



**GUIDE TO**  
Inspiring Entertainment



**DESTINATIONS**  
Hong Kong, Japan and Australia

## Achieving loftier goals

Sabrina Chan, senior executive director of Hong Kong Association of the Pharmaceutical Industry, talks about her association's wide-ranging work to elevate pharmaceutical professionalism and Hong Kong's competitiveness in the global arena





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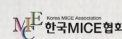
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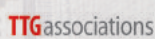
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# What rocks you?

Wild whoops and energetic percussion beats interrupted polite chatter one early morning in a function room at Grand Hyatt Singapore, where the American Society of Association Executives (ASAE) was hosting its Association Leadership Forum.

And as the cheerful percussion band comprising youths from Urban Drum Crew Singapore marched through the room, it drew immediate silence and attention – and awe – from all delegates.

It was a spectacular way to ‘wake’ delegates and kick off an intensive day of knowledge exchange among association chiefs and executives from around the way. Plus, I bet the amazing visuals from the band’s Laser Percussion Show must have gotten ASAE more than a couple of social media tags.

But just as importantly, engaging Urban Drum Crew Singapore as the opening act for the two-day conference demonstrated to an international audience that Singapore can be fun and entertaining, and she has some creative folks in her midst.

More than a decade ago, when I was a conference and event manager, I remember having to reach beyond Singapore for quality acts whenever clients were not confident of seeing world-class local acts.

Back then, Australian acts were highly favoured. As impressive as they were, they were also costly, requiring flight and accommodation for all performers on top of their engagement fees.

Fortunately, over time, Singapore acts polished up and many gained regional and international exposure. Urban Drum Crew Singapore, for instance, have performed more than 1,000 shows professionally since its formation in 2005.

And it isn’t just Singapore acts that have gotten their act together. Across Asia quality event entertainment options are growing, to the benefit of planners taking events to this part of the world. Our team of writers have gone through their backyard to identify a few interesting acts that work for a variety of event purposes.

Besides those featured in this issue’s *Guide to Inspiring Entertainment* (pages 13-16), I would also like to urge you to consider performance groups belonging to schools and charity organisations, whose performers need and value opportunities to present their creative capabilities and to build their confidence. Most convention bureaux will be able to recommend a few for you to consider and to help make initial connections.



**Karen Yue**  
Group Editor

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## DESTINATIONS



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# Innovation association tackles society challenges with event content

By Karen Yue

The International Society for Professional Innovation Management (ISPIM) has chosen to apply a challenge-based approach to its content creation for upcoming conferences in Asia-Pacific, in order to emphasise the legacy potential of its events and to attract more attendees.

The new approach debuted with ISPIM Connects in Fukuoka, Japan, which was held from December 2 to 5 last year.

In the lead up to this, the ISPIM team, led by executive director Iain Bitran, met with Fukuoka city government officers to identify major challenges facing the city and its people.

“They gave us seven or eight hottest chal-

**Bitran: building a more fulfilling content**

lenges they have at the moment, and we picked three that our innovation community could best help with. The challenges we chose were population aging, energy transition and building a conducive start-up eco-system,” said Bitran.

“We found that when there is a challenge-based conference content, the local community become rather passionate and want to be involved. That’s because the challenges are issues they can identify with, and would want to know or discuss solutions,” he added.

“Having a challenge-based content also allows us to facilitate connections between people and communities that wouldn’t usually think of connecting. For example, researchers of population aging and energy transition who presented at our conference got to meet with innovation experts – people outside of their field – who share the same passion.”

However, Bitran said that for this approach to work, there must be a challenge owner in the city. Citing an example, he said: “We are looking at bringing ISPIM Connects to Singapore in 2019 but we have not been able to

identify an agency – a challenge owner – that can give us the answers (challenges that the city is facing). Usually we meet with the authority or people who are involved in innovation, such as the national innovation agency. There isn’t one in Singapore, and the Agency for Science, Technology and Research has not been able to help. So I’m taking a different route by talking to the Singapore University of Technology and Design. If that fails, then we won’t do Singapore at all.”

Besides boosting local and regional attendance and facilitating broader connections, Bitran said taking a challenge-based content approach also allows ISPIM to “build legacy into the event programme”.

“By engaging city stakeholders (in the programming), such as working with a local university to conduct research on a challenge and implementing solutions with the challenge owner, we can track and measure the positive impact our efforts bring to the local community even after the conference concludes,” he explained.

## Busan scores 20<sup>th</sup> World Microscopy Conference

The International Federation of Societies for Microscopy (IFSM) has picked Busan, South Korea as the host city for its 20<sup>th</sup> World Microscopy Conference (IMC20) in 2022.

Busan beat other destinations like South Africa (Cape Town), Netherlands (Maastricht), US (Portland), and Spain (Madrid) in the race.

Taking place from September 25 to 30, the event is expected to be attended

by approximately 3,000 delegates from 37 countries. Scientists in the microscopy sector will discuss trending issues and network with other people in the industry. The event will include a simultaneous exhibition of global microscope manufacturing companies.

Held every four years, South Korea will be the second Asian country, after Japan, to host the conference.

“This success is a fruitful result of our strong collaboration with the local community, academe, and the private sector,” said In Sook Lee, director at the Korea Tourism Organization – Convention Team in a press statement.

“Last year, Korea was the top meeting destination according to the Union of International Associations, and we are determined to promote Korea’s knowledge, expertise, and capability to attract more international conferences,” she added.



The successful bidding team from South Korea

## Newly-formed MSAE seeks AMC

The newly formed Malaysian Society of Association Executives (MSAE) is looking for an association management company (AMC) that is willing to run it in exchange for access to MSAE’s connections.

MSAE president Zaliha Omar said: “We don’t have the means to pay for



**Zaliha: reciprocal approach**

an AMC, so we are looking for one that is willing to do it for free. In return, we will connect them with associations that wish to organise meetings, workshops, teaching sessions and conferences.”

Zaliha said the role of the AMC would be to organise a membership drive, create sustainable funding, create activities that will appeal to members, and run the day-to-day operations.

MSAE currently has 23 members from diverse sectors including trade, medical, construction and petroleum associations. – S Puvaneswary



# Association meetings face threat of predatory conferences

By S Puvaneswary

Predatory conferences – illegitimate conferences created purely for profit and feed off eager academicians and PhD students looking for short cuts to get their works published or to speak at international conferences – are jeopardising attendance at and performance of legitimate ones.

This warning came from Noor Ahmad Hamid, regional director Asia Pacific of ICCA, who spoke at the recent Union of International Associations (UIA) Associations Round Table Asia-Pacific 2018 in Kuala Lumpur.

Noor explained that predatory conferences would naturally present poor quality content, the fact masked by glossy websites that imitate the real thing, thus fooling sincere delegates who would pay for registration fees.

Noor identified examples of such conferences in his presentation, but had asked for attendees to refrain from taking the information beyond the room.

While ICCA had come across various “questionable conferences” by dubious organisers and had alerted its members,

Noor noted that there is no authoritative body to monitor predatory conferences and therefore data is lacking to indicate how extensive their impact is.

Offering tips on identifying predatory conferences, Noor said to look out for missing contact information or organisers that have scheduled several conferences on different fields of expertise on the same day but at different locations.

Speaking to *TTGassociations* after the presentation, Jeffers Miruka, president of the African Society of Association Executives, shared an example of a predatory agriculture conference in July 2018. It had a website very similar to the legitimate conference but used a different URL and venue. Registration fees were also collected from interested parties.

“The minute the organisers knew that they had been discovered, they shut down their operations. However, organisers of the legitimate conference were (affected). The turn-out at their conference was poor as damage had already been done,” Miruka elaborated.

He said demand was fuelled by

academicians who were desperate and were willing to pay money to have their scientific papers approved with guaranteed publication in a short frame of time in order to qualify for further academic funding. In the case of PhD students, attending a conference in their area of expertise or having their research published in a journal would be a step closer towards getting their doctorate.

Miruka added that such conferences have poor quality presentations and those who pay to attend such conferences in order to gain knowledge end up disappointed.

Cyril Ritchie, UIA president, shared that he had received invitations to attend UN conferences in the past but the email return addresses were never an official one.



Noor: beware of fakes

## ASAE deepens reach in Asia-Pac

A new Certified Association Executive (CAE) programme and continually improved content at its annual Association Leadership Forum Asia Pacific conferences are among the investments the American Society of Association Executives (ASAE) is making to further its reach to associations based here.

ASAE president and CEO John Graham said: “Our work in Asia-Pacific is part of a long-term vision that started five years ago when we did a study to determine which markets outside of the US would be the most receptive to our products and services. We found that Asia-Pacific holds the most potential.”

With the completion of the study, ASAE debuted the ASAE Great Ideas in Association Management Conference in Hong Kong in 2015.

Graham noted that ASAE’s conferences in Asia-Pacific “have changed along the way” to better suit the needs of association executives in the region.

“Our Association Leadership Forum Asia Pacific this year is a lot more interactive and offers many opportunities for

our attendees to share what they do and to learn from one another.”

While attendance at the conferences here has not grown significantly since 2015, Greta Kotler, chief development & credentialing officer, said the “calibre of attendees is now much higher”.

Graham shared that many Asian cities are keen on hosting future ASAE education conferences. Bangkok, Singapore and Yokohama are among the informal contenders for the 2019 edition.

ASAE is also looking to pilot a CAE programme in Australia this year, before rolling it out to the rest of Asia-Pacific.

It is also in talks with the Singapore Business Federation to bring the same certification programme to the city-state

soon.

Besides these efforts, ASAE is keen to amplify the legacies left behind by Asian associations through its annual Power of A Awards. Winners have traditionally been North American associations, but ASAE hopes to globalise it by including nominees and winners from the Asia-Pacific region. – **Karen Yue**



Graham: stronger commitment to Asia-Pacific

## SG furniture industry nurtures youths

Singapore Furniture Industries Council (SFIC) has launched the Youth Furniture Chapter (YFC) to nurture a more resourceful and resilient generation of young leaders in the Singapore furniture industry.

Mark Yong, SFIC president, said: “Organisations are now focusing on succession planning to ensure continuity and growth. With YFC, we can identify and put together an agenda to train and mentor the right people to step into leadership positions. YFC allows us to have a formal structure to groom our NEXTGen leaders to drive sustainable growth over the long term.”

YFC, headed by Jake Tan, has its roots in 1999 when it began as a small committee as part of a leadership succession plan for SFIC. Today, YFC comprises about 100 NEXTGen entrepreneurs. SFIC aims to double this number by end-2019.

YFC’s launch coincided with the opening of the 4<sup>th</sup> ASEAN Youth Furniture Exchange (AYFE) and Digital Forum in Singapore on November 1, a regular event that aims to build an intra-ASEAN business network for the region’s new generation of furniture entrepreneurs.



# Localised expansion crucial for association growth: experts

By Pamela Chow

Associations gunning for regional or global growth have been urged to adopt a tighter and more focused growth strategy, especially in a fragmented region like Asia and the Middle East.

Experts at ASAE's Association Leadership Forum in Singapore advised identifying target markets and taking on a localised strategy for each.

Dom LaVigne, former director of government & public affairs-Asia Pacific/Middle East, Methanol Institute, noted that "one size does not fit all" in the regions, which have "disparate" political, media and business practices; as well as political sensitivities and territories.

For example, in China, the municipal officials often hold more decision-making power than the national government.

The European Society for Radiotherapy & Oncology has binned its "one size fits all principle" and "standalone model" in its pursuit of global expansion, shared Sven Bossu, its director of innovation.

Instead, the association has turned

to strengthening partnerships with key associations in Singapore and turned up conversations with regulatory boards and healthcare professionals in this region.

Likewise, the Building Industry Consulting Service International (BICSI) has concentrated on growing certain markets, the latest being Dubai, and is approaching

each market with a unique model, shared Paul Weintraub, vice president of global development and support, BICSI.

He advised fellow associations to know "what the target market is demanding from you" and to tailor their products and services accordingly.

A focused approach is also crucial in establishing partnerships. Nikki Walker, vice president, global association management & consulting, MCI Group, advised against long-term partnerships. She recommended that related associations come together to co-organise events and symposiums, and be open to working with third-parties that can help fill the gaps that associations cannot due to limited resources.



Weintraub: tailored for each market

## { Bureau brief }

### Indonesia gets bid fund

Indonesia's Ministry of Tourism has set aside a US\$1 million bid fund for 2019, as part of the government's efforts to boost the country's business events sector. The money will be used mainly for the bidding of international events. Aside from the creation of the fund, the govern

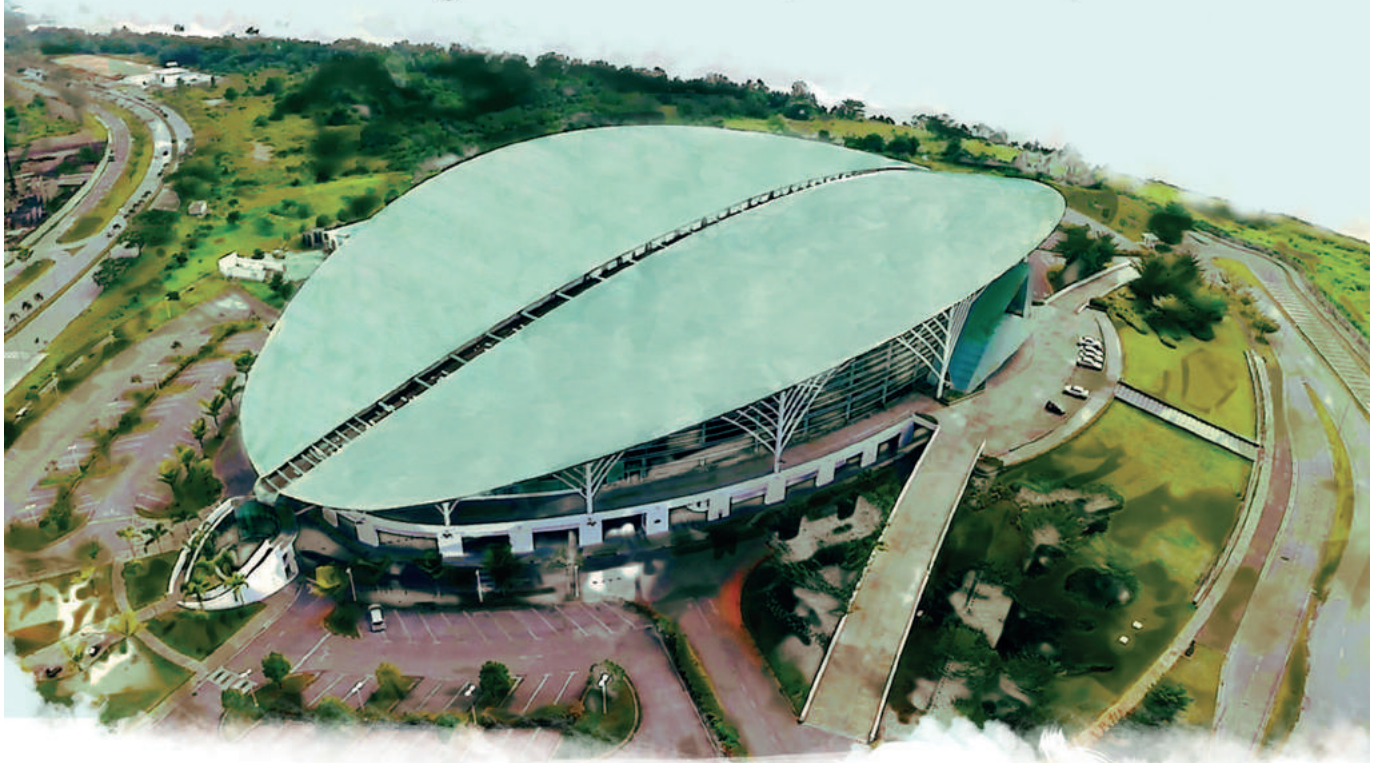
### Visitors to act as guardians of New Zealand

Tourism New Zealand and its tourism industry stakeholders has launched a major initiative inviting visitors to care for its unique land and environment. The Tiaki Promise actively encourages all visitors to experience New Zealand in a way that keeps them safe, protects the natural environment, respects all cultures and preserves the country for future generations. Visitors will learn about the Tiaki Promise before arriving and while travelling around the country.

### Sri Lanka destination campaign is finally on

After three to four years in the making, and despite a constitutional crisis in late-October last year threatening to disrupt destination marketing, Sri Lanka's new tourism campaign, So Sri Lanka, is finally off the ground. The multi-year campaign will kick-off in 1Q2019, starting off as a digital campaign targeted at key source markets like China, India, the UK, Germany and France. It will then taper off into wider in-market activities to be conducted over three years.

## Delivering Successful Events, the Borneo Way



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# Going for sporting gold

What has a major sporting event got to do with association meetings? Plenty of good found the Gold Coast, but not quite for Japan yet, writes **Karen Yue**

It was on November 11, 2011 when the Commonwealth Games Federation General Assembly announced that the Gold Coast in Australia would be the host city for the 2018 Commonwealth Games (Gold Coast 2018).

The victory led to even more sporting events being drawn to the sunny destination. In the year leading up to the Games in April 2018, the Gold Coast welcomed the Pan Pacific Swimming Championships, Sudirman Cup for badminton, triathlons by the International Triathlon Union, and more.

But another positive development also emerged. According to Anna Case, director – global business events with Destination Gold Coast, many sporting associations relocated their headquarters to the Gold Coast following the announcement on Gold Coast 2018.

“Our local city council and state government collaborate very closely on big events like the Games because they require a lot of resources to support,” said Case, adding that it was also imperative to get more events into the city to use the new and improved facilities that were developed to support the Games.

With the stronger presence of sporting associations in the Gold Coast, the destination started to see “a lot of sporting events and meetings rolling our way”.

By mid-2018, the city secured at least 47 events under the category of Sports, Health and Wellness, most of which are association meetings scheduled to take place between 2016 and 2020.

Association meetings that have taken place at press time include: International Footwear Biomechanics Symposium 2017; Sports Chiropractic Symposium 2018; Australian

& New Zealand Sports Law Association 2018; and World Squash Federation Level 2 Course & World Coaches Conference & World Squash Federation Coaching Meeting 2018.

While the Gold Coast has been rising as a global meetings city, Case said winning the hosting rights to Gold Coast 2018 has further elevated the destination’s profile, as well as that of the wider Queensland state.

“We are already a contender (for international meetings), particularly in our core markets. However, securing such a prominent event – although sporting events are different from conferences, the logistical parts are similar – puts us in the global media (limelight).”

Over in Japan, where the 2019 Rugby World Cup will take place across 12 cities from September 20 to November 2, and the 2020 Summer Olympics will be held in Tokyo from July 24 to August 9, local convention bureau representatives have reported a rise in interest and enquiries from associations keen to meet in the country. However, nothing has been converted into actual bookings at press time.

Etsuko Kawasaki, executive director of the Japan Convention Bureau, said the enquiries were “not restricted to the sector of sports and related

**“Our strategy is to get sporting events that have a conference component. Quite a lot of them have that, such as an annual general meeting or a coaches’ conference.”**

## Anna Case

Director – global business events, Destination Gold Coast



areas”, and pointed to the upcoming G20 Summit & Ministerial Meetings scheduled for June 2019 in Osaka as another catalyst for the spike in planners’ interest.

Hironobu Fujimura, director of sales, business events team, with the Tokyo Convention & Visitors Bureau (TCVB), has also observed a leap in the number of enquiries from associations and meeting planners, again for events not restricted to sports and related areas.

To convert that interest into bookings, Fujimura said the TCVB Business Events Team is working with the Tokyo Metropolitan Government to entice large associations with the provision of financial and in-kind support.

TCVB has chosen to cast a wider net to lure meetings to Japan on the back of the high-profile Games, preferring not to focus only on sports, sport medicine, sport technology or health and wellness-related associations.

Limited supply of event venues, hotel accommodation and travel services in the host cities of both the 2019 Rugby World Cup and 2020 Summer Olympics – already stretched thin by Japan’s fiery popularity among corporate event planners and holidaymakers

– have affected associations’ willingness to give Japan their final nod right away.

Susan Maria Ong, MICE director, Asia Pacific with Japan National Tourism Organization, said many enquiries for large-scale business events keen on Tokyo, Osaka and Kyoto were being waitlisted as far back as mid-2017. These would likely only be confirmed once the 2020 Summer Olympics is over.

Justin August, director of business development with Osaka-based Sakura International, said: “(While) there has certainly been an increase (in enquiries from overseas business event clients), association enquiries have fallen as organisers do not want to schedule meetings at the same time as a major sports event due to the pressure this puts on accommodation and venues.

“Even now we only have a couple of confirmed bookings so the percentage (of business conversion) is very low. High pricing in Japan means overseas agencies are fishing for comparative quotes and reluctant to sign off on anything until they are sure they are getting a good deal.”

August expects to see more confirmed meeting bookings over the next six months.



# Foreseeable succession

The sudden exit of ICCA's CEO took members by surprise and highlighted the critical need for succession planning in associations, a smooth leadership transition, and clear communications to members. By **Caroline Boey**

**W**hen Martin Sirk, CEO of the International Congress and Convention Association (ICCA) announced in late-June 2018 his exit in a month's time, after 16 years at the helm, members across the world were taken by surprise.

A familiar face, Dennis Speet who is ICCA's chief value officer, quickly assumed the role of acting CEO while the association got to work in search of a replacement.

Leadership change is unavoidable, acknowledged ICCA members, but told *TTGassociations* that a smooth transition is critical and the new leadership must recognise the needs of global members and that they are different region to region.

Outgoing ICCA president Nina Freyssen-Pretorius said the ICCA board would be transparent and share the profile of the CEO with members and staff, and she wanted members to share their wishes and priorities with the board.

A new CEO profile was created and the job was advertised in October with shortlisting to take place in January/February



uary 2019, and the new person joining on March 1, 2019.

Mario Hardy, CEO of Pacific Asia Travel Association (PATA), said: "When you have a strong and capable management team with a track record of consistently delivering results, leadership succession becomes less of a concern as you know the organisation will continue to operate successfully during the transition."

But he noted that associations need to ensure that its executives have a notice period long enough to adjust to the new landscape, and sufficient time with the new leadership for a proper handover.

"Ideally, if at all possible, you would want both leaders to work side by side for a few months to ensure a smooth transition," Hardy said.

A clear vision for the future of the organisation, what type of experience and skill-set best fulfils that need, and what type of leader would be required to deliver on that vision are critical, he added.

"For the past few years, I had been most concerned with the financial sustainability of the organisation. As we have now stabilised the finances of PATA, my focus has shifted to the growth of the organisation and increasing the influence and its impact on the future of the travel and tourism industry."

As all associations have their own unique needs, Gary Grimmer, CEO and strategic consultant, GainingEdge, said leadership succession is an issue of board governance, to ensure there are regular opportunities for new people to serve and ensuring diverse representation in terms of geography, gender, culture and member type.

"I feel that it is a good idea for associations to have succession planning for their CEO, but there is never a single

right answer. Some succession plans will call for the development of a designated internal successor. However, other organisations will find that their strategic needs change and will be seeking 'new blood' or people and perspectives from outside the organisation or even sometimes outside the industry in question," said Grimmer.

He added: "The other major issue that I think most associations should be focused on is the question of disruption in the professions they serve and how their business models relate to that. Between creative business applications, new commercial models, robotics and artificial reality, there are forces that will cause disruption in most professions as well as in the associations that serve them."

"Anticipating disruption and forming strategies to deal with it are one of the most important things associations should be talking about."

At AIPC – International Association of Convention Centres, its administration is delivered under contract rather than by dedicated full-time staff where the principles of accountability are the same, its executive director, Rod Cameron, said.

"Operational continuity is the most important single issue for us as our board needs to know that there is a clear point of departure for any new administration should they elect to move in a different direction structurally."

"The most important elements of succession planning for us have been to make a change in administration possible without major disruption ... and that records and 'organisational history' are also entirely up to date and readily accessible."

"The membership is in fact the whole basis for the existence of any organisation – and that can sometimes be forgotten."

**"When you have a strong and capable management team with a track record of consistently delivering results, leadership succession becomes less of a concern as you know the organisation will continue to operate successfully during the transition."**

**Mario Hardy**  
CEO, Pacific Asia  
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AND QUOTE "TTGASSOCIATIONS" FOR  
PRIORITY HOSTING CONSIDERATION

### What's New At IT&CM China 2019 Say Hi to Everyone!

An interactive ice-breaker for all delegates that first reveals 2019's attendees. Get to know who's who before exhibition days begin and be on the look-out for delegate profiles you want to meet.

#### Power Hackathon Luncheon

Enrich both mind and body by learning trending innovative solutions that are making a major impact on the industry as you lunch. Limited complimentary lunch vouchers available.

#### MICE Innovation Hub

Meet China's brightest start-ups and explore the fresh solutions created to solve today and perhaps tomorrow's industry challenges

#### IT&CM China Meets CTW China Under One Roof

Enjoy even more opportunities to interact with CTW China's corporate travel executives as both events are now housed in the same hall. IT&CM China buyers can also pre-schedule business appointments with CTW China suppliers.



#### FOLLOW US ON WECHAT

To stay up-to-date on the latest event updates, and look-out for games and prizes to be won from now till IT&CM China 2019.



## A slice of Japan in the Lion City

Pan Pacific Singapore has introduced its newest event space, a newly-constructed Garden Pavilion sequestered in its fourth floor open-air space.

The Garden Pavilion sits serenely in the heart of a beautifully-sculpted Japanese garden, and is connected via a short walkway from Keyaki restaurant. The rectangular structure is clad in traditional Shoji-inspired screens, and opens up to a shimmering koi pond.

The Garden Pavilion itself can seat up to 40 people for a sit-down lunch or dinner. In standing cocktail-style, the rectangular space would be able to hold around 80 pax. Keyaki itself can seat up to 140 pax, and it has two private dining rooms. Only Japanese fare from Keyaki will be served at events utilising the pavilion, and menus can be tailored and

customised to any palate.

Kaiseki menus for private luncheons or dinners start at S\$220 (US\$162) per person, while cocktail receptions start at S\$80 per person with canapés. The minimum spend for the use of the pavilion is S\$6,000\*\* for dinner and S\$5,000\*\* for lunch.

A full-day meeting experience starts at S\$135 per person inclusive of a bento lunch and two coffee breaks, while a half-day meeting experience starts at S\$90 and includes a bento lunch and one coffee break.

The Garden Pavilion would certainly be a perfect place to unwind, partake in a delicious meal, and imbibe a glass of wine, after a long day of negotiations and discussions. Opening hours for lunch are 11.30 to from 14.30, while dinners are from 18.30 to 22.30.

## Dual branded AccorHotels property opens in Bangkok

The second dual-hotel brand concept in Bangkok has opened in the heart of Sukhumvit, within the Thai capital's CBD.

Featuring modern Thai interiors, Novotel Bangkok Sukhumvit 4 boasts 185 Deluxe and Grand Deluxe rooms that overlook the city skyline. Guestrooms feature a 49-inch Smart TV, a connectivity panel, minibar, safety deposit box, and work desk.

Meanwhile, newly-built 133-room ibis Styles Bangkok Sukhumvit 4 features double and twin bedding, where each guestroom comes furnished with a 42-inch TV, a minifridge, and tea and coffee making facilities.

Guests staying at either of the two hotels can avail amenities such as the all-day diner Food Exchange, RedSquare Rooftop Bar on level 24, fitness centre, and swimming pool.

Nana and Ploenchit BTS Skytrain stations are just a five-minute walk away from the co-branded property.



## Stage an event by the

Siloso Beach in Sentosa has opened a brand new events space, Glass House, within the C Side beach destination.

Glass House stands next to the Coastes beach bar and restaurant, and boasts floor-to-ceiling glass walls – which allows in lots of natural sunlight – and an alfresco deck area overlooking the beach. The 84m<sup>2</sup> air-conditioned space can accommodate up to 120





## Yan Toh Heen reopens bigger and better

The two-Michelin-star Yan Toh Heen in the InterContinental Hong Kong property has reopened with a larger dining area as well as a stunning, panoramic view of Victoria Harbour, thanks to its new location at the Lower Level of the hotel's shopping arcade.

The restaurant now seats 140 guests and offers three private rooms. There is a 10-seat room that is attached to the 96-seat main dining area, and two separate rooms near the reception. The latter can be combined into one larger space for three 12-seat tables. There is also a flatscreen TV, ideal for presentations or special celebrations.

Food-wise, executive chef Lau Yiu Fai has created a new range of exquisite Cantonese dishes that blend tradition with modern flair.

Event planners will be able to select from several set menus, including a business set lunch and a chef's tasting menu. Tailor-made menus are also available upon request.

Buyouts are possible and come with a minimum spend of HK\$250,000 (US\$31,910), excluding a 10 per cent surcharge.



## seaside in Singapore

people for a standing reception, or 80 people for a sit-down affair.

Food and drinks can be catered from the main kitchen at Coastes.

To book out the entire space, a minimum F&B spending or venue rental of S\$3,000 (US\$2,176) or S\$4,000 is required for weekdays and weekends respectively. Rates are based on four-hour booking blocks.

## Amara Sanctuary Resort Sentosa debuts heritage trail

Amara Sanctuary Resort Sentosa has launched an hour-long trail that integrates her buildings' colonial history with surrounding nature and conservation.

The Amara Heritage Trail is led by senior tourist guide Carol Dragon from Journeys, an established agency specialising in heritage walking tours around Singapore.

The experience begins at the hotel lobby and takes participants under shady saga and petai trees and through the hotel's herb garden to touch and sniff common herbs and spices that go into local cuisine. Along the way, Dragon narrates the history of the black-and-white conserved buildings that now make up Amara Sanctuary Resort Sentosa.

The Amara Heritage Trail can be customised for groups to include flexible timing, special menus (such as kacang putih with



Gunner cocktails, selected herbs and spices, sambal petai side dish), personalised name on dessert plate, Trail shirt and memorabilia.

Twenty people are allowed in each group. Larger numbers will be split into smaller groups.

## Smiling Albino launches Bangkok Art Biennale day trips

Smiling Albino, a Bangkok-based travel specialist, has designed private day trips that combine the visiting of the city-wide international art exhibitions and Bangkok's unique experiences.

Trips are custom designed for each client, taking in exhibition locations and paired with excursions through the backstreets and alleyways of historical Bangkok. Guests will step into heritage communities, learn about indigenous crafts and traditions, and use the waterways as a way of connecting with the communities of the capital's past.

During the tour, in addition to a Smiling Albino guide, a special Biennale Expert Host will join the trip to provide additional information and insights into the art exhibitions and their creators.



This is Bangkok's first time hosting the biennale, and the event will have 75 artists from 33 countries exhibiting over 200 works at 20 locations around the Thai capital until February 3, 2019.

### { What's on offer }

#### Dorsett Kuala Lumpur

Dorsett Kuala Lumpur has recently renovated its function facilities, and is offering a new Meet, Eat & Sleep @ Dorsett package.

The package is available from now until March 31, 2019, and is priced at RM140 nett (US\$34) per person per day. If inclusive of accommodation, prices start from RM295 nett per room per night.

The package includes complimentary Wi-Fi, meeting equipment such as one LCD projector, screen and flipchart/whiteboard, and lapel/wireless microphone.

Bookings of 15 to 30 guestrooms will earn the group two free perks, while bookings of 31 rooms and more will get three.

Terms and conditions apply.

Email [events.kualalumpur@dorsetthotels.com](mailto:events.kualalumpur@dorsetthotels.com)



Dorsett Kuala Lumpur

# Achieving loftier goals

Sabrina Chan, senior executive director of Hong Kong Association of the Pharmaceutical Industry, talks to **Prudence Lui** about her association's wide-ranging work to elevate pharmaceutical professionalism and Hong Kong's competitiveness in the global arena



**Could you give us a quick introduction to the role the Hong Kong Association of the Pharmaceutical Industry (HKAPI) plays in Hong Kong's public healthcare system?**

Founded in 1968, HKAPI is one of the earliest associations in the world formed by R&D-based pharmaceutical companies. We work closely with different government bureaux, professional associations, academics and patient groups, consistently providing expert views across the entire spectrum of healthcare matters, including healthcare system reform, research and development as well as patient empowerment.

Though that mission has evolved over the years, it still follows the industry's fundamental pharmaceutical philosophy that medicine is for all people.

HKAPI also provides constructive advice on the healthcare system, supporting the implementation of regulatory requirements while maintaining supplies of critical drugs and vaccines to safeguard the public.

For instance, we reviewed the Drug Office's e-submission system before its official launch two years ago. HKAPI implemented a pilot test on it and then gave comments to bridge (user) gap and to minimise bugs. We also offered training for members.

**What are the various functions of HKAPI?**

I lead the executive office and the day-to-day running of the associations' interest in accordance with the strategic plans and budget. I also work with an eight-member Board of Directors, who are our sponsors and elected by full-time members once every two years in AGMs.

There are several task forces set up for strategic initiatives and system betterment, namely Preventive and Primary Healthcare; Patients, Enlistment & Risk-

sharing; Open Access; R&D/Eco-system; Regulatory Affairs; Ethics and Compliance as well as Macau.

I work with staff, sponsors and task-forces to develop policies and planning for the implementation of strategic directions, and support the effective implementation of strategic plans.

Together, we review and evaluate present and future opportunities, threats and risks in the external environment as well as current and future strengths, weakness and risks relating to the industry.

**How big is the association today?**

There are 39 full members, 28 associate members and two members under Academics and NGOs – the Chinese University of Hong Kong and Hong Kong Cancer Fund.

Multinational companies engaged in the research and/or development of pharmaceuticals remain our core members, including the world's top 20 companies. Our member companies provide over 70 per cent of the prescription medicines in Hong Kong. Annual subscription fee for

**Has this membership changed?**

When I first (joined HKAPI in 2004), there were 53 members. That number slipped over time due to mergers and acquisition (M&A) among member companies. This is a dynamic phenomenon but it doesn't impact our membership revenue since annual subscription fee is based on members' sales turnover.

The pharmaceutical industry faces high risks because of the costly and lengthy R&D process for new drugs, which comes with a high chance of failure. According to a 2016 study by the Pharmaceutical Research and Manufacturers of America, the discovery of a new drug through to getting the US Food and Drug Administration's (FDA) approval takes 10 to 15 years and costs US\$2.6 billion. Less than 12 per cent of these candidate medicines make it into a Phase One clinical trial approved by the FDA.

On the other hand, our associate



member categories have become more diversified, attracting law firms, device companies, communications, researchers, PR firms and even local big companies. We hope they provide better services for our members, and understand us more through HKAPI (and the) platform (we provide) for training and exchange of best practices and experience.

Since HKAPI also focuses on intellectual property such as patents, members like Baker & McKenzie has helped us a lot on law-related discussions.

### How competitive is Hong Kong's pharmaceutical industry?

Last year we did a survey on Hong Kong's clinical trial attractiveness and identified other countries like Singapore and South Korea that have already exceeded us, so we have to catch up. For example South Korea has a dedicated department – the Ministry of Food and Drug Safety – which takes a one-stop-shop approach to attract clinical trials. But this is not happening in Hong Kong yet. We have to apply for approval from ethics committees, negotiate with investigators and apply for procedures – all of which takes a longer time.

We have submitted proposals to the government to have a faster setup of clinical trials in Hong Kong.

### Does HKAPI have a major annual conference that brings international pharmaceutical professionals together?

We seldom do but our members may work with different associations to hold theirs. We may also support related conferences.

For instance, the Pharmaceutical Society of Hong Kong will host the 2020 Federation of Asian Pharmaceutical Associations Congress, drawing 2,200 delegates. HKAPI will definitely support it and details of our involvement are usually announced at a later stage.

Hong Kong has risen higher in status as a medical hub in Asia due to her high compliance with the code of practice. HKAPI has laid down standards for all medical conferences held in Hong Kong. We produce and distribute unbiased promotional leaflets and advertisements to prevent patients from being affected by inaccurate, outdated or missing information (regarding medicine). Also, we specify that medical conferences cannot take place in resorts where gaming opportunities are present.

### HKAPI has a close working relationship with Meetings and Exhibition Hong Kong (MEHK). How does this partnership work?

MEHK has long been a super-connector for and a long-term supporter of HKAPI. We work across many facets and maintain a long-term partnership in elevat-



Chan (far right) spent time with her peers at HKAPI's 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebrations last April

## "HONG KONG HAS RISEN HIGHER IN STATUS AS A MEDICAL HUB IN ASIA DUE TO HER HIGH COMPLIANCE WITH THE CODE OF PRACTICE. HKAPI HAS LAID DOWN STANDARDS FOR ALL MEDICAL CONFERENCES TO BE HELD IN HONG KONG."

ing Hong Kong's profile in the world's pharmaceutical industry.

As MEHK extends its business network through HKAPI to bring even more pharmaceutical events to the city, HKAPI takes on the role of city ambassador.

And when HKAPI hosts its local events, MEHK conducts study missions to international association meetings and functions as a bridge to connect us with international association partners and event organisers for global exposure. MEHK's efforts include securing speaker line-ups and opportunities for us to join industry networking events.

When MEHK organises study missions for association executives, I am often invited to speak about my experiences in running associations in Hong Kong and in Asia-Pacific.

As well, MEHK always helps to advise medical event organisers on compliance with our Code of Practice.

### Is HKAPI affiliated with regional associations?

We are a member of the International Federation of Pharmaceutical Manufacturers and Associations (IFPMA) since 1970 as well as a member of the steering committee of the Asia Partnership Conference of Pharmaceutical Associations (APAC) since its establishment in 2011.

### Do these affiliations help HKAPI in connecting members with global peers or be involved in global activities?

I am myself a member of the working group and mentor of the three-day APEC Business Ethics for SME Forum since 2012. It's tough from the outset as it was a small group of trainers and therefore required high involvement from members. My role varied every year, working with members and mentors and taking on speaking, training and facilitating responsibilities.

This year, the APEC Business Ethics for SME Forum was held in Japan and the theme was Promoting a Code of Ethics – Identifying the Relevant Stakeholders. I was a speaker at the opening and closing Japanese sessions and was also involved with mentor assignment and tables. I would say this was the most sustainable meeting I have (been part of), and I am so happy to see our group growing stronger with more members.

For years, we worked hard on promoting the Code of Practice and were rewarded by more Asian countries joining us. The Philippines issued an Administrative Order for the code in 2014. Recently,



Chan takes on speaker duties

China Pharmaceutical Innovation and Research Development Association joined IFPMA and I flew to the capital and assisted it by reviewing its first draft of the code with other members.

### What's the biggest challenge in the work that you do for HKAPI?

It's how to align different members' demands and thinking (with our goals and activities). We have adopted various methods to obtain members' thoughts, such as having our CEO to meet with the general managers of member companies to seek their views. Prior to that, we conducted member surveys.

We adopt an evidence-based discussion approach and we carry out a lot of surveys and research. As such, coordination and support from members is vital.

When developing systems, I need to balance societal benefits with compliance clauses. I am fortunate to have the support of the Board of Directors. Our members treat me well too.

No matter how different the Board's view is during discussion, we must unanimously align with the outcome.

I am also very proud of our high ethical standards and compliance to the Code of Practice. For years we have worked very hard on this for the industry because if one member were to breach the code, it would be a loss for the whole industry.

### HKAPI marked its 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 2018. What's your vision for the next 50 years?

We hope to help Hong Kong citizens expediently use innovative and effective healthcare solutions, and to continue to foster professional development to fuel industry growth.

Undoubtedly, our ongoing responsibility is to leverage the experience we gain from different places and multinational companies, and share best practices with our members to improve our medical system.

This is our dedication and explains why many position papers have been submitted over the last decade. One cannot imagine why a small office of six people would drive so many qualitative research

and surveys. Some of these surveys are not one-off, rather they are questionnaires sent out regularly to monitor the effectiveness of a particular system.

### Tell me more about HKAPI's efforts on professional development.

HKAPI is a platform equipped with different forms of training for members because of good submission practice and good review practice. High ethical standard is our cornerstone.

We conduct systematic educational programmes such as a 22-week course

for nominated medical representatives from member companies. We also conduct regulatory training programmes such as the one implemented with the University of Hong Kong (HKU). HKU students are welcome to participate for free to gain professional knowledge outside of their syllabus. As well, our ongoing Code of Practice workshop takes place at least once a year, drawing about 120 participants. All these are in addition to our patients' workshops and trainer training sessions.

On the academic front, we support HKU and Macau University each year by staging a seminar to exchange intelligence on healthcare systems or special topics involving the two cities. Our seminar this year focused on public-private partnership in the healthcare industry.

And finally, we have the Patient Empowerment Forum which is organised annually with the Hospital Authority and Hong Kong Alliance for Patient Organizations. It is now in its fifth year, and the 2018 edition covered topics like diabetes, medical device, digital device, medicine and home care. The event promotes exchange among stakeholders, academic members and even governments.

## A champion for ethical standards

Prior to joining the pharmaceutical industry, Sabrina Chan was with the External Affairs Department of i-CABLE Communications, tackling government relations, regulatory issues, corporate affairs, and the promotion of the company's core products and services.

She co-founded the Telecommunications Research Project under the Centre of Asia Studies (University of Hong Kong, HKU), and was a journalist for various print and electronic media outlets.

Chan studied communications in Hong Kong when she began her tertiary education. She holds a graduate degree in International Studies from the University of Sheffield (UK), as well as law degrees from the Chinese University of Hong Kong (CUHK) and University of Tsinghua (China).

She is a member of the High Level Steering Committee on Antimicrobial Resistance and of the Business Facilitation Advisory Committee in Hong Kong.

Other career achievements include:

- A close partnership with universities in the roles of Chair of Advisory Board of the HKU Bachelor of Pharmacy Programme, and as Adjunct Assistant Professor of CUHK School of Pharmacy
- A long-time member of the Working Committee to develop strategies for promulgating Codes of Practice across APEC economies



- A mentor with APEC and IFPMA programmes, where she shared best practices through training workshops and panel discussions at various forums attended by delegates from APEC member economies and biopharmaceutical sector experts



From a dramatic dance with water to comedic singing sommeliers, *TTGassociations* picks out some of the most fascinating entertainment ideas for meetings and events

# INSPIRING ENTERTAINMENT



Digital Water Curtain

## Joseph the Sand Artist

Joseph Erwin Valerio uses his hands to draw on a flat glass covered with the finest sand imported from the UAE. His sandpaintings always weave stories and are themed, and can be customised to deliver the client's message. Music can be incorporated to make the performance even more interesting.

**What's unique:** Joseph, who has no formal training in painting and drawing but catapulted to fame on a TV reality show for talented Filipinos, realised his talent while sifting through dirt and sand when his home was destroyed by a typhoon in 2009.

**Great for:** Opening/closing ceremony, gala dinner, press event to highlight the key message

**Contact:** josephtheartist@yahoo.com; (63) 09364140025; (63) 09179548275

### Want more sandpainting options?

Corporate Entertainment Agency (hello@corporateentertainmentagency.com) in Singapore executes the art form through two artists while global entertainment specialist Scarlett Entertainment (asia@scarlettentertainment.com) boasts an artist who can sand paint with his eyes blindfolded.

## Digital Water Curtain

With a stunning curtain of water cascading from the ceiling, this act can be synchronised with elegant dancers, a solo aerial dancer within the waterfall, or a vocalist or musician in tune with the flowing droplets. The Digital Water Curtain combines digital and water effects, and can be featured as an installation piece, or as part of a bespoke performance.



**What's unique:** The performance is dramatic and injects an element of surprise into the event experience.

**Great for:** Opening/closing ceremony, VIP speakers appreciation dinner

**Contact:** Wildfire Entertainment, Singapore; email@wildfire.sg

## Jeongdong Theatre

Jeongdong Theater, based in Seoul and Gyeongju, offers for hire a top traditional dance team, a *samulnori* (traditional percussion) team and an instrumental team. As well, the theatre opens its space for rental, providing technical prerequisites such as lighting equipment and green rooms for performers.

**What's unique:** Event planners can bring a traditional Korean performance exclusively to their delegates at Jeongdong Theatre. Furthermore, the theatre is the founder of successful production brand Miso, which lends artistic flavour to the usual traditional performances.

**Great for:** Prelude to a keynote presentation, opening/closing ceremony

**Contact:** Jeongdong Theater, South Korea; jjoonwk@jeongdong.or.kr (Seoul); jys@jeongdong.or.kr (Gyeongju)

## LED Monkey King

A spectacular fusion of technology, dance and Chinese culture, the LED Monkey King performance commands audiences' attention with electrifying glow-in-the-dark costumes, precision beats and an amazing choreography.

**What's unique:** As a beautiful amalgamation of western pop-culture's *Tron: Legacy* and eastern classic, LED Monkey King is a glowing sight to behold.

**Great for:** Opening/closing ceremony, gala dinner, as a roving act for delegate interaction

**Contact:** @Dance, Hong Kong; dance@atdance.hk

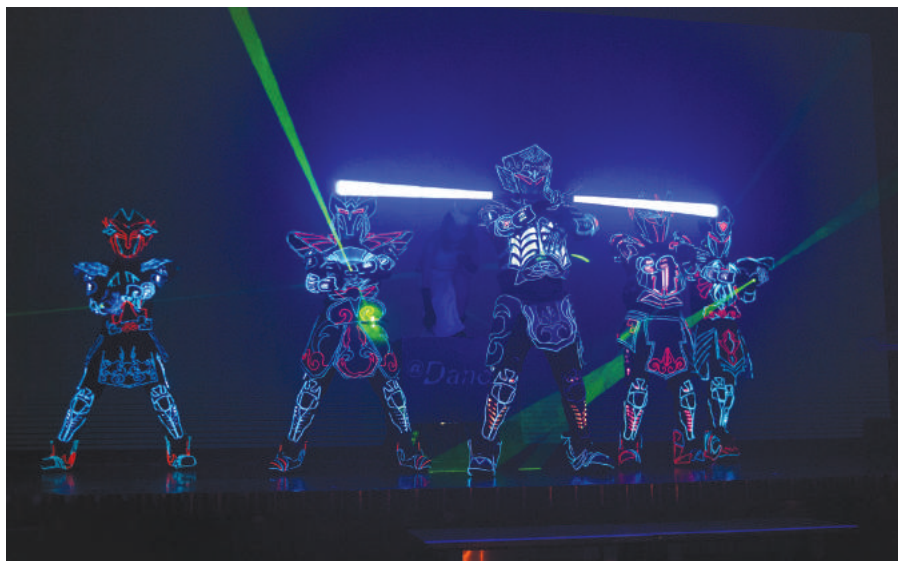
## Hyper Light Drum

This visually stunning performance is delivered by female drummers on LED water drums. Water splashes as the energetic routine gains intensity. The performance can feature up to 15 drummers, and the length of the show can vary according to the planner's requirement.

**What's unique:** All aspects of the performance can be customised, from the music (cultural to futuristic sound tracks) to the costumes, to be aligned to the theme of the event.

**Great for:** Accompanying act for an arriving VIP, conference opening

**Contact:** Hyperactive Entertainment, Malaysia; info@hyperactiveentertainment.com.my



From above: LED Monkey King; Grand Opera Thailand



## Luminatrix

The show brings fire, light, juggling, acrobatic stunts and dance together on stage for a performance delegates won't forget.

**What's unique:** Luminatrix is a fusion of contemporary dance and modern circus. Performances can be customised to include corporate branding, and can be delivered indoors or outdoors by two to 10 performers.

**Great for:** Conference opening, annual dinner, celebratory gatherings, award ceremony

**Contact:** Psysicux, Malaysia; psysicux@gmail.com

## Grand Opera Thailand

Grand Opera Thailand was established in 2011 by British operatic impresario, Stefan Sanchez, who has been grooming Thailand's young opera singers and launching them on international careers. The professional opera company has under its wings several groups and individual singers, allowing event planners to pick the one best suited for their event.

**What's unique:** Grand Opera Thailand's portfolio of performers is versatile. For a memorable experience, surprise delegates with a flashmob performance at an off-property dining venue.



**Great for:** Gala dinner, cocktail reception, networking party

**Contact:** PIGS Co, Thailand;  
david@pigsdmc.com

## Geisha Dance Troupe

Dressed in vibrant kimono and obi belts, the Geisha Dance Troupe incorporates traditional Japanese and modern dance, as well as everything in between. The act transitions seamlessly from traditional moves accompanied by *shamisen* and *taiko* drums to contemporary steps driven by bass, pop and dance hits. The robotic routine of pop animation dance fuses ancient and futuristic Japan, as well as essences of the country's manga culture.

**What's unique:** The act leaves the audience in constant wonder and surprise about the moves that will come next. The audience can experience not only Japan's rich cultural heritage but also its

balance of old and new. Interactions with the audience through humour are also engaging.

**Great for:** Opening ceremony, VIP speakers appreciation dinner

**Contact:** Scarlett Entertainment;  
becky@scarlettentertainment.com

## Musicland

Arriving guests are directed into a dimly lit area where a female dressed in an elegant lycra costume sits above head height, beckoning guests as they approach. With anticipation in the room heightened from the dramatic first encounter, the lights are dimmed further as patrons fill up the main space, which features high cocktail tables.

Spotlights then reveal the lycra-clad lady as an aerial hoop performer striking an acrobatic pose and then dropping head first to serve champagne. Described as "a bar except the service is upside

down," a host will also be on hand to ensure a smooth service.

**What's unique:** Few acts command as much attention and intrigue especially at a welcome event. It's also very social-media worthy, and a unique talking point that adds glam factor to a corporate function.

**Great for:** Welcome event, networking party, post-dinner before an event swings into party mode

**Contact:** Musicland, Australia;  
chad@musicland.net.au

## Hikarie Light Painting

Japanese light painter Jinpei uses his original technique of swooping arcs of light on a wall-sized canvas in complete darkness to create "paintings." From the "brushstroke" of each light, figures, landscapes and even symbolic imagery is layered on the canvas. The result is a living picture; one light fades and another is created, leaving the audience in a waking dream world. The technique is soon to mark 30 years of popularity, having been developed in 1989.

**What's unique:** This form of painting inspires creativity in the audience as well as a sense of serenity and thoughtfulness.

**Great for:** Opening ceremony, awards dinner, VIP speakers appreciation dinner

**Contact:** Scarlett Entertainment;  
becky@scarlettentertainment.com

## The Ultimate Champagne Dinner

The Ultimate Champagne Dinner is a gala dinner that features seven rare vintage champagnes paired with a curated musical programme of opera, jazz, classic vinyl pieces, dances, and Michelin-inspired dishes. The event ideally takes 12 to 16 guests, or up to 32 people, and can be executed in other destinations besides Thailand.

**What's unique:** The idea, dreamt up by Athikom Jeerapairotekun, managing director of Thailand-based Premier Incoming Group Services – PIGS Co, is designed to be an experience for companies looking to impress the crème de la crème of their business partners.

Regarded as the Rolls Royce of dinners, the experience is best delivered in a fabulous venue, and PIGS Co is able to recommend unique and exclusive options such as Nai Lert Heritage Home in central Bangkok, The Slate in Phuket, 137 Pillars, or Dhara Dhevi in Chiang Mai.

**Great for:** Intimate client/partner appreciation dinners

**Contact:** PIGS Co, Thailand;  
david@pigsdmc.com



From above: Hikarie Light Painting; Hyper Light Drum



## The Singing Sommeliers

A comedic operatic performance that keeps revealing surprises, the act begins with two professional wine guides who introduce themselves as sommeliers.

It soon becomes evident that the male guide is clueless about wine and goes on to compare a woman in the audience to a silky smooth Chardonnay, just before bursting into a song about how all women are like wine. The female responds with Carmen's *Habanera*, but with a humorous English translation about men. She then bumps into an ex-lover in the audience and the fun continues, including an appearance by "Pavarotti" to inject further frivolity.

**What's unique:** This flexible act combines high brow opera with tongue-in-cheek comedy, a stint of acrobatics and enough twists and turns that gives it a broad appeal, not just for opera lovers.

The show can be modified to suit both high-tech staged environments to more casual settings. This act cannot be duplicated because it is highly dependent on the chemistry of husband and wife duo Jon and Rebecca Bode.

**Great for:** Welcome dinner, intimate speakers/part-



Clockwise from above: Musicland; Luminatrix; Geisha Dance Troupe



ners appreciation function, ice-breaker, pre-dinner event or just before dessert

**Contact:** Extraordinary Acts, Australia; [info@extraordinary-acts.com.au](mailto:info@extraordinary-acts.com.au)

## Magic Howard

Bringing his unique style of close-up magic to events, Magic Howard leaves the audience baffled and thoroughly entertained. As a resident in Thailand, he has performed on British TV and in Las Vegas; he has amazed royalty and Hollywood stars and is now entertaining corporate groups. He can do an hour-long performance or two slots of 30 minutes each, roaming through pre-dinner cocktails or on stage.

**What's unique:** Howard's light-hearted banter is endearing, and he is one of the most professional and entertaining magicians in town.

**Great for:** Intimate client/partner appreciation dinner, networking party

**Contact:** PIGS Co, Thailand; [david@pigsdmc.com](mailto:david@pigsdmc.com)

## JUMP

Put a smile on delegates' faces with this upbeat and comedic performance. Combining oriental martial arts and acrobatics, JUMP is an original production featuring taekwondo, taekgyeon and other high-energy stunts.

The story begins as a family scrambles to clean up their home and train under their grandfather, an old-school martial arts trainer. He introduces a mysterious young man into his home, and this sets the family into a series of hilarious and clumsy antics.

**What's unique:** With its action-packed sequences, JUMP injects good-spirited comic relief after a long day of meetings and activities. Delegates familiar with modern Korean drama series may appreciate its references to family soap operas, while other attendees can still roll with the punches and punch lines.

**Great for:** Welcome gathering, gala dinner, delegate networking

**Contact:** Vegam Inc, South Korea; [ticketmaster@hijump.co.kr](mailto:ticketmaster@hijump.co.kr)



The Singing Sommeliers





seanweb/shutterstock

# A more affordable Hong Kong

The growing supply of mid-scale hotels and unique venues is helping Hong Kong to finally be more approachable for association events. By **Prudence Lui**

**W**hen consultancy Mercer sought to rank Asia's most expensive city for expatriates, based on the costs of 200 common expenses, including accommodation, transport, clothes, food, entertainment and gas, it found Hong Kong topping the annual list in 2018.

Hong Kong's reputation as an expensive city for business travel and activities is nothing new. But what is refreshing is change creeping into place, as the growing presence of mid-scale hotels, interesting off-site venues and catering suppliers make the destination more affordable.

In recent years, Hong Kong has welcomed a slew of homegrown and international mid-tier hotel brands such as Hotel COZi, Penta, Holiday Inn Express, Dorsett and Hilton Garden Inn. These are scattered around downtown and the New Territories.

Destination China's general manager, Gunther Homerlein, said that while these properties are not in prime locations – such as within walking distance of convention centres – they offer cost-conscious meeting delegates more affordable accommodation options that are still supported by Hong Kong's convenient public transport system.

While a good Destination Management Company (DMC) would help associations secure better rates from suppliers, Ivy Sung, managing director of Faces of Hong Kong, said the growing supply of mid-scale hotels has helped to generate more competitive rates in the marketplace.

"As well, with the decrease in visitorship from China, hotels and meeting venues here in Hong Kong are working harder to (get business from elsewhere), Sung added, painting a pro-buyer scenario.

Mid-scale hotels also provide critical

**If mainstream convention centres are too expensive, consider unique ones such as the Jao Tsung-I Academy which has spaces for rent**

accommodation relief for "secondary meeting delegates", opined Connexus Travel's managing director, Gloria Slethaug, who defined this segment of attendees as students or attendees from "lower income" countries.

Slethaug noted that most associations tended not to include mid-scale hotels in their official accommodation options, out of consideration of event brand positioning. "Fortunately, more association chiefs and meeting planners are now willing to exercise flexibility and be innovative with options to offset pricier operating costs.

"For instance, planners are now using technology to replace printed materials and signage, reducing the duration of meetings and plenary sessions, simplifying menus and have more dine-arounds to improve attendees' networking opportunities – all of which help to cut operating costs," she said.

What mid-scale hotels cannot do though, is to provide meeting venues for cost-conscious associations.

Momentous Asia Travel & Events general manager, Doris Lam, said "only five-star hotels or Hong Kong Conven-



tion and Exhibition Centre (HKCEC) have the space” for plenary sessions her company has to organise for associations.

“But hotel meeting packages are pricey and HKCEC is difficult to book for association meetings that are not recurring,” said Lam.

Meanwhile savings can be sought from dinner and social events being hosted at local restaurants and unique venues.

Jao Tsung-I Academy, Club One at Repulse Bay and the Hong Kong Jockey Club make good options, in addition to lecture halls located on university grounds.

Homerlein also suggested hosting social functions during the quieter days of the week – Sunday to Wednesday – when there are many “empty tables” at restaurants.

Associations could also approach larger restaurant chains, such as Dining Concepts, with a budget and leave them to develop a suitable menu and dining ideas.

Homerlein acknowledged that these options are better suited for smaller-sized association events.

“For bigger gala events, organisers are still hamstrung by the minimum expenditure imposed by the larger venues. Fortunately, there are other venue options now, such as the new Cruise Ship Terminal (which offers event spaces for rent). More venue options means more competitive rates,” he remarked.

## { Need to know }

### 1 Slip into Old Town Central

The new Ultimate MICE Guide to Old Town Central (OTC) by Meetings and Exhibitions Hong Kong helps planners design programmes around the best locations in the OTC cluster. It covers five key components, ranging from multi-purpose venues and teambuilding sites, to trendy dining options. It is available in printed copies as well as online.

### 2 Bridge of wonder

The super-infrastructure of the High Speed Rail Link and the Hong Kong-Zhuhai-Macau Bridge were unveiled in September and October 2018 respectively.

Besides being architectural masterpieces, they also enhance connectivity between Hong Kong and her neighbours. Easier

travel between Hong Kong and mainland China will mean greater Chinese attendance at meetings hosted in Hong Kong.

### 3 Asia-Pacific push

The Hong Kong Tourism Board (HKTb) is stepping up efforts to attract more professional associations from Asia-Pacific to meet in Hong Kong even as it continues to invest in destination promotions in Europe and the US.

Apart from forming strategic partnerships with professional associations and professional conference organisers, HKTb is also strengthening connections with professional associations in China, especially medical and high-tech industry associations, and organise familiarisation tours for their representatives.

Hong Kong-Zhuhai-Macau Bridge



## { Pre/Post }

### Sail into the sunset

The Peninsula Hong Kong has launched a Harbour Sunset Cruise on its new 19-metre cruiser for up to 15 passengers. This two-hour evening cruise features the Symphony of Lights on Victoria Harbour. The package includes canapés and unlimited consumption of house Champagne, wine and other beverages, available from 6:30 to 8:30 pm nightly. A personalised chartered tour will be available for guests to book for private functions and cocktail receptions,



### Snack this way, please

Hong Kong Foodie Tours' new Temple Street Night Foodie Tour takes visitors into the enclave to savour street snacks loved by generations of locals. There are opportunities to sample herbal drinks and learn about the secret of the beloved sweet and sour sauce. Complete the experience with a seafood dinner. The three-hour walk takes place on Monday and Thursday, covering six tasting locations. The tour takes in no more than 12 participants each time, but special arrangements can be made for private groups. The tour takes a summer break in August.

### Learn to bake like a pro

Hong Kong's bakery chain, Kee Wah, offers traditional Chinese bakery classes at its flagship shop in a historic building in Wanchai. Each lesson lasts two to three hours, and is led by experienced instructors. Participants can choose to enrol in Chinese or Hong Kong-style bakery classes as well as seasonal classes. No more 16 people are accepted per class.

### Fancy a delicious candle?

The predictable candle-making class gets a quirky upgrade by local candle artisan BeCandle. Appreciate iconic shrimp dumplings in a new light by replicating them via wax and candle-making. Perfect as an ice-breaker activity, participants can take their dim sum candles – packed in traditional bamboo baskets – home as souvenir. Each class takes no more than 40 pax but larger groups can be accommodated off-site.



**Fukuoka is adding on to its dedicated Conference Zone with a waterfront development that will bring even more venues, hotels and convention space to the city**

organisation, whose meeting was held for the first time in Japan, in 2018.

Further growth in the number and calibre of association events can be expected, according to the trade.

Shigeru Yamamoto, general manager of KNT-CT Global Travel Co., told *TTGassociations* that he is receiving “more enquiries than ever before about Fukuoka” for association meetings. He attributed the boost in interest to the large number of direct flights from Asian cities, proximity from the airport to the city centre, and hotels of varying price points.

Yamamoto’s clients also noted the efforts of the FVCB to support association events, and the compact nature of the city, which enables guests to “enjoy both daytime and night-time activities with ease.”

Macphie agrees that the FCVB’s comprehensive support has been instrumental in the city’s rising popularity among association meeting planners.

“We help arrange things like unique party venues (such as turning a shopping arcade into a large street party) and give language and financial support (subventions) to international conferences,” he said.

Fukuoka has also been successful in securing academic association meetings thanks to Kyushu University, which aims to be “the core of an academic research city built on cooperation among industry, government and academia”.

The facilities in its new west-Fukuoka campus are proving popular with conferences.

Another deciding factor for planners is the city’s variety of professional meeting rooms and exhibition halls. Inside the Fukuoka Conference Zone, the Marine Messe exhibition space boasts 8,000m<sup>2</sup>, the Fukuoka Kokusai Center exhibition space is 5,000m<sup>2</sup> and the multi-purpose International Congress Center’s main hall comprises 1,300m<sup>2</sup> and 20 conference rooms. By 2021, a 5,000m<sup>2</sup> exhibition space and two 400-pax capacity meeting rooms will be added to the conference zone.

A MICE Vibrancy Zone under development in the waterfront area will give the city a further boost. Work includes the construction of new venues, hotels and convention facilities as well as the revitalisation of existing ones. The goal is to make it easier for event guests to walk between all venues that are part of their visit. It is expected that this zone will particularly appeal to planners that prioritise environmental and health considerations.

Sean Pavone/Shutterstock

# Japan’s current meetings magnet

Fukuoka is winning major association gatherings and the reasons why are clear, writes **Kathryn Wortley**

**F**ukuoka is ramping up efforts to attract association groups as it builds on its strong position as a city for business and association events, laying plans to improve facilities, infrastructure, access, activities and services within the next five years.

Since it was designated one of Japan’s five global strategic cities for business events by the Japan Tourism Agency in 2013, Fukuoka has become an increasingly strong contender in securing international pitches. In 2016, it was ranked second in Japan, after Tokyo, for the number of international conferences held, with 383 in total, an increase of 20 year-on-year. In the same year, the city also scooped first place for attracting the largest international convention in Japan, the 99<sup>th</sup> Lions Club International Conven-

tion, which had 38,000 pax.

In 2017 and 2018, Fukuoka continued to attract significant association groups, thus boosting its reputation. Wins include the International Congress and Convention Association’s Association Meetings Programme; the 16<sup>th</sup> Intelligent Transport Systems Asia-Pacific Forum, which had 5,519 pax from 27 countries; and the International Society for Professional Innovation Management Connects Fukuoka 2018 conference.

The latter was especially important according to Kenny Macphie, spokesperson of the Fukuoka Convention Visitors Bureau (FCVB), as it “is a very sought-after conference because it brings interesting and influential speakers.”

Fukuoka also secured the 2019 meeting of EVO Sports, a console gaming

In terms of accommodation, the city has 26,000 hotel rooms. Large hotels allow planners the convenience of securing all their needs in one location.

The Hilton Sea Hawk Fukuoka, for example, has a convention hall for 4,000 people, 1,053 guestrooms and onsite cultural activities for time-strapped groups.

According to Tatsuro Iwase, director of sales for the Hilton Sea Hawk Fukuoka, Fukuoka's convenient, citywide transportation (especially the city subway), access from the international airport and rich selection of local cuisine have proved attractive for its event clients.

While the future of Fukuoka looks bright for association meetings, challenges remain. According to Macphie, the main ones are capacity and international access.

"We have excellent facilities and access from Asia, however, popularity (of the city) means that booking in advance is important," he explained, noting that more hotels are being built to increase the city's accommodations capacity. Within the next few years, city room inventory is expected to rise to 30,000.

Macphie believes the privatisation and redevelopment of Fukuoka's airport, including the creation of a new 2.5km runway designed to accommodate more international flights and ease congestion, might see the creation of more direct flights between Fukuoka and cities in North America and Europe.



"We have excellent facilities and access from Asia, however, popularity (of the city) means that booking in advance is important."

#### Kenny Macphie

Spokesperson,  
Fukuoka Convention and  
Visitors Bureau

## { Need to know }

### 1 Great connection

Fukuoka International Airport has direct flights to 17 cities in Asia and one city in Europe (Helsinki) while ships depart Hakata Port for Shanghai, China and Busan, South Korea.

### 2 One-stop service

Depending on the meeting, the FCVB can introduce to planners sightseeing materials, unique venue options, tour guides and interpreters, advertising initiatives and organisations offering Japanese cultural experiences such as tea ceremony.

### 3 Go for welcome support

Meeting Place Fukuoka can set up a welcome for association groups. Options include welcome banners, *happi* (festival) coat loans and referrals to traditional artists to perform at an opening ceremony. Conditions apply.

## { Pre/Post }



### Go on a tranquil river cruise

A 70-minute river cruise can be taken around the waterways surrounding Yanagawa Castle. The experience is conducted in a traditional boat and rowed by boatmen in costumes who sing old songs while peddling with only a single staff. Some bridges are so low that guests need to lower their heads. By reservation, guests can enjoy steamed eel during the tranquil ride.

### Harvest nature's bounty

Ariake Sea, to the south of Fukuoka's coast, is renowned for large areas of fertile land. It is the site of the largest bay in Kyushu Prefecture, offering beautiful views and plentiful farming and fishing opportunities. Experiences for guests include making Ariake Nori (Japan's leading seaweed brand), as well as picking fresh vegetables and fruit with local producers throughout the year.

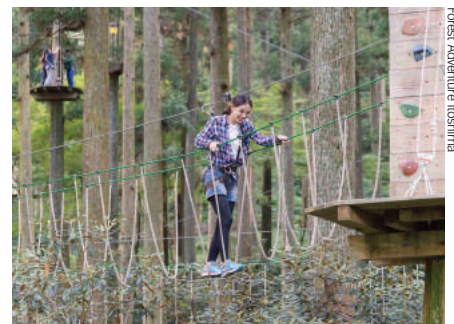
### Get to know a rare textile

Hakataori Kougeikan Sanui Textile takes guests on a tour focusing on *hakata-ori*, a traditional local textile used for *obi* belts that fasten kimono. Guests can view historic documents related to the fabric before joining a tour of the factory and enjoying shopping. Only 450 people now remain in the field of *hakata-ori* production, making the textile rare. The activity can accommodate 50 people.



### Forest adventures start here

Forest Adventure Itoshima offers five sites of adventure courses for adults throughout a leafy forest, with 38 pieces of apparatus for participants to take on. The activities are perfect as ice-breakers, and for bringing delegates closer together in fun ways at the end of a meeting. There is a changing room, and outdoor shoes can be rented.



Forest Adventure Itoshima

### Make some food you cannot eat

In Japan, the window displays of most eateries are filled with lifelike models of dishes served. This activity, hosted by food model specialist Sample Riki Co., allows participants to craft multiple colours of wax to create a food model in a hands-on workshop. Options include ramen noodles, a rice bowl and a dessert. Up to 40 people can be accommodated.

### Partake in a tea ceremony at Kokura Castle Garden

Traditional Japanese tea ceremonies are conducted in a large, historic house adjacent to Kokura Castle. The venue promises views of the castle, pond and surrounding manicured greenery. Visitors can watch the tea be prepared or simply consume it along with a seasonal sweet. There are low tables and chairs provided for those who prefer not to sit in formal style on *tatami* mats.



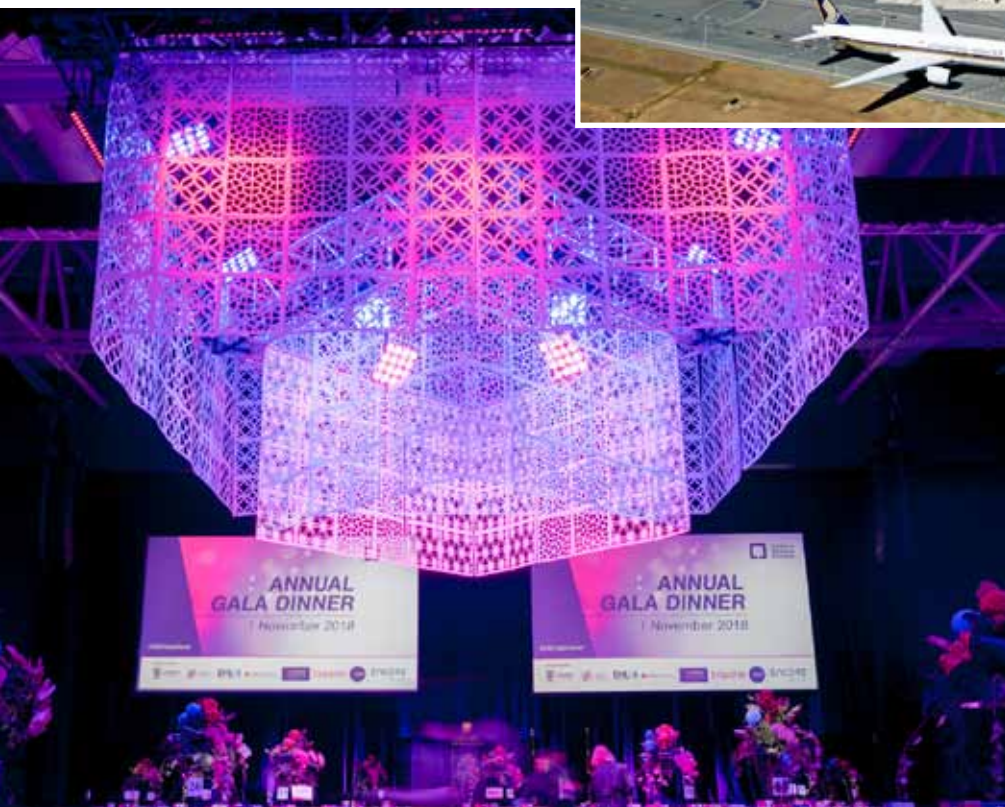
# Canberra comes into its own

Direct international flights give fillip to association conferences as the Australian capital city courts regional and global market. By **Gerardine Donough-Tan**



**Left: National Convention Centre Canberra gets dressy for a gala dinner**

**Above: Canberra Airport welcomes more international airlines, making the Australian capital even more accessible**



security, defence, agribusiness, research and education, space and spatial science, renewable energy, health, social and sports science.

“The Bureau identifies potential bid leaders from associations and academic institutions – knowledge leaders involved with international conferences, particularly those aligned with Canberra’s key sector strengths,” explained Avon Dissanayake, a spokesperson with CCB.

Many of Canberra’s research organisations, academic and cultural institutions partner with CCB through the Research and Learning Institutes Group. Besides assisting in bid proposals, it adds value to business events, giving event organisers direct access to the latest projects being conducted in Canberra’s academic and research institutions.

For instance, in February, the Annual Australasian Aid Conference will bring together researchers from across Australia, the Pacific, Asia and beyond who are working on aid and international development policies.

The 13<sup>th</sup> International Convention on Rehabilitation Engineering and Assistive Technology is targeting more than 500 international delegates – mainly from Asia-Pacific – in August 2019.

Robyn Chapman, CEO of Assistive Technology Australia, said: “Canberra’s proximity to the Asia-Pacific region and the city’s facilities, including the purpose-built National Convention Centre Canberra, make it an ideal location to host this significant event. Canberra also provides access to the Federal Government for the policy issues we will be raising on the assistive technology agenda.”

Museum Galleries Australia is aiming for 600 delegates at its conference in May 2020. The three-day programme

Canberra, a popular choice for domestic association meetings, saw its market potential grow when Singapore Airlines (SIA) launched four-times weekly non-stop flights from Singapore in September 2016. The ‘Capital Express’ to Wellington, New Zealand, was delinked in May 2018 in favour of daily flights to Canberra via Sydney.

With Qatar Airways’ starting a daily non-stop service from Doha in February 2018, Canberra now has twice-daily direct connections to the rest of the world. Other airlines are in talks to begin direct flights too.

Since the commencement of direct flights in 2016 up to end-June 2018, Canberra has seen a 19.5 per cent rise in international visitation.

VisitCanberra commented that SIA’s increase in frequency would provide “an additional 40,768 additional seats annually, bringing significant benefits in trade,

investment opportunities and tourism to the economy” and pledged to continue working with the airline to promote the expanded service in key Asian and European markets, a commitment echoed by SIA in Australia.

“Canberra is an ‘emerging’ destination for the international conference and conventions market, but the attraction and delivery of international conferences (in the purest sense) is still in its early stages,” acknowledged Carla Huetter, director of sales and marketing, National Convention Centre Canberra (NCCC).

So, key stakeholders are bidding for more business, and thereby live up to the city’s name. Canberra is believed to have originated from a local Aboriginal word for ‘meeting place’.

The Canberra Convention Bureau (CCB) actively targets conferences ranging from 50 to 1,500 attendees from Asia-Pacific, Europe and the Americas. Strong economic sectors are cyber



at NCCC will include participation from many of Australia's national institutions, thus drawing national and international attendees from the museum and gallery communities.

"This is a perfect example of a content-rich event which appeals to both domestic and international delegates," said Stephen Wood, NCCC general manager.

NCCC's two levels of event spaces, comprising the Royal Theatre, four theatres, ballroom, 15 meeting rooms and exhibition hall, cater to meetings of 30 to 2,500 delegates.

Some small conferences may prefer hotels and universities instead. Hyatt's two ballrooms take 350 to 600 guests for cocktails, while Crowne Plaza has capacity for 150 guests. The largest hotel ballroom, in QT Canberra, seats 1,000 people theatre-style or 400 in classroom layout.

Also popular are the Australian National University and UNSW Canberra. Non-profit research organisation Honeynet Project chose the latter for its annual conference in November 2017 that drew more than 70 volunteers from 20 countries, besides Australia.

"Canberra was an ideal destination. We have a strong cyber security and IT sector here, and the vibrant start-up culture in

Canberra, supported by the ACT Government, is really developing the high-skill jobs of the future," said Ben Whitham, Australian lead for the Honeynet Project and cyber security entrepreneur.

One of Canberra's advantages – for meeting planners – is its compactness; airport, accommodation, venues and attractions are within easy reach. F&B options abound, with many after-hours hospitality possibilities in New Acton, Braddon and Kingston Foreshore.

Museums, galleries and gardens also double up as event venues.

CCB's Dissanayake cited 12 that host events and gala dinners, some with capacities ranging from 400 people for banquets to 600-1,000 people for cocktail receptions. "These unique venues provide insightful glimpses of what it means to be Australian and of our place in the world," he added.

Imagine dining beside a WWII Lancaster Bomber at the Australian War Memorial, one of Australia's top attractions, or a gala event in the Great Hall at Parliament House, one of few such buildings in the world available for private events.

For jaded conference planners, Canberra may not be on the back-burner much longer.

## { Need to know }

### 1 Avoid peak season

The annual, month-long Floriade is probably Canberra's top tourism event. But air travel and accommodation prices are high then. Holding the conference between June 1 and September 1 allows attendees to enjoy the Truffle Festival. Hunt for fresh, black winter truffles with truffle dogs, or savour special menus with wine pairings.

### 2 Talk to the airlines

Negotiate partnership agreements for bigger conferences: Qantas with Jetstar, and Singapore Airlines-SilkAir. SIA's commercial considerations include alignment with brand objectives, and if the partnership helps to develop tourism and expand its network presence. Depending on ticket T&C, attendees may be able to stopover in Sydney on the Singapore-Canberra routing.

### 3 Hotel accommodation

Choices range from five-star to budget, global brands to Australian chains and independent hotels, and luxurious to quirky. New hotels and serviced apartments have opened in the past three years in the city and precincts. But individual hotel room inventories are fairly small, often between 100 and 200-plus rooms.

## { Pre/Post }

### Get back to nature

Just 10 minutes' drive from the CBD, Australia's only combined zoo and aquarium – National Zoo & Aquarium – also offers all-inclusive luxury accommodation with animal encounters at the Jamala Wildlife Lodge. Choose from six Giraffe Treehouses, five Jungle Bungalows or seven rooms in the Shaka Lodge. Feed a giraffe from the verandah or watch sharks swim past at dinner.

Further natural encounters can be found at Tidbinbilla Nature Reserve, located 40 minutes from the CBD. Drive through, bike or walk the trails at Tidbinbilla to see koalas, kangaroos, platypus and wombats in their natural setting.



### Explore the weekend markets

While the long-running Old Bus Depot Markets in Kingston draw locals and visitors alike every Sunday, Capital Region Farmers Market is a social enterprise at Exhibition Park on Saturday mornings. Besides fresh produce, stock up on seafood, meats, cheese and pastries. Go early – 07.30 for the best choice – or just before closing time at noon for bargains. Do bring your own bags.



### Mountains and beaches – in two hours

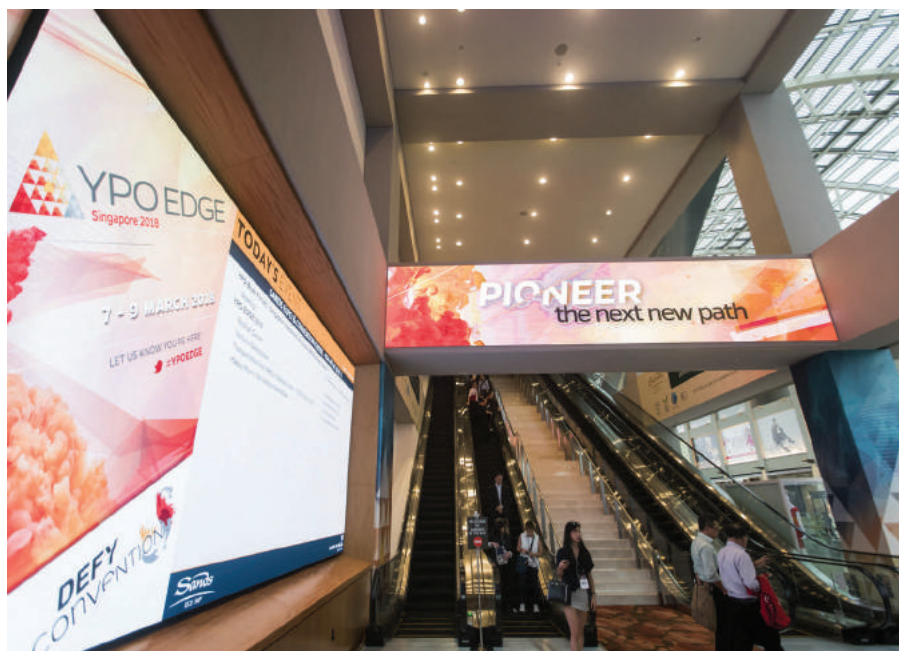
The Snowy Mountains provide year-around activities like sightseeing, walking, hiking, mountain biking and skiing. Thredbo is a pretty alpine village in Kosciuszko National Park, where Australia's highest mountain stands.

Alternatively, head to New South Wales' South Coast to sunbathe, swim, surf or do some kayaking or dolphin and whale watching. Shoalhaven is the shortest drive, the reward being white-sand beaches and seafood, or bush-walking and rock climbing.

### Do more than appreciate wine in the Canberra Wine Region

Some 140 vineyards and 33 wineries are within 35 minutes' drive from Canberra. Pialligo Estate is a working farm built on a quality, paddock-to-plate philosophy. The estate includes an orchard, vineyard, olive grove, smokehouse, market and herb gardens and function facilities in the Glasshouse and four Garden Pavilions. Academy classes teach participants to bake, cook, mix whiskies and make handicraft. Advance booking required.





At least five meals were served daily, including Happy Hour drinks and canapés every evening. The most impressive F&B setup was at the Venture Marketplace, which presented a seafood bar of fresh oysters, crab legs, prawns and more.

Other personal touches included a dedicated check-in counter for YPO attendees, YPO- and MBS-branded welcome amenities and gifts, as well as a YPO-branded pagoda in the Tower 1 lobby that served as a photo-worthy backdrop for delegates.

During their stay, delegates and their partners were invited to a private brand showcase at the Louis Vuitton Island Maison at The Shoppes. Participants were also treated to TWG Tea canapés and ferried around the mall with a dedicated buggy service.

To meet its sustainability requests, MBS' MICE team worked with the event organiser to incorporate several green event initiatives, such as using water dispensers instead of plastic bottles; recycling plastics, glass and paper where possible; as well as diverting leftover food away from landfills using onsite food waste digesters.

YPO also produced more than 2,800 recyclable registration bags, which included reusable water tumblers. At the end of the event, the organisers collected and recycled approximately 700 bags and achieved an overall event waste diversion rate of 75 per cent.

#### Key takeaways

Having previously hosted YPO in 2012, MBS had the advantage of familiarity with YPO's needs, enabling the venue's team to make suitable recommendations and work in partnership with the organisation's planning team.

Mike Lee, vice president of sales at MBS, reflected: "Our partnership with YPO was formed years ago, and to have the group return to our integrated resort for their 2018 event is akin to welcoming an old friend home."

"For that reason, some of MBS' senior management – including myself – were personally involved in the planning process with YPO. We were excited to work together again to push the event's boundaries of creativity and build on the success of its 2012 edition."

# Thinking big, getting cosy

The flexible combination of spacious and intimate spaces made Marina Bay Sands the ideal choice for two of YPO's leading events, writes **Pamela Chow**

#### Event brief

This year, the Young Presidents' Organization (YPO) returned to Singapore's Marina Bay Sands (MBS) – the only Asian city and the only venue to host YPO more than once – with a double bill: the Global Leadership Conference (GLC) and flagship event YPO EDGE.

The occasion brought upsized ambitions. These included 2,800 young leaders in attendance and a line-up of high-profile speakers, such as Singapore's prime minister Lee Hsien Loong, as well as the founder of the Billie Jean King Leadership Initiative, and former tennis champion Billie Jean King.

#### Challenges

To facilitate a series of plenary and concurrent sessions, discussion forums and networking functions, the integrated resort had to provide a combination of large and intimate spaces within a single venue.

"YPO needs a location where there is a hospitality venue that is big enough, but also offers quality and intimacy," said Terry O'Connor, YPO EDGE 2018 host city chair and former regional chair of Southeast Asia.

Feeding the delegates well was another crucial task, as they hailed from more than 90 countries and had diverse dietary requests.

Furthermore, the 2018 GLC and YPO EDGE

conference was YPO's first green meeting, putting the ISO 20121-certified venue and its expert team to the test. On top of these, the YPO delegation also comprised visiting spouses and partners, who were looking forward to a memorable experience at the iconic venue.

#### Solution

The Roselle-Simpson ballroom was transformed into an experiential Venture Marketplace of businesses, products and services. At the same time, networking events, private gatherings and breakout sessions were hosted at smaller, alternative venues with a touch of exclusivity.

These included private dining rooms of celebrity chef restaurants such as Adrift by David Myers, CUT by Wolfgang Puck and Osteria Mozza; the recently revamped 24-hour hotel lounge, Renku; the new LAVO Italian Restaurant & Rooftop Bar; and individual meeting rooms in the convention centre.

To elevate the culinary experience, MBS' banquet team curated special menus with more than 20 varieties of food per meal, with separate counters and buffet lines set up for those with specific dietary requirements, treating delegates to a selection of local and international food.

#### Event

Young Presidents' Organization  
Global Leadership Conference  
and YPO EDGE

#### Organiser

Young Presidents' Organization

#### Venue

Marina Bay Sands Expo  
and Convention Centre

#### Date

March 5-9, 2018

#### Number of participants

2,800

# Smooth in-house operators

HATA members take it upon themselves to organise and execute their 45<sup>th</sup> convention in Dubai, and find that careful planning pays off, writes **Prudence Lui**

## Event brief

The last time the annual convention of the Hong Kong Association of Travel Agents (HATA) ventured to a faraway land was 17 years ago in Capetown and Johannesburg, and the association was keen to organise its 2018 edition somewhere different.

The organisation of the convention would eventually fall on the shoulders of its two office staff and a 10-member convention committee, as HATA decided against hiring an event planner.

## Challenges

The first challenge was to find a suitable destination that provided visa-free access, daily direct flights served by multiple carriers, and that is safe for travellers.

Significant considerations also had to be made about the convention theme. It had to be one that would attract participation and inspire speakers and attendees to brainstorm visions and solutions to benefit the industry.

As well, HATA had to balance registration fees and sponsorship with expenditure.

Without an events contractor, it meant immense workload for HATA's convention committee.

## Solutions

Dubai, which satisfied all conditions, was eventually chosen to host the HATA 45<sup>th</sup> Annual Overseas Convention.

Convention committee chairman, Edmund Tsang, said the destination decision was made 10 months leading up to the event date.

To ensure the convention committee was able to cope with the planning and execution of the convention, the team mapped out a detailed timeline that took into account all critical tasks. Team members were all experienced in convention management, and with the support of skilled crew, they closely monitored the execution process from start to end.

The convention committee chose to go with a theme that emphasised values needed to address future challenges. Hence, How Artificial Intelligence Impacts the Future of Travel was borne. Three keynote speakers were appointed: Antoine Medawar, senior vice president and managing director, Amadeus for Middle East and Africa; Celia Lao, CEO, Air Asia for Hong Kong and Macao; and Lucas Leung, founder, TraVR HK.

Recognising that content is king – and required to ensure strong participation, the convention committee built an attractive programme comprising keynote speeches, plenary sessions, break-out workshops and enrichment time for sightseeing, entertainment, spouse and social activities.



## Event

The Hong Kong Association of Travel Agents (HATA) 45<sup>th</sup> Annual Overseas Convention

## Organiser

Hong Kong Association of Travel Agents

## Venue

JW Marriott Marquis Hotel Dubai

## Date

October 12 to 14, 2018

## Number of participants

116

In terms of enrichment, delegates got to see city sights and go on hotel inspections in Dubai. As well, options of two- and three-day post-conference tours to Abu Dhabi were offered.

HATA received an overwhelming response

for the convention. The Abu Dhabi post-conference tour, in particular, got snapped up swiftly.

Altogether, the HATA 45<sup>th</sup> Annual Overseas Convention was attended by 116 delegates – in excess of the targeted 110.

To tackle sponsorship requirements, the convention committee established an amicable working relations with the sponsors to deliver brand alliances and value adds.

## Key takeaways

HATA realised that the success of the 45<sup>th</sup> Annual Overseas Convention in Dubai has set new standards for future editions and elevated the association's standing in the hearts of members.

Encouraged by the performance of the 2018 edition, HATA has started planning for its 2019 convention – and longhaul destinations are being considered again.

HATA's spokesperson also added that a key lesson from the organisation of the 45<sup>th</sup> Annual Overseas Convention is the need for flexibility. For example, with the eager response seen for the Abu Dhabi post-show tour, HATA moved to add on another one-day tour to the destination for wait-listed delegates.



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