convention Bureau (MCB). "For us, we're always about looking forward and the international associations sector is really a core part of our business. That's where the highest yields, longest staying delegates are," she said.

Bollinger noted the MCB secured 26 international association bids last year, which is its average, but more significantly, the bureau secured sizeable bookings like the five-day Lions Clubs International Convention 2024 with 13,000 attendees and the 2022 World Ophthalmology Congress which could see up to 20,000 delegates descend on the city. The two events will be the largest conferences ever held in Victoria.

MCB calls the international association sector the jewel in Melbourne's business events crown, contributing 70 per cent of economic impact for 2016/17 FY, or A\$226 million (US\$172 million) in economic contribution, and is expected to attract over 38,900 delegates between 2017 and 2025.

The numbers prompted Bollinger to shy away from projecting any other figures for future performance. She said: "I'm a little nervous because we're actually well ahead so I'm wondering if we did a good job forecasting, or did we just

do a really good job of converting."

But just across the river from the MCB office, the Melbourne Convention and Exhibition Centre (MCEC) tells a less optimistic story. "I think generally budgets seem to be flat for associations," said its CEO Peter King, referring to both international and national sectors. "It's tougher, it's very competitive and (attendee) numbers are declining."

King clarifies that at the MCEC, the actual number of meetings rose by about 20 per cent while attendees declined by up to 20 per cent, which was "certainly impacting the bottomline", he said.

King cited association mergers, their need to generate more revenue, tougher standards for business operations and the ongoing relevance of some associations that are putting pressure on the sector.

Also compounding the problem, opined Associations Forum manager of client services Denys Correll, were questionable practices by some major associations which were prominently highlighted in the mainstream media last year (*See News, page 4*).

Over at Pullman Albert Park, a popular venue for association meetings, director of sales for conference & events, Emma Parker, has also seen weaker bookings.

She puts it down to Melbourne losing bids to competing cities, notably Sydney where the International Convention Centre opened its shiny doors in December 2016 and the Gold Coast. Her observations are supported by findings from the Conference Monitor which showed association bookings in NSW were up 38 per cent last year over the previous year.

Parker isn't optimistic about the im-

mediate future.

She said: "In the last 12 months, national associations have said to us that they're struggling to get the numbers. Some said there's been a lot of conference fatigue. From what I'm seeing on the books, we don't have a lot of association business for the next financial year. It's definitely a softer market particularly for Melbourne. In my opinion, 2018 and 2019 are going to be tough on Melbourne."

Parker and King are however optimistic that bookings for Melbourne will improve once the MCEC's newly expanded facilities open in July 2018.

"The associations sector is still going to be incredibly important," said King. "It's just that the way those events are conducted and the way we drive revenue and manage those events is changing."

That makes this a space to watch.

**"It's tougher, it's very competitive and (attendee) numbers are declining."**

## Peter King

CEO,  
Melbourne Convention and  
Exhibition Centre





## { Need to know }

### 1 Melbourne Planners Guide

The Melbourne Convention Bureau publishes an annual Melbourne Planners Guide, which includes useful information before planning a trip. From a list of hotels with capacity details to pre- and post-conference ideas the guide will help inspire a memorable programme for conference delegates.

### 2 Dress in layers

There's a saying in Melbourne that if you don't like the weather, come back in one hour. The city's four-seasons-in-one-day climate means visitors need to be prepared for various conditions. The best way to dress is in layers – for example a light top with a cardigan in spring and a warmer jacket or coat and scarf in winter.

### 3 Event banners in the city

Banners and signage hub posters within the city for your meeting is possible with a town planning permit, obtainable from the City of Melbourne office. Applications need to be made at least four months before the event, with allocations often confirmed after one month.



## { Pre/Post }



### See the Queen of attractions

A visit to Melbourne isn't complete without stopping at the Queen Victoria Market, a tourist landmark rich in culture and history.

This is the largest open-air market in the Southern Hemisphere where everything from fresh and gourmet foods to fashion, craft and Australian souvenirs can be found. Although the market is open five days a week, Sundays are most popular with visitors as entertainers perform for crowds, creating a carnival-like atmosphere. Guided tours with tastings are also available through the market's website.

#### Contact

[qvm.com.au](http://qvm.com.au)

### Day Trip to Dandenong

Make a day trip to the Dandenong Ranges where hilltop scenery, lush forests and unique craft stores await. Head to Olinda to see some wonderful blooms at the National Rhododendron Gardens, local art galleries or Geppetto's Workshop for a trip down toy memory lane. Also visit Sassafra for specialist tea shops and tea rooms serving traditional Devonshire Teas. Yarra Ranges Tourism can assist with tour and transport enquiries from small to large groups.

#### Contact

[visitdandenongranges.com.au](http://visitdandenongranges.com.au)



### Hidden secrets of Melbourne city

A tailored walk through the CBD is a great way to experience the city and catch some of Melbourne's iconic street art. Hidden Secrets is Melbourne's original laneway guide since 2004. Their walks can be tailored to suit required time frames and includes diverse points of interest to appeal to a broad group. For foodies, the company also does a Progressive Degustation Walk and a Cafe Culture Walk among other offerings.

#### Contact

[hiddensecretstours.com](http://hiddensecretstours.com)

### Ride around Melbourne

If you only have a couple of hours and fancy some exercise, consider discovering Melbourne on a bike. This is made easy thanks to a Bike Share Scheme that provides 600 bikes at 50 docking stations around the city centre. A day pass costs A\$3 (US\$2.30) for unlimited 30-minute rides in a 24-hour period. A TravelSmart map provides all the information a cyclist will need.

#### Contact

[melbournebikeshare.com.au](http://melbournebikeshare.com.au)



# Dancing to a meetings tune

An expanding inventory of meeting facilities has allowed Yogyakarta to support a growing number of association gatherings, discovers **Tiara Maharani**



Yogyakarta boasts a well preserved local culture; Javanese dancers practising their moves

Royal Ambarrukmo Yogyakarta

**Y**ogyakarta may be better known as a leisure destination and lacks the extensive convention and meeting infrastructure found in its sister cities Jakarta and Bali, but the city rich in culture and heritage is no greenhorn to hosting major business and association gatherings.

At the start of the new millennium, Yogyakarta became the first secondary destination in Indonesia to win the hosting rights to a national healthcare association meeting despite not having a convention hall. This was made possible by the efforts of major hotels in the city.

Since then, Yogyakarta's infrastructure has seen improvements with the emergence of new hotels and better meeting facilities.

Correspondingly, tourism data is showing growth. The Yogyakarta tourism office reported 11,377 business and association events in 2015. These were attended by 841,711 participants. The following year there were 13,587 events with 1.6 million participants.

The numbers continued to climb and in 2017, Yogyakarta hosted 15,262 events with 1.7 million participants. Among these were TEFLIN (the Association for The Teaching of English as a Foreign Language in Indonesia) International Conference, Asian Association of Open Universities Annual Conference, Kumon International Conference, Asian Conference on Clinical Pharmacy, and Asian Aroma Ingredients Congress.

Most recently in April, the city hosted the Center for International Forestry Research's 3<sup>rd</sup> Asia Pacific Rainforest Summit, an event that drew more than 1,200 delegates.

Aris Riyanto, head of Yogyakarta Tourism Office said his city's ascent in the association meetings space was a result of "its rich history combined with its culture and adventure", which he believed were "strong draws" for attendees.

Arif Hidayat, president director of Exponent Cipta Media, agrees, pointing out that Yogyakarta's "wealth of heritage and culture" has bestowed the city with many unique venues and activities.

He referenced the ruins of Ratu Boko Palace and Prambanan temple grounds as examples. The former can take up to 300 people for an outdoor reception, while the latter is great for a 1,000-pax dinner with Ramayana ballet performed against the temple backdrop.

Furthermore, Yogyakarta's heritage and culture will also encourage associations in culture, arts, medical, education, environment, history, anthropology and archaeology sectors to meet in the city.

For Fadli Fahmi Ali, director of destination specialists Werkudara Nirwana Sakti, Yogyakarta's creative community is a strength.

"Here, we can easily find dancers, actors, choreographers, musicians, film-makers and puppeteers who can break the boundaries of ideas and styles to make events more special," he explained.

Equally critical to Yogyakarta's sustainable success in the meetings business is the availability of events hard-

ware. Currently the city offers the Jogja Expo Center which can accommodate up to 9,670 people theatre-style, and The Alana Yogyakarta Hotel & Convention Center for up to 2,700 people theatre-style. Royal Ambarrukmo hotel, with its 1,500m<sup>2</sup> ballroom and 20 break-out rooms, is perfect for conferences with multiple concurrent sessions.

For meeting planners in search of venues with a little more cultural flavour, the grand Hotel Tentrem makes a good option with its traditional architecture. The hotel boasts a 1,872m<sup>2</sup> hall and nine meeting rooms.

Yogyakarta's inventory of hotels with quality meeting facilities continues to expand, most recently with Yogyakarta Marriott Hotel. Opened in October last year, the hotel features a 1,867m<sup>2</sup> ballroom and eight breakout rooms.

Denny Ristyanto, director of sales and marketing with the young hotel, told *TTGassociations* that there has never been a quiet day at the hotel since its opening.

"We continued to get event bookings up till the end of the year (when business meetings typically slow down)," he shared, adding that the hotel's varied facilities appeal to business and association meeting planners.

While only 10 per cent of event bookings were from international associations, Denny is confident of growing that share to more than 30 per cent in 2018.

Arif opined that with Yogyakarta's current hardware, the city is capable of welcoming medium-sized meetings of 700 to 1,500 participants.

What industry players hope to see more are improved accessibility and stronger destination promotions.

Yogyakarta's only direct flights are provided by AirAsia from Malaysia and Singapore. Delegates from elsewhere must connect from other airports, creating logistical challenges for planners of large-scale international meetings.

Ian McDonald Cameron, general manager of Royal Ambarrukmo Yogyakarta, hopes the government's plan to develop a new airport in Kulon Progo Regency by 2020 would materialise.

The current Adisutjipto International Airport – the only airport in Yogyakarta – has a short runway that does not allow large-bodied aircraft to land.



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## { Need to know }

### 1 Traffic priority

Yogyakarta streets can be really busy at peak hours. To ensure a smoother journey and minimal disruption to programme schedule, planners should ask their local ground handler to help arrange for police escorts.

### 2 Getting around

Should transport between hotel and conference venue not be provided, delegates will be glad to know that getting around Yogyakarta is easy. Taxis, *andong* horse

carts or *becak* trishaws can be flagged off the streets. Alternatively, use Grab or Go-Car car hiring apps to secure a ride.

### 3 Watch the weather

Yogyakarta's climate tends to be relatively moderate although the high humidity can make one feel sticky and uncomfortable in summer. Light clothing is advised for outdoor activities but be ready with a light jacket or shawl when programmes transition indoors as the air-conditioning can be quite strong.



Fedor Selivanov/shutterstock

## { Pre/Post }

### See Borobudur in ribbons of gold

One of the best ways to enjoy the great Buddhist monument that is Borobudur is to take a sunrise tour. There are several ways to do it. Go up the temple and watch the sunrise from its peak, or climb the Punthuk Setumbu hill and watch as the sun rises between Merapi and Merbabu mountains, casting its golden rays over the majestic temple. Manohara Hotel in the vicinity also offers a sunrise tour plus breakfast.

#### Contact

[www.barama.co.id](http://www.barama.co.id)



### Stories of Ullen Sentalu

Ullen Sentalu Museum offers stories, works of art and relics related to the Yogyakarta and Solo palaces. There are several rooms in the museum, each with its own story and characteristics. After a tour of the museum, head to the Gothic-style Beukenhof Restaurant to enjoy a meal. Planners can organise a themed dessert event here.

#### Contact

[ullensentalu.com/konten/1/0/beranda](http://ullensentalu.com/konten/1/0/beranda)

### Take a hike

Kalibiru National Park, a small reserve located about 1.5 hours by car from Yogyakarta city, is famous for its beautiful views. Park visitors can climb a particular tree that has a platform mounted at its crown, to feast on outstanding views of the surroundings. Besides hiking, visitors can also sign up for ziplining and rappelling.

#### Contact

[wisatakalibiru.wordpress.com](http://wisatakalibiru.wordpress.com)



Marriott International, Kurniadi Wibodo

### Make a piece of batik

Find out how *batik* is traditionally made using methods handed down across generations. There are many *batik* courses offered in the Kraton (palace) area, along the small alleys surrounding the Taman Sari Water Castle. One can also get an introduction to *batik* at the Museum Batik Yogyakarta and Batik Winotosastro. Local artists will gladly guide participants through the manual process.

But if arts and craft isn't your cup of tea, pop by Beringharjo, the city's biggest *batik* market, to snap up some pretty souvenirs.

#### Contact

[www.museumbatik.com/](http://www.museumbatik.com/)

[www.winotosastro.com/batik/](http://www.winotosastro.com/batik/)

### Go temple hopping

Besides the famed Prambanan and Borobudur, Yogyakarta has many other smaller ancient temples waiting to be discovered. There are four special ones to take note of: Sambisari (right), Ijo, Plaosan and Ratu Boko.

Start the day at Sambisari, then continue on to Plaosan, before heading to Ijo where views across the plains can be enjoyed from its location atop a 427m hill. Should you enjoy your archaeological expedition so far, choose to end the day at Ratu Boko Palace – the ruins of an ancient palace – which is also a great spot to catch the sunset.

Aleksandar Todoric/shutterstock





# The Human Genome Meeting 2018

Money was the biggest challenge, as the meeting sought to support 30 speakers and a low registration fee to attract young researchers. By **Julian Ryall**



**T**he decision to host the Human Genome Meeting 2018 in Yokohama, Japan was made in 2016, allowing the port city to beat fellow contenders Tokyo and Chiba.

Chair of the 2018 organising committee, Piero Carninci, recalled that competition was “very tough” as all three cities were willing and ready to provide financial support.

Carninci, who is also deputy director of the RIKEN Centre for Integrative Medical Science, said that Yokohama was eventually chosen because the city’s main convention centre, Pacifico Yokohama Convention Centre, was “ready to provide us with a discount”.

Furthermore, the research institute of RIKEN Centre for Integrative Medical Science was also located in Yokohama, and the committee wanted meeting delegates to visit the facility.

Other winning points included excellent travel links provided by trains into

central Tokyo and by air for overseas attendees, as well as numerous accommodation options and entertainment for post-conference programmes.

Delegates got to spend one memorable evening dining and relaxing at the city’s waterfront Manyo Club onsen, which gave them “a full Japanese experience that most were usually not able to try”, said Carninci.

Although the Human Genome Meeting 2018 was eventually a great success, so much so the organiser of next year’s event expressed concerns about matching the high standards set by this year’s edition, the event did encounter some challenges.

Carninci revealed that the meeting’s biggest hurdle was in financing.

“We needed to cover the costs of 30 guest speakers,” he said.

Adding to the financial strain was the committee’s decision to set a low registration fee to make the meeting more

accessible to young researchers, so as to attract as many of the new generation of genome scientists as possible.

To ease the financial burden, the committee sought out sponsors. Some 25 companies stepped in as sponsors for the meeting, individual seminars and lunch events.

Other challenges included the vast scale of the meeting and communication difficulties when working with people from across the world and who speak different languages.

“This is the second major conference I have organised in the last three years,” he said. “The most important thing is that no one should try to organise something of this scale by themselves.”

He added: “You need to create a team of capable individuals, be selective of the people you put into that team, and be sure that each of them is able to do the tasks that they are assigned to.”

Regular feedback, he found, was also critical for the team to know how things were progressing.

Management of the meeting was split between the local organisers – Carninci and his team – and the headquarters of the Human Genome Organisation in Seoul, South Korea.

In terms of communication, Carninci said clear and open communication with all teammates must be encouraged.

“I have learnt to be consistent in messaging to avoid misunderstandings,” he reflected.

“For me, that means not using e-mails so much but picking up the phone or speaking to people face-to-face whenever possible. When you are working with multiple languages, it is important to have people who can speak at least two languages perfectly.”

## Event

Human Genome Meeting 2018

## Organiser

Human Genome Organisation

## Date

March 12-15, 2018

## Venue

Pacifico Yokohama Convention Center

## No. of attendees

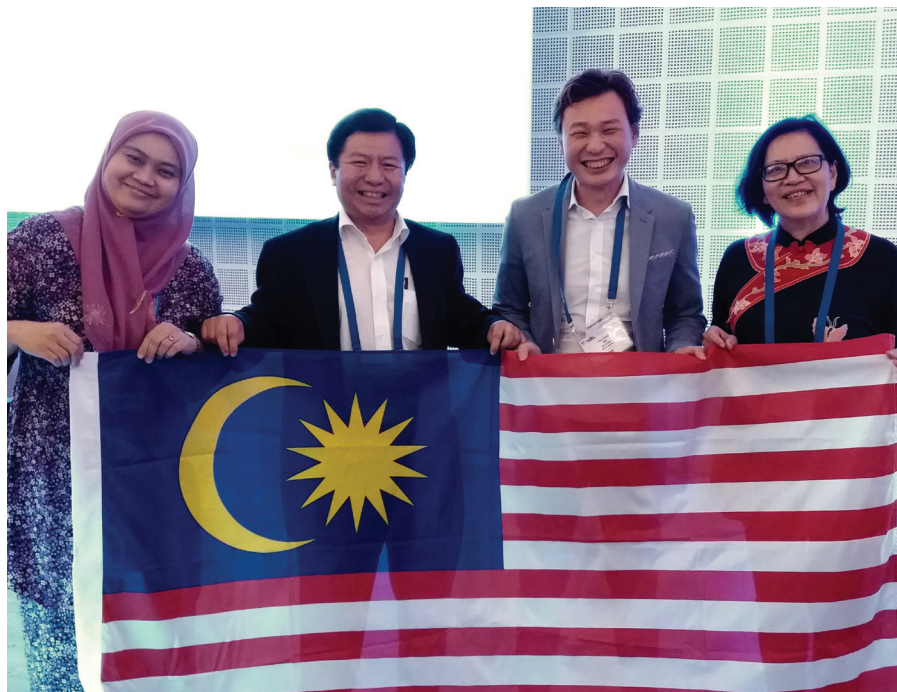
463

## Challenges

Financial strain from having to support 30 guest speakers and facilitating a low registration fee to allow young researchers to access the meeting; sharing event management duties; clear communication across different languages



# 49<sup>th</sup> World Congress of Surgery 2021



Associate professor Hanafiah Harunarashid (second from left) posing triumphantly with members of the Malaysian delegation after winning the bid for the 49<sup>th</sup> World Congress of Surgery 2021

Malaysia pulled off a victorious bid against Taiwan and New Zealand, but winning the congress is only the beginning of the journey, writes **S Puvaneswary**

The World Congress of Surgery is an international flagship event for the profession of surgery worldwide, and a convention of intellectual discourse is held every two years by the International Surgical Society (ISS) in collaboration with its integrated societies, participating societies and national societies of the host country.

In August 2017, news broke that Malaysia had won the hosting rights to the 49<sup>th</sup> World Congress of Surgery in 2021. It was up against Taiwan and New Zealand.

It was a great honour for the Health Ministry of Malaysia and the College of Surgeons Academy of Medicine Malaysia – two organisations that had worked hard to bid for and win the world conference – and for Malaysia which has long been an active member the world

renowned ISS.

The Health Ministry of Malaysia and the College of Surgeons Academy of Medicine Malaysia were supported by the Malaysia Convention & Exhibition Bureau (MyCEB), the honorary consulate and advisor to Malaysian tourism in Basel, Jeffery Sandragesan, along with partners in the medical industries, host venue Kuala Lumpur Convention Centre and top local universities with medical faculties, namely Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, Universiti Malaya and Universiti Sains Malaysia.

Recalling work done in the lead up to the successful bid, associate professor Hanafiah Harunarashid, president of the College of Surgeons Academy of Medicine Malaysia, said: “It involved a lot of hard work and preparation with MyCEB leading the way in research and doing the groundwork.

“We highlighted our strong points which included having a successful track record in organising medical and non-medical related international conferences, strong links with ISS, medical professionals in Malaysia who are well known worldwide and would build trust in Malaysia. Noor Hisham, the director-general of Health Malaysia for instance, is a council member on the ISS executive board.”

During the bid presentation, Hanafiah said the team highlighted various winning points of Malaysia – that it is a safe country, politically stable, has good infrastructure, facilities and transportation system, and is a value-for-money destination.

While the bid has been won, Hanafiah stressed that there is still a lot of work to be done leading up to the congress.

Delegate boosting activities must be conducted to raise the profile of the conference among the surgical fraternity worldwide.

Sponsorship must be secured to ensure that the event makes a healthy profit. While national and regional economic climates might be soft, Hanafiah remains confident in obtaining sponsorship.

“As long as we start early in getting corporate sponsorship, we should not have a problem. As this is a world congress, corporate sponsors will want to be part of this prestigious event,” he said.

As well, the bid committee must fulfil its promise on delivering the best World Congress of Surgery ever, and prove that Malaysia is indeed a country of diversity and cultural harmony.

Hanafiah intends to engage different surgical societies to be part of the organising committee.

## Event

49<sup>th</sup> World Congress of Surgery 2021

## Organiser

International Surgical Society and the College of Surgeons Academy of Medicine Malaysia

## Date

September 2021

## Venue

Kuala Lumpur Convention Centre

## No. of attendees

Around 5,000

## Challenges

Having a strong strategy to win the bid; delegate boosting efforts to bring in the targeted 5,000 attendees; securing sponsors to ensure a profitable congress amid soft national and regional economic climates

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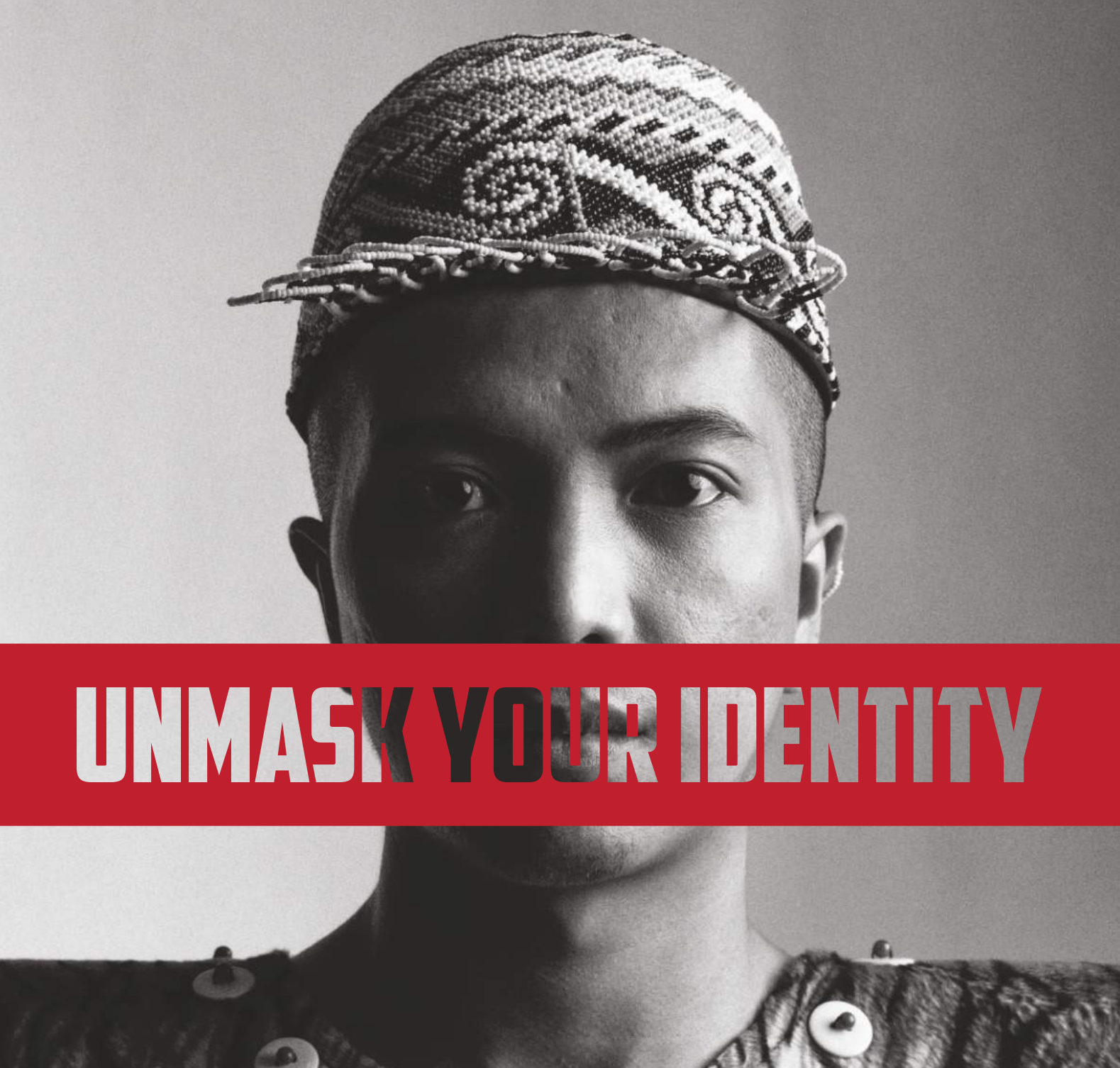
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