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New and
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South Korea and
Singapore



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A test of relevance

The Covid-19 crisis has upended life as we know it, removing many conveniences we have come to take for granted, from things as simple as leaving home for a stroll in the park to more critical needs like accessing drugs that used to be readily available, such as aspirin and ibuprofen.

For many, their job stability is being threatened. The travel and tourism industry has been particularly hard hit. People have been avoiding travel for fear of transmission, and governments have been discouraging foreign arrivals through tough border controls.

Several airlines, hotels and tourism companies have gone into hibernation, forcing staff to go on furlough or be retrenched.

On April 24, the World Travel & Tourism Council (WTTC) estimated that over 100 million jobs were at risk in the sector worldwide, revising its figures upwards by 30 per cent in just four weeks.

It is often said that leadership is tested in crises. For professional associations, these brutal times are a real test of their relevance to the industry they represent.

Across Asia – the hardest-hit region, where WTTC estimated that 63.4 million travel and tourism jobs are at risk – national associations representing the industry have been working hard to secure government support for affected workers and businesses.

In Singapore, these associations have been instrumental in the creation of a hefty government fund to aid the industry, through

their dialogues with the Singapore Tourism Board.

The Thai Hotels Association successfully lobbied for the government to issue hotel closure orders, without which hospitality staff would not have been able to access the country's social security fund as well as other forms of relief.

The same was seen in the Philippines, where various associations presented financial assistance proposals to the Department of Tourism.

While business financing and wage support are the most apparent forms of assistance needed, I hope associations have not neglected to provide a guiding light to their members for an often unseen and unspoken problem – mental health.

Isolation due to new remote working arrangements, fear of redundancy, anxiety from reduced income, loss of long-time colleagues to retrenchment, and the tsunami of negative news daily is enough to eat away at anyone's sanity.

Unfortunately, not all business leaders are ready to help their staff cope with mental stress. In fact, business leaders, who are responsible for the livelihood of many people, may be in need of mental care themselves.

Associations can help by highlighting the critical need for mental care within member organisations and providing guidelines on how to get started.



Karen Yue
Group Editor

PROFILE

13

Tan Maw Pin

She wanted an Asian meeting on falls prevention but her passion led to her becoming chairperson to the inaugural World Congress On Falls and Postural Stability. By [S Puvaneswary](#)



GUIDE TO

16

New and accessible stays

For time-strapped meeting delegates, hotels located within walking distance of the event venue are a dream come true. Here are some of the newest accessible hotels to have opened in the region



DESTINATIONS



20

South Korea // Seoul plays the right cards

[Adelaine Ng](#) finds the city is among the world's top Muslim-friendly destinations, but greater awareness of its halal facilities and warm welcome is needed



22

Singapore // Gear up in downtime

While tightening measures amid Covid-19 mean downtime for venue providers and operators, it offers the chance to gear up on offerings. By [Pamela Chow](#)

DEPARTMENTS

1 To our readers

3 News

7 Talking point

2 Contents

5 On the shelves

24 Case study

Lay-offs ordered in tourism and meetings industry associations

By Caroline Boey

Some global and regional industry associations have become victims of the Covid-19 pandemic, with lay-offs and suspension of operations being ordered.

The Association of Corporate Travel Executives (ACTE) has suspended operations through May 2020.

An email to ACTE executive director, Leigh Bochicchio, to verify if the association is laying off its global staff, received the following automatic reply: "As a result of the global impact of the Covid-19 pandemic, ACTE has suspended operations through May 2020."

Meanwhile, a source said two positions at regional association, Meetings & Events Australia have been impacted, that of the national events manager and the partnerships manager.

At press time *TTGassociations* could not verify if the Global Business Travel Association (GBTA) had to let go of about one-third of its staff.

Commenting on the unfolding situation, Oscar Cerezales, global executive vice president, MCI, said: "A lot of associations and all industries will go through it eventually, especially those that without the right cash positions, good reserves, etc."



Among professional associations *TTGassociations* contacted, Noor Ahmad Hamid, regional director Asia Pacific, International Congress and Convention Association, said staff all over the world are continuing to work from home.

"We have systems in place and we are able to serve our members, provide training and also organise (global and regional) webinars," said Noor.

On May 12 and 13, ICCA will host a webinar that guides participants on how

to do business in the new environment.

It is also business as usual for the Corporate Travel Community, according to Benson Tang, executive director.

Tang commented: "We are under Informa Group and we have the financial strength to pass through this turmoil.

"We will continue to contribute and unite the global corporate travel industry together. On June 17, 2020, our Shanghai Education Gathering in Waldorf Astoria will go ahead as planned."

Singapore Furniture association sets up financial help for members

Singapore Furniture Industries Council (SFIC) has rolled out a S\$1.2 million (US\$842,000) Member Assistance Scheme to provide financial relief for some 300 of its members.

Available from April 1, 2020, to September 30, 2021, the scheme is set to impact full and associate members who joined SFIC as at January 31 this year.

Depending on the length of their membership with SFIC, eligible members are set to receive between S\$1,000 and S\$6,000.

Mark Yong, president, SFIC, commented that the fund was set up not only to provide a "timely financial catalyst" for members to tide through the economic effects of the Covid-19 pandemic, but also to prepare members "for the upturn when it comes".

The amount will go towards helping members to defray business costs, improve business capabilities, save jobs, provide training for staff, as well

as find business opportunities in new markets, said Yong.

As one of SFIC's main aims is to assist companies in retraining and retaining employees, Yong said his team is working with government agencies to develop a Resilience Training Programme for companies to make full use of the slowdown to equip staff with new or improved skills.

Additionally, members can tap on the Member Assistance Scheme to pursue digitalisation.

SFIC is also waiving one year of membership subscription fees for new and existing full and associate members from July 2020.

SFIC's efforts are supported by Enterprise Singapore (ESG)'s SG Together Enhancing Enterprise Resilience (STEER) programme. ESG will match S\$1 to every S\$4 raised by SFIC under STEER. This means the government agency has committed to contribute S\$225,000 to the S\$1.2 million fund. This marks the first

fund supported under the programme.

STEER intends to support similar funds set up by the Trade Associations and Chambers (TACs) or industry groupings.

By doing so, the ESG aims to help businesses with the challenges faced amid the pandemic and to continue transformation efforts in anticipation of economic recovery, said Tan Wu Meng, senior parliamentary secretary at the Ministry of Trade and Industry's Committee of Supply speech in March.

Ted Tan, deputy CEO, ESG, has urged other trade associations and chambers to initiate similar relief efforts for their members.

Yong: drawing support from government agencies

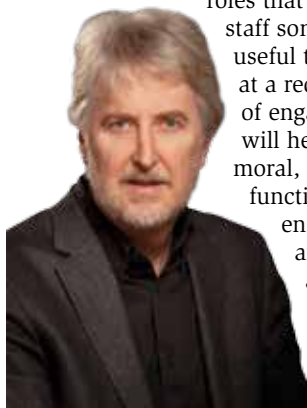


Protect your people, strategise together: JMIC chief

As the Covid-19 pandemic takes its toll on industry associations, Joint Meetings Industry Council's (JMIC) executive director, Rod Cameron has urged fellow association leaders to make use of reserves to keep as many jobs as possible, as well as focus on knowledge sharing to tide through the crisis.

He has advised association leaders to "be fully aware of the wide range of applicable government support measures and how they can facilitate access for affected staff" while paying attention to the psychological impact of the crisis on their staff.

Identifying and promoting ongoing roles that will give staff something useful to do, even at a reduced level of engagement, will help lift their moral, enhance functionality and ensure they are better able to re-engage when conditions improve, he said.



Cameron: people at the centre

Without specific information on the extent of damage trade associations are taking in this climate, Cameron suggested that most would now be focused on "re-evaluating resources in anticipation of needing to maintain priority activities in the face of potentially reduced revenues in the coming year".

Hit by zero event revenue and possible membership fee delinquency, Cameron said trade associations needed to continue serving members by facilitating the exchange of strategies and policies being developed either by governments or the members themselves in order to cope.

He suggested that this could be done by using "the power of the collective to gather and distribute hard information".

He explained: "The greatest value of a collective is the power of sharing. That is where we should be focusing efforts now, and it has the added benefit of being pretty cost-effective."

On JMIC's part, it will continue to provide a forum for information exchange, strategy development, and to document and communicate the diverse values of the industry in supporting global economic, academic, professional and social development, just as it has done in the past 50 years.

{ Bureau brief }

Business Events Christchurch formed

Christchurch has unveiled a collaborative business events partnership comprising Tourism New Zealand, ChristchurchNZ and Te Pae Christchurch Convention Centre, with the common goal to bring more international meetings to the destination.

The first phase of Business Events Christchurch's operations had started in March, with a brand awareness campaign aimed at audiences in Australia, in what was also the city's first-ever business events marketing effort. The second phase of the marketing outreach, slated for later months, will focus on Asia, beginning with Singapore.

Seoul readies for post-pandemic recovery

Seoul Convention Bureau (SCB) has rolled out a new PLUS SEOUL programme to further help the business events industry in Seoul recover once the Covid-19 situation blows over.

Part of the improvement includes lowering the minimum number of international participants required to access the programme, from 500 pax to just 200 pax. Conferences that have been postponed within the year will enjoy 10 per cent more in pre-approved financial support.

Customised programmes will continue to be a core part of the PLUS SEOUL programme, but there will also be fresh options. The programme also extends its welcome to companions of business events participants with one-day tours and meal cards.

Indonesia offers virtual events training

Indonesia's Ministry of Tourism and Creative Economy has rolled out a virtual events course, designed to aid trade members in upgrading their professional knowledge. Built in partnership with the Australian Marketing Institute, there will be two courses that span three weeks starting from May 1.

Brisbane delivers first-ever virtual expo

Met with unusual circumstances due to the pandemic, organisers of QODE Brisbane, a technology conference, has taken its event into the virtual world instead of cancelling the festival.

It partnered with YouTube to stream its conference live, as well as allow its attendees to visit exhibitor booths with the help of virtual reality.

Speakers from the US and Israel were among those who took part virtually, while some local speakers included Nine CEO Hugh Marks and Queensland chief scientist professor Paul Bertsch.

The event was streamed free of charge. Tickets for the live event were refunded.

The event also teamed up with a Brisbane Virtual Reality company, Visitor Vision, to offer a new way for people to view the conference exhibits.

"One of the key reasons people attend conferences is to visit the exhibitor booths to gain further insight into the products and information available, and for those exhibiting, it's a really important way to access that market," chief QODE officer Jackie Taranto said.

She added that visitors could even "jump on a call to chat with the exhibitor as they would face-to-face", aside from being able to virtually walk through exhibitor booths.

As a result of the programme being online, an exhibitor can also access information about who has visited the booth, the company they are from and their interest level, which is often more information than they might be able to gain about a potential customer in a traditional setting.

Brisbane lord mayor Adrian Schrinner said it was fitting that a technology-based



QODE conference went online

solution would help QODE Brisbane proceed.

"These extraordinary circumstances call for innovative solutions and what better way to ensure this important global event goes ahead than by embracing the latest technology," Schrinner said.



A Deluxe Room at the new Carlton Hotel Bangkok Sukhumvit

Carlton debuts in Sukhumvit, Bangkok

Singapore's Carlton Hotel Group has extended its brand presence to Thailand, with the opening of Carlton Hotel Bangkok Sukhumvit.

Located between the Asok and Phrom Phong BTS Skytrain stations, the 338-room luxury hotel offers 1,200m² of configurable event spaces across 10 function rooms.

The largest is its Grand Carlton Ballroom, which has a capacity of 560 guests in theatre seating. Each function room is equipped with a high-resolution 220-inch LED screen.

Guestrooms and suites range in size from 37m² to 129m². They come with electric curtains and blinds, and in-room IPTV.

Wah Lok – regarded as one of Singapore's finest Cantonese restaurants for three decades and recognised as being part of the Carlton flagship in the city-state – also has a presence in the Bangkok hotel.

Other dining establishments include all-day dining restaurant Plate, the Tuxedo cafe, and rooftop bar Cooling Tower.



Qatar opens business class lounge in Singapore

Qatar Airways has opened a new premium lounge serving business class passengers at Singapore Changi Airport Terminal 1, which operates daily from 07.30 to 02.00.

The lounge boasts contemporary Arabic design elements, ultra-luxurious interiors and customised furniture pieces.

The 700m² lounge can host 85 passengers at any given time. Guests can relax in the lounge's seven different seating areas – including sound-proof, semi-private spaces known as quiet pods – and have a tipple at the centrepiece martini bar, where a dedicated mixologist is at hand.

The lounge is also equipped with a full kitchen ready to prepare food orders on demand. Also available is a buffet spread serving international dishes.

With the addition of the new Singapore lounge, the airline now operates five premium lounges across the globe. The others are located in London, Paris, Beirut and Bangkok.

University in Okinawa opens up spaces for science, tech events

The Okinawa Institute of Science and Technology Graduate University (OIST) is preparing to welcome more science- and tech-related conferences and conventions this year, with the opening of its fourth lab on April 1, and a fifth underway.

The efforts form part of Phase II of OIST's development. The first phase, rolled out after the university's accreditation in 2011, assisted OIST in attracting faculty members, students and business events delegates.

Located in the Tancha area – approximately an hour's drive from Naha International Airport – the university is upping its game to attract business events as part of its efforts to bring global talent and innovative solutions to its modern, leafy campus.

OIST's Conference Centre has a 493-seat, 605m² auditorium that comes with a 4K pro-

jector and large screen, power outlets at each seat, and simultaneous interpretation equipment for two languages. The auditorium offers views of a lake, and nearby green spaces can be used to showcase traditional Okinawan dance or music.

There are also four meeting rooms ranging in capacity from 30 to 130 pax with theatre-style seating, which can be used to support satellite conferences. The Centre also boasts a spacious lobby for poster sessions, meals or a coffee break, as well as digital signage.

On the adjacent main campus, the 150-seat Sydney Brenner Lecture Theatre and a 60-seat seminar room can be tapped on as alternative breakout spaces.

In November 2019, OIST hosted the 20th International Conference on Systems Biology, attended by 430 pax from 20 countries.

Outrigger's Phuket resort presents new venue

The Outrigger Laguna Phuket Beach Resort – a Thailand Convention and Exhibition Bureau (TCEB)-certified business events venue in Laguna Phuket – has opened a new standalone meeting and events centre.

Spanning two storeys, the complex has six function rooms amounting to 672m² of space. Three of the function rooms on the ground level can be combined to form the 448m² Similan Ballroom. Pillarless, with six-metre-high ceilings and movable partition walls, the ballroom can seat 350 guests theatre-style, or 320 in a banquet setting.

The remaining three rooms are located on the second floor. Among them, the largest is the 112m² Tongfah, which can seat up to 90 people theatre-style. The entire complex is equipped with the latest audiovisual technology and complimentary high-speed Wi-Fi.

Event planners can also make use of the spacious pre-function area and a dedicated VIP lounge. The private entrance to the left of the resort lobby will be appreciated by event planners needing privacy for VIP guests.

Meanwhile, four other meeting venues

are housed within the resort's main building. They comprise the 716m² Andaman Ballroom and three smaller function rooms.

Green functions will be central to the resort's business events offering. The property has removed all single-use plastics.

Depending on the meeting's objectives, delegates may be able to participate in corporate social responsibility initiatives.



Similan Ballroom, part of the Outrigger Laguna Phuket Beach Resort's standalone event complex



No Change To Dates: 3 to 5 August 2020

Despite the challenges of coming together physically this year, we're committed to keeping vital industry conversations, interactions and engagements alive. Keep these dates saved in your calendar and let's meet virtually from wherever you are in the world!



Stay Tuned For New 2020 Virtual Programme and Highlights By June

The event is staying true to its value proposition of delivering business, learning and networking opportunities between international and Chinese suppliers, buyers and industry professionals at large. Meetings, peer-sharing, and collaboration are more vital than ever before in leading this industry on its road to recovery. Details on how you can be a part of doing this virtually will be released by June. Keep these dates saved in your calendar and let's meet virtually from wherever you are in the world!



Physical event in Shanghai, China deferred to 23 to 25 March 2021

Be sure to save the dates. We're looking forward to welcoming you back to our physical IT&CM China and CTW China event experience in 2021. Nothing can beat the professional camaraderie and much anticipated interaction of coming together in-person after this year-long social hiatus.

REGISTER TO BE THE FIRST TO RECEIVE UPDATES

Our team will also be in touch with confirmed and interested participants to support their transition to this year's virtual show format and the 2021 physical event.

We'll also like to hear your thoughts on what you would value in a virtual event and how we can further support your recovery efforts.



SCAN HERE TO REGISTER NOW!

www.itcmchina.com

Sindhorn Midtown Hotel Bangkok opens

Sindhorn Midtown – the flagship property of Thai-inspired hospitality brand Siam Sindhorn – has opened in Bangkok's Langsuan neighbourhood. Spread across its two towers are 344 hotel rooms and suites, along with 49 serviced residence units.

F&B offerings include Tr.EAT, where local cuisine is served with a dash of Asian flavours and flair; and Rhumba, a gathering spot offering a comprehensive selection of rum that can be mixed into classic and creative cocktails.

On the 18th level, the Horizon Pool offers skyline views, cocktails and small bites, while the Fitness Center on the 19th level allows



One of the hotel's 49 serviced residence units

guests to stay fit 24/7. For meeting groups, the hotel offers four function rooms that can seat 9 to 23 pax in a boardroom seating.

The hotel's convenient location means Chit Lom and Ratchadamri BTS Sky Train stations, the Erawan Shrine and the Pratunam Market are within walking distance. Guests can walk on to major shopping centres Central World and Siam Paragon.



Passengers can explore Manila sans traffic gridlock

Rediscover Manila on Pasig River Cruise

A Pasig River Cruise that showcases new and old Manila will be launched this month, featuring another view of the city for both business and leisure travellers sans the traffic gridlock.

The cruise starts from the Guadalupe ferry station in bustling Makati, from which it is a 45-minute ride to the end-point, Escolta, in old Manila. The air-conditioned ferry for up to 150 pax features Wi-Fi and piped-in music.

Passengers can expect to see Makati CBD's high-rises; Mandaluyong's colourful neighbourhoods; as well as Santa Ana's heritage houses. One of the key highlights on the way is Malacañang – the presidential palace, situated in old Manila district San Miguel.

Also a highlight along the way is the Manila Post Office, rebuilt after the Second World War. It was once touted to become an accommodation in the likes of Fullerton Hotel.

Native snacks await at the Escolta ferry station, after which travellers are taken to the newly-restored Jones Bridge for a tranvia (trolley) tour of Binondo Chinatown – the world's oldest – passing through various tourist spots until it reaches the final stop at the Spanish-era seat of government, Intramuros.

The tour is then capped by a special dinner at the Ayuntamiento de Manila, another neoclassical building which once housed the Manila City Hall.

This marks the first Pasig River cruise for tourists after the river's successful cleanup.

A twilight tour is recommended for a magical experience of the old quarters. Alternatively, the tour can begin in Intramuros and end in Poblacion in Makati, for a pub crawl and dinner experience.

Accor adds dual-branded hotel in Melbourne

Accor has brought Novotel Melbourne Central and ibis Melbourne Central under one roof in the Melbourne CBD.

The tower on Little Lonsdale Street houses 483 keys, and puts guests just a short tram ride from the Melbourne Convention and Exhibition Centre.

Occupying levels 20 to 35, Novotel Melbourne Central's 213 rooms and suites range from 20m² to 28m² in size. Guests enjoy access to its InBalance gym, and 24-hour guest services and concierge desk.

Located on levels four to 18, ibis Melbourne Central features 270 premium economy guest rooms averaging 18m².

Guestrooms at both properties come with complimentary Wi-Fi.



Floyd's Aperitivo Bar serves house-cured charcuterie

Three flexible event venues are housed within Novotel Melbourne Central, with Meyers Place being the largest, good for up to 48 delegates.

Guests at both hotels can sample classic Italian cocktails served with house-cured charcuterie at Floyd's Aperitivo Bar, before heading for dinner at Pretty Boy Italian Steakhouse.



Associations are seriously considering taking their impacted meetings online

A different approach

Associations are being challenged to consider meeting virtually and diversify their revenue streams as the Covid-19 pandemic continues to upset functions, writes **Karen Yue**

While Covid-19 has resulted in negative impacts on daily life and businesses, Asian association executives and congress specialists are regarding the pandemic as an opportunity for them to take another look at how their events are conducted and their dependency on event revenues.

Shirlena Soh, president, Association of Biomedical Laboratory Professionals (Singapore) (ABMLPS), which had to cancel two major meetings in 1H2020 due to the Covid-19 pandemic, told *TTGassociations* that the situation was proof they had made the right decision to consider moving some meetings online.

“(Due to) the nature of our members’ profession, getting an AGM going (can

be) challenging. A decision to postpone an AGM also requires an approval obtained at a meeting. Fortunately, our (association) allows electronic communication,” said Soh.

One of the affected ABMLPS meetings in Singapore was scheduled for March. The gathering, organised in collaboration with a US entity, was expecting some 100 attendees.

Soh explained that the decision to axe the two ABMLPS meetings was made only because its members are among the first line of respondents in the Covid-19 pandemic. They are involved in the intense lab investigations.

“All meetings and activities (in the medical sector) are ... impossible now due to a strict hospital segregation plan that restricts medical professionals

from coming in contact with one another,” she said.

Another event involving medical professionals, namely the 19th International Congress on Infectious Diseases (ICID), was postponed for the same practical reasons.

It was scheduled initially for this February in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, but will now be held in September 2020 at the same venue.

Explaining the decision, Marc Mendelson, president, International Society for Infectious Diseases (ISID), said: “The prevention of further spread and the effective containment of Covid-19 is our top priority. The people who attend the ICID are critical to the national, regional, and international response to the epidemic and are needed at home in order to engage with

and protect their own communities.”

ABMLPS and ISID are not the only associations whose activities were impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic.

According to the research division of the International Congress and Convention Association (ICCA), as at February 27, 2020, 65 meetings scheduled for Asia-Pacific in 2020 – out of a total of 1,058 association meetings in the region – have had a change of plans because of the pandemic. Two have been relocated, 11 cancelled and 52 postponed. More meetings have been cancelled or postponed since then.

Control, alternate, quick shift?

The disruption to association meetings posed by the pandemic begs the question: Why aren’t more meetings held virtually? If Soh was for online meetings, why didn’t the ABMLPS hold its March meetings on the net?

“(Moving) an event online, especially one that has the scale of a main congress, would require the establishment of supporting infrastructure and specialists. These can be a costly undertaking for just one activity. Furthermore, time ... for preparations (is needed),” Soh said.

Octavio Peralta, founder & CEO, Philippine Council of Associations and Association Executives (PCAEE) and president, Asia-Pacific Federation of Association Organizations (APFAO), said associations hoping to use online events as an alternative during this period must be resource-ready.

Internet connectivity, hardware and human capability must all be available. “Unfortunately, readiness has been wanting,” said Peralta.

Soh opined that a “bite-size approach” – such as converting a small seminar into a webinar – would be more realistic for associations that are new to online event formats, “as such events would be easier and faster to execute”.

“The Covid-19 (pandemic) is actually a good opportunity for associations that (did) not have online events ... to start

looking into this. Once they start, they can consider adopting online events again even in good times,” she reckoned.

Jane Vong Holmes, senior manager-Asia, business events consultancy Gain-Edge, agrees. “It can be quite challenging to move an entire congress online. Some congresses are more complex than others,” she said.

Should associations consider virtual meetings, Holmes suggested they consider hybrid arrangements – face-to-face content with some live streaming for those unable to attend in person.

Smaller events, such as board meetings, can also be held remotely as they involve a small number of executives.

Richard Roocroft, general manager, Interprefy Asia Pa-

ence may help associations fulfil the need to meet during challenging times, Holmes emphasised that it cannot be a complete replacement for live meetings.

“The best part of a convention is the face-to-face opportunities it provides. Participants can make new contacts and/or strengthen their existing relationships,” she noted.

Webinars, while able to facilitate knowledge exchange and allow for the delivery of education, will cause participants to miss out on this “highly-rated benefit”, said Holmes.

“The live experience cannot be duplicated online,” Holmes emphasised.

It is precisely the value of live interaction that led

curtailed, the board of ISPIM decided to proceed with the ISPIM Connect Bangkok conference as planned, from March 1 to 4 this year.

The board factored in WHO’s announcements at the time of the decision-making, as well as the fact that Thailand’s borders were still open.

Of course, since the interview in February, the pandemic has spiralled deeper and many governments around the world have either ordered a lockdown or placed restrictions on events.

In response, ISPIM will replace its three-day Innovation Conference 2020 with a virtual one on the same dates – June 7-10 – and return with the full-scale physical gathering in Berlin in June 2021.

Impact on revenue

ISPIM derives 80 per cent of its income from the annual Innovation Conference in Berlin, shared Bitran, and the conversion of the event into a virtual meeting will affect event takings. However, he remains confident in ISPIM’s survival as there are other activities in its portfolio to finance its overall operations.

Soh said most associations these days are aware of the need to diversify their revenue streams, and few would rely entirely on conference revenues or a single event to power their entire operations. As such, it was unlikely that the Covid-19 pandemic alone

will threaten their survival.

Associations fall into two main categories, according to Soh. The first type operates on a pro bono basis, has low overheads, and engages contract PCOs to manage meetings. Associations in this category adapt well to changes and can sustain operations even without meetings for a year.

The other type are the professional associations that often have a large number of in-house employees. Such associations, typically found in Europe and the US, have “a sophisticated revenue stream” and are likely to have safeguards in place for crises, noted Soh.

ABLPS falls into the first category, said Soh, adding that her association “will be fine” even with two cancelled events in 1H2020.

However, for associations that have yet to move with the times, the pandemic’s impact on events will be a painful reminder for them to diversify revenue streams.

Regional network shines

If there was one key takeaway from Covid-19’s impact on meetings, Bitran and Peralta felt it would be the importance of having a network of local or regional speakers and partners that associations can lean on when hiccups occur.

Peralta said: “Associations must allocate resources to start developing local talents and speakers to be self-reliant and not dependent on sourcing imported expertise.”

Fear of Covid-19 infections led to a few keynote speakers withdrawing from ISPIM Connect Bangkok, but the association was able to swiftly call in favours from supportive partners in Asia.

“It is always good sense to have a strong local or regional network. If you have European speakers pulling out of your Asian conference at the last minute ... the nearest replacements are easier to secure, provided there’s something in it for them,” he concluded.



* This data includes all confirmed meetings in Asia Pacific (Asia + Oceania) scheduled in 2020 as recorded in the ICCA Association Database on 26 February 2020

ICCA: Most affected association meetings have been postponed, not cancelled

cific & Japan, remarked that “the first step towards any new technology adoption is always the hardest”.

Roocroft explained that organisations that get started on their first webinar or online event will find subsequent ones “easier to implement”.

Interprefy specialises in remote simultaneous interpreting for live and online meetings, using a cloud platform.

The company was roped in for the USANA Australia Kick Off 2020 event, which was moved online due to mounting concerns over Covid-19 developments. More than half of the delegation were supposed to come from China.

Interprefy has seen an increase in engagement of live streaming and remote simultaneous interpreting services since the pandemic began.

Not a total replacement

While an online confer-

Iain Bitran, executive director, International Society for Professional Innovation Management (ISPIM), to initially determine that online meetings are simply “out of the question”.

“Associations need to get their people to meet – that has to be one of their goals, if not the major goal. Connecting people is the greatest value associations offer their members,” Bitran said.

“Human beings are social creatures... Many ideas happen because people meet, say something to each other and spark something off. You won’t get that through a virtual conference,” he added.

Despite losing a large number of concerned delegates who fear infection and whose travel has been



Bitran: connecting people is the greatest value associations offer their members

Love in the face of adversity

The Covid-19 pandemic has crippled meetings across China, but industry stakeholders have chosen to tackle the crisis with kindness, finds **Karen Yue and Angela Teo**

As public and private gatherings are suspended in China under strict government orders, along with a freeze on domestic and international transport, in a desperate fight to curb the spread of the highly infectious Covid-19 virus, China's meetings industry players found themselves stripped of business and sources of revenue for the immediate future.

Amid their struggle for business survival, many of China's meetings specialists have opted to respond with compassion and generosity by volunteering their time and

resources to help their city, province and country in the battle against the pandemic.

ICCA China members are among those who have demonstrated love and resilience in the face of adversity, and here are some of their stories.

31Events

Recognising that the spread of misinformation surrounding Covid-19 was just as damaging to businesses as the virus itself, Shanghai-based 31Events event technology specialist committed itself to surveys that helped event organisers, including

associations, identify areas in greatest need of help and matched them with relevant products and services.

The company discovered that associations wanted to establish virtual platforms so that assistance and training for their members could be continued, and Covid-19 advisory could be disseminated.

Its' initiatives to chart the impact of the pandemic on business events, and to provide solutions and initiate relevant online discussions caught the attention of China's Ministry of Commerce, which reported on the firm's efforts.

Air China

The state-owned enterprise stepped forward to support China in her fight against the outbreak by activating flights and staff to deliver much needed medical and disaster relief supplies, as well as transport thousands medical staff to Wuhan.

Ona Li, representative of Air China, added that the company has also waived all costs for delivering 28.1 tons of supplies to Japan and South Korea on March 16 and 17, as the countries struggled with the outbreak themselves. It also helped to fly medical experts to countries in need.

Li shared that some of the supplies were donated by Air China, while the rest came from local companies, organisations, embassies and overseas Chinese.

As China's fight against



Wuhan Eurasia Convention International Hotel stepped in to house medical teams from Guangzhou and Zhejiang that had rushed to help Wuhan battle the outbreak

the outbreak drew to a close the Air China family came together to compose and perform a song, Take Off, to express their gratitude for all those who helped China through the difficult time.

The song can be enjoyed at https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/HpFATgI3SqQe-CODGa_v5-A.

China Optics Valley Convention & Exhibition Centre

China Optics Valley Convention and Exhibition Centre (COVCEC) received an order to transform three of its exhibition halls into a temporary hospital on February 4. Bringing together the people and resources needed for the task amid Wuhan's lockdown and the Spring Festival holiday was not easy.

Despite the challenges, the team delivered on the mission – a makeshift hospital that spanned 10,000m² and held 1,000 beds. The facility opened its doors February 17 at 17.00.

For more than 18 days, the COVCEC team worked together to safeguard the health and interests of patients and medical workers. They provided much needed

project management, facilities management, security, hospitality and communication services that helped ensure the running of the hospital.

Their efforts ensured that actual hospital beds were freed up for critical cases, which alleviated the strain on the city's medical resources and reduced risk of transmission.

By March 3, when the makeshift hospital ended its operations, 875 patients had been treated within its grounds.

Dujiangyan Municipal People's Government

As the Covid-19 outbreak reared its head in Dujiangyan City, Sichuan province, the local municipal government realised that there was an urgent need to allow life to carry on effectively and with reduced infection potential.

Dujiangyan Municipal People's Government sought to establish a non-contact online shopping network so that residents could continue to get their necessary supplies safely. To achieve this, it convened a meeting with the Dujiangyan Internet Association, as well as key

e-commerce enterprises, and these stakeholders responded positively.

The government also called upon all relevant departments and social institutions to promote this service.

The non-contact online shopping network took off after a week of preparation, and is still ongoing today. Between January 25 and March 21, the service recorded 257,141 deliveries of take-out food and supplies, using 214 vehicles daily. Five key participating e-commerce platforms generated RMB 2.1 million (US\$302,777) during that period.

In addition, Dujiangyan Municipal People's Government also executed an online version of the 2020 Dujiangyan Spring Fair Online, which was traditionally an event held in the city during the Spring Festival.

Hangzhou Municipal Bureau of Culture, Radio, TV and Tourism

As the highly-infectious Covid-19 laid siege to China in late-January, the Hangzhou Municipal Bureau of Culture, Radio, TV and Tourism initiated an urgent fund-raiser with the Hangzhou MICE Association to secure donations,

as well as masks and other essential medical supplies.

Tina Gan, representative of the MICE department of Business Events Hangzhou – part of the bureau – recalled the achievement. The hunt for mask supplies began on January 25 while the fundraiser kicked off on January 27. By January 29, RMB 20,000 worth of masks were shipped out and donations of RMB 19,515 were secured the day after.

Donations were obtained through the Hangzhou MICE Charitable Fund, while sources for masks were identified through the Hangzhou MICE Association's Wechat group for members.

As the masks were not suitable for professional medical use, they were channelled to Hangzhou Xiaoshan Airport Customs and Jianggan District Commerce Bureau. In Jianggan, the supplies were used by frontline staff attending to markets and community facilities, as well as by supervision officers at the District Commerce Bureau.

Nanjing International Expo Center

When Nanjing International Expo Center (NIEC) in China chose to help alleviate the city's pressure for isolation facilities, staff found themselves tasked with a fresh set of responsibilities along with protective suits as their new uniform.

Regarded as a landmark in the Chinese city of Nanjing, the Centre has 140,000m² of exhibition space, a convention centre and a 252-key hotel.

A system had to be established, revealed Leo Liu, deputy director of sales & marketing with the Centre, where a health docket was created for every guest, temperature screening was conducted twice a day, public spaces were sanitised twice daily, and garbage was carefully sorted before being transported for safe disposal.

NIEC had to work closely with the city's health authority to establish critical



Air China donated cargo services for medical supplies and transported healthcare personnel



Clockwise from above: A barber attends to medical staff at Wuhan Eurasia Convention International Hotel; transformation in progress at China Optics Valley Convention & Exhibition Centre; Shanghai Spring Travel staff on house visits



procedures needed to safely isolate hundreds of people. Hotel staff also cooperated with government personnel, the police and healthcare specialists to ensure the safe storage of medical supplies such as masks, thermometers, alcohol, and disinfectants.

Liu opined that all the hard work was worth it. "We need to assume social responsibility during these unusual times. We will continue to provide assistance to the community should our help be needed."

Shanghai Spring Travels

Changning District, where the office of Shanghai Spring Travels is located, is home to many foreigners living and working in bustling Shanghai. Many who had returned to Shanghai after the Spring Festival had to be under home quarantine.

To help these foreigners make sense of the information and regulation on epidemic prevention and containment effort, Shanghai Spring Travels staff who were proficient in foreign languages chipped in to help with community communications.



Some 40 employees volunteered for the programme, which required them to pay home visits to foreigners and man an online Q&A live chat service. They also performed community service, such as conducting temperature checks for residents, offering child counselling for families with difficulties, and more.

Wuhan Eurasia Convention International Hotel

No stranger to pro-bono and charity activities, Wuhan Eurasia hotel wasted no time in converting its premises into emergency accommodation for the Guangzhou and Zhe-

jiang medical teams that had flocked to Wuhan to provide assistance.

Chris He, representative of the 448-key hotel, explained that the property was well suited to support the medical teams as it had 17 professional meeting rooms, as well as the capability to provide high-quality accommodation, catering and other services.

To serve its new purpose, some of the dining rooms and guestrooms were adjusted and extra amenities – such as working venues, haircut salon, table tennis tables and express delivery services – were added. Disinfection

stations, dressing tents, and outdoor operating points were also established.

To feed medical staff on shift work, the hotel implemented a flexibility meal service. Breakfast service was conducted twice, one at 05.30 to 08.00 and another at 09.40 to 10.10, for instance. A small supermarket on each floor of the hotel provided convenience for medical staff needing snacks and daily necessities.

Hotel staff contributed their time to transport supplies for the medical teams, while the local community was called upon to donate items and food to resident medical staff.

Wuhan Eurasia hotel also shared donations with other hotels that were in need, and contributed more than 400 sets of bedding for temporary hospitals in Wuhan.

Wuhan International Convention and Exhibition Centre

When Wuhan International Convention and Exhibition Centre (WHICEC) received a government order to convert two floors of its exhibition space into a makeshift hospital on February 3, the centre's team speedily set up a crisis response team.

Working round the clock for 48 hours, the team re-worked the infrastructure of the exhibition space, which had very different settings to that of a hospital, to match authorities' requirements. The team delivered the makeshift hospital – later named Jiangnan Temporary Hospital – three hours ahead of deadline.

From then on, rest became a luxury for the crisis response team, which remained on standby round the clock from February 5 to March 9. They ensured lights, air-conditioning, lifts and the sound system were working, and took care of the distribution of items donated by businesses so that medical staff could focus on treating patients.

Of Wuhan's 16 temporary hospitals that were converted from public facilities, Jiangnan Temporary Hospital received the highest number of patients – 1,848 in all.

Wuhan Rayte Exhibition Culture Co.

Shocked and saddened by the rapidly deteriorating situation across Wuhan city, as medi-

cal staff fought the outbreak without adequate protective equipment, Wuhan Rayte Exhibition Culture Co. decided to reach for a change through actions.

It raised more than RMB 400,000 in cash donations, and directed medical and disinfection supplies to hospitals and community organisations in need. Among the things donated were adult-use diapers for medical staff who were unable to leave their stations to use the washroom for hours, and mattress, quilts, coffee/tea machines and other living comforts for temporary hospitals across the city.

Staff also volunteered to send medical personnel to work in their own vehicles when public transportation was halted.

Wuhan Rayte Exhibition Culture Co helped to feed medical staff, with more than RMB 40,000 worth of meat buns delivered to five hospitals, as well as a full month of hot meals to medical staff at Wuhan Seventh Hospital who had come from all over the country to help fight the outbreak.

To encourage staff to respond to the government's call for volunteer medical workers, Wuhan Rayte Exhibition Culture Co. paid a full salary plus rewards to all those who participated.

By March, families in the city were starting to feel the strain of income losses. Thus, the company donated RMB 40,000 worth of food to needy families.

According to Jeffrey Tao, head of Wuhan Rayte Exhibition Culture Co., the company is now actively providing assistance to other countries.

Wuhan International Convention and Exhibition Centre



From above: Jiangnan Temporary Hospital; Hangzhou Municipal Bureau of Culture, Radio, TV and Tourism sends a donation to Hangzhou Xiaoshan Airport Customs

He had personally donated US\$1,500 to the York University of Toronto Alumni Association to purchase masks and other materials for the hospitals in Canada.

Xiamen ITG MICE

Joining in the fight against Covid-19, Xiamen ITG MICE donated surgical masks, gloves, disinfectant and other cleaning and healthcare supplies to the local community.

It also formed a volunteer team that helped deliver anti-virus brochures to Xiamen residents, as well as handwritten cards to cheer on frontline medical staff.

In addition, company staff initiated a fund-raising campaign to help finance prevention efforts and treatment in Wuhan.

Company spokespeople Rowena Cai and Eve Lin shared that help was sourced from "international friends and organisations", including the ICCA family, which allowed Xiamen ITG MICE to purchase 25,000 surgical masks in a single day. These were sent to the frontline in Xiamen.

Cai told *TTGassociations*: "We always believe that there is opportunity in adversity. Only through global collaboration and coordination among industry professionals in different countries, can a global industry recovery be achieved."

"ICCA is focused on the fact that now is a time for cooperation, not competition. We are a close-knit family and have an opportunity to support each other. In particular, we have launched our *Stand Together While We Are Far Apart* campaign, highlighting the solidarity and support we all have for each other."

Senthil Gopinath
CEO, ICCA



Tan Maw Pin

IT TAKES A SPARK

She wanted an Asian meeting on falls prevention but her passion led to her becoming chairperson to the inaugural World Congress On Falls and Postural Stability. By **S Puvaneswary**

You had smaller plans initially – to organise an Asian falls prevention meeting in Malaysia. The idea went on to become the first World Congress on Falls and Postural Stability (WCFPS), held in Kuala Lumpur last December. What transpired?

In the first half of 2017, I approached the Malaysia Convention & Exhibition Bureau (MyCEB) to ask if they would consider funding an Asian-based falls prevention meeting.

At the time, other parts of the world were holding such meetings. There was the European Falls Festival and the biennial Australia and New Zealand Falls Prevention Conference, but there was no such platform in Asia.

Malaysia Convention & Exhibition Bureau (MyCEB) did some research on their own and came across the International Conference on Falls and Postural Stability, which had been held successfully in UK by the British Geriatrics Society (BGS) for nearly two decades.

The MyCEB representative in London went to meet the publicity arm of BGS and proposed the idea of bringing the conference to Malaysia.



BGS initially thought it was a good idea and an opportunity to make more connections in Asia. MyCEB then developed a bid proposal and offered to fund my attending the 18th International Conference on Falls and Postural Stability in Birmingham in 2017.

That's where I met Tash Masud, president elect, BGS and chair of the Falls and Bone Health Special Interest Group (SIG) in 2017. I presented the bid proposal to the Falls and Bone Health SIG committee informally on the eve of the 18th International Conference on Falls and Postural Stability and he explained that the conference will not leave the UK because its members would not receive much funding support to attend the conference if it were to be held overseas.

However, Masud went on to suggest that it would be a good idea to work together to hold a world congress on falls and postural stability and that such a meeting was long overdue. After further negotiations mediated by MyCEB, the meeting materialised.

What were the concerns BGS had before they agreed to come onboard?

We had to convince the BGS that the Malaysian Society of Geriatric Medicine (MSGM) had the capacity to organise the congress. At that time, our society had only 70 members whereas the BGS had over 3,000, comprising professionals specialising in the healthcare of older people across the UK.

It helped that Masud knew me as I had worked under him when I was a young doctor in the UK. He knew and trusted me and that helped make the conversations easier.

We also had to convince BGS that Kuala Lumpur had the facilities and capabilities to hold the congress. MyCEB assisted by funding a BGS delegation for a site inspection. It was only after seeing the facilities at Kuala Lumpur Convention Centre and a few key hotels that they were convinced.

Asia has benefited from the WCFPS.

Yes, there is no doubt about that. The WCFPS attracted 450 delegates, half of which were Malaysians and the rest from Asia. They came mainly from Singapore, Japan and South Korea.

The congress provided a platform for Asians to share their research on falls and postural stability. This meant that the world could also come to know that Asians have researching on these areas.

We have developed advanced technology to prevent falls such as robots to help people rehabilitate and sensors that can detect imminent falls to prevent them from happening. The majority of the non-Asian

delegates were from Australia, the UK and the Netherlands.

The congress provided opportunities for early career researchers and early career falls practitioners to meet key opinion leaders from all over the world. When you go to a large congress on geriatrics, it could be difficult to find people interested in the research area of falls, but everyone who came to the WCFPS were interested in falls research.

So, it was very specific group of people the delegates could speak to.

"I NOTICED THAT OLDER PEOPLE WERE TREATED AS SECOND CLASS CITIZENS. ON WARD ROUNDS, DOCTORS WALKED PAST THEM AND THEY WERE DENIED TREATMENT ON THE BASIS OF AGE."

Has the society brought up any issues to the Ministry of Health Malaysia after the congress?

Yes, we have. Issues raised during the WCFPS include not having sufficient geriatricians in government hospitals in Malaysia, retention

of staff specialising in geriatric healthcare in the civil service, inadequate remuneration for civil servants in the healthcare sector as well as support in developing age-friendly services.

These issues were submitted to the Ministry of Health earlier this year along with the MSGM's strategic report. This report is our action plan and recommendation to the ministry on how we can work with all stakeholders to enhance the health of our senior population.

What is the future like for the WCFPS?

It has been decided there will be a world congress every three years. Interested parties will have to bid for it. At its first run, it was provisionally decided that the 2nd WCFPS will be hosted by the Australia and New Zealand Falls Prevention Society, and held together with their regular meeting in Perth in 2022.

The (Malaysian) organising committee intends to set up a steering committee and are in the process of developing guidelines for future WCFPS. This is important to ensure that our efforts to initiate such a meeting are not wasted.

The MSGM will therefore take on the responsibility as inaugural hosts of ensuring the continuity and longevity of this event. We have plans now to initiate an Asian Falls Network and we hope that an Asian Falls and Postural Stability Meeting can be held in 2021.

What new projects are you busy with now?

I am involved in the AGELESS Project where I am the overall programme lead. AGELESS is an acronym for Transforming Cognitive Frailty to Later



Life Self-Sufficiency. This project also involves researchers from seven other local universities. We received a RM6 million (US\$1.4 million) grant from the Ministry of Education Malaysia for this five-year project, which is a study aimed at addressing cognitive frailty in older persons.

Currently, medical professionals deal with dementia and frailty in older people separately. What we want to do is to develop early detection of cognitive frailty and to develop strategies to address these two conditions together.

What events in your life led you to the area of geriatric medicine and research?

When I was training in the UK, I worked for two months as a house officer on the geriatric ward. I noticed that older people were treated as second class citizens, to put it simply. On ward rounds, doctors walked past them and older people were denied treatment simply on the basis of age. What's worse was that they were denied what everybody deserves – a good death at home, surrounded by family and friends. Like most young people, I wanted to save the world.

As I delved deeper into geriatric medicine, I realised that saving the world in the 21st century means preparing for an ageing population. I made a conscious effort to fully immerse myself in this area to make life better for older people.

You are the founding secretary of the MSGM, which was set up in 2012. What would you say is the society's biggest challenge?

The main issue is getting people from various sectors in geriatrics – such as geriatricians, allied health professionals and people interested in developing healthcare services for older people – to work together on a common agenda.

Why is it so hard?

Doctors are very independently-minded people. However, we are fortunate that geriatricians are natural team players. We may have arguments, but at the end of the day, everyone still pulls together. Events like the WCFPS and organising annual conferences will always pull people together. You know the saying – united we stand, divided we fall.

Speaking of pulling people together, has the congress helped to attract new members?

Yes, we have many more who have signed up as members and it has certainly created more awareness of the work we do.

Prior to the congress, we hired a publicity personnel to generate media awareness on the event and its importance. For people to join our society, they must



Championing the ageing agenda

Tan Maw Pin was the local organising chairperson of the 1st World Congress on Falls and Postural Stability 2019, and is the honorary secretary of the Malaysian Society of Geriatric Medicine (MSGM). She is also a professor in geriatric medicine at the University of Malaya. She is currently the principal investigator for the *Life After Falls* study funded by the University of Malaya Impact-Oriented Interdisciplinary Research Grant. Tan is also the founder and managing director of digital lifestyle medicine platform ACT4Health, and the medical director of the Genting Dementia Day Care Centre and Aged Care Services.

first recognise the benefits of becoming a member.

We hold an annual national conference which provides members with knowledge sharing sessions and networking opportunities. There is also a WhatsApp forum for members to post queries about the administration of the society, exchange ideas, ask advice from fellow members and address issues raised by members.

For example, if my patient wants to move to another healthcare facility in the country, I can post a query and quickly get information on what is available.

How does the MSGM raise funds for outreach programmes that promote awareness of health issues among older people?

It sounds strange, but money is not the most important thing. The most crucial part in running programmes is the human capital.

As the society's main role is to raise awareness on geriatric medicine and provide relevant education, our events involve conferences and workshops. Attendees are mainly healthcare professionals keen to learn about how to improve the way they provide healthcare to older persons.

Our job is to make these events af-

fordable for them, and they will willingly pay registration fees to attend our events if they see the value they get for their money.

What are the MSGM's plans for the future?

We are going to place our attention on Malaysia's response to an ageing population as well as the ageing agenda in developing nations.

Malaysia is unique in that we have repeatedly been named a leading retirement destination globally. We are therefore confident, that if we plan carefully and learn from other countries' experience in policy for population ageing, we will be able to ensure our country benefits and reaps its dividends from an ageing population.

The MSGM feels that we are well placed in moving forward the population ageing agenda for Malaysia with our critical mass of highly motivated and passionate members.

In addition, we would like to bring to light that most older people now live in developing countries, while nearly all the research and development have occurred in developed countries. We are determined to shout as loud as possible that developing countries matter just as much and no one should be left behind.



New and accessible stays

For time-strapped meeting delegates, hotels located within walking distance of the event venue are a dream come true. Here are some of the newest accessible hotels to have opened in the region



AMARI SPICE PENANG, MALAYSIA

Operating status

Opening September 2020

Hotel features

Hosting a large group of delegates in one accommodation nearby a massive convention centre will become a reality once the 453-key Amari SPICE Penang is completed.

Not only is the hotel set to be located within the area of the Setia SPICE Convention Centre, it is minutes' drive away from the Penang International Airport.

Between sessions, delegates can take their pick from Amari SPICE Penang's four F&B outlets, including all-day dining restaurant Amaya Food Gallery and rooftop bar SkyBar, which offers unobstructed views of the hotel's surroundings.

The hotel's 240m² ballroom, which can be divided into two, can host pre- and post-conference functions. Four breakout rooms are also available.

From top: Winter Garden terrace at Holiday Inn Express Melbourne Southbank; one of the eight meeting spaces at the Grand Dafam Signature Surabaya

Star conveniences

Delegates can access the Setia SPICE Convention Centre – and the Setia SPICE Complex on which it sits – via two connections on the hotel's ground and fourth floors.

Billed as the world's first hybrid solar-powered events venue, the Setia SPICE Convention Centre houses a 4,060m² pillarless ballroom, which can accommodate up to 8,000 pax in a theatre-style setting.

Meanwhile, the state's only championship golf course is also a short drive away at the Penang Golf Club.

GRAND DAFAM SIGNATURE SURABAYA, INDONESIA

Operating status

Opened June 2019

Hotel features

The 172-key Grand Dafam Signature Surabaya does not only provide convenient access to a convention venue, it boasts meeting facilities, most of which come with sizeable capacities.

Besides its grand ballroom, which seats up to 920 pax, it offers a less conventional venue in the Previere 21 Bar & Lounge. Located on the top floor, the lounge can be bought out for private events with up to 150 standing guests.

While Grand Dafam Signature Surabaya does not have an events team, event organisers can get support from the hotel banquet sales and F&B staff.

Star conveniences

Located within walking distance is the Grand City Mall and Convex Surabaya – home to a sizeable convention hall that can seat up to 5,000 pax in theatre-style, as well as an expansive exhibition centre spanning 4,100m².

According to Grand Dafam Signature Surabaya, the hotel provides a complimentary shuttle service for guests when there is an event at the Grand City.

HOLIDAY INN EXPRESS MELBOURNE SOUTH- BANK, AUSTRALIA

Operating status

Opened January 2020

Hotel features

One of the larger properties on this list, the 345-key hotel comes with five function rooms.

Organisers can choose to combine the Sandridge and Walker rooms to house 36 pax in boardroom-style, or host del-



An artist's impression of the Executive Lounge at the soon-to-open Amari SPICE Penang

egates in the Festival Space, which has a capacity of up to 120 pax theatre-style.

The hotel's most unique venue is its Winter Terrace, a choice venue for alfresco cocktail receptions of up to 60 pax.

All guests enjoy free hot buffet breakfast daily from The Great Room Bar and Restaurant, and complimentary Wi-Fi in rooms.

Star conveniences

Nestled within the heart of Melbourne's Southbank, the Holiday Inn Express sits within walking distance of the Melbourne Convention and Exhibition Centre and the Crown Conference Centre.

From the hotel, it takes only a short stroll to hit the city's restaurants, shops and attractions, including the National Gallery of Victoria, the Arts Centre Melbourne as well as the Eureka Skydeck, which offers sweeping views of the city's skyline.

INTERCONTINENTAL YOKOHAMA PIER 8, JAPAN

Operating status

Opened October 2019

Hotel features

Since its revitalisation, port city Yokohama has been a key up-and-coming destination in Japan.

The second InterContinental-branded hotel to open in the city offers upscale facilities with a local touch, making it a choice business event accommodation. The 173-key InterContinental Yokohama Pier 8 also features a 138m² banquet room on the third floor.

Delegates will appreciate the op-

portunity to experience Yokohama's east-meets-west culture at The Larboard Restaurant & Bar. Its menu is specially crafted to showcase the city's Japanese-European fusion cuisine, known as *yōshoku*.

Star conveniences

A short drive away is the PACIFICO Yokohama convention complex, with the 5,000-seater National Convention Hall as its centrepiece. Also located within the complex are a conference centre with a 1,000-seater main hall and 50 meeting rooms, including four that can be combined to seat up to almost 1,400 pax.

Both InterContinental Yokohama Pier 8 and PACIFICO Yokohama are a short drive away from the city's well-known attractions, such as the Cup Noodles Museum and the historic Yokohama Red Brick Warehouses.

JW MARRIOTT HOTEL NARA, JAPAN

Operating status

Opening April 2020

Hotel features

Business events are a great platform to explore the culture of the host city. Nara, Japan's first capital, offers just that opportunity. Located near the heart of Nara City is the 158-key JW Marriott Hotel Nara, billed as the first international luxury hotel in the area. The hotel also sits adjacent to the Nara Prefectural Convention Centre, the prefecture's largest convention hall.

Food and beverage options at the JW Marriott Hotel Nara include Silk Road,

a multi-cuisine restaurant that lives up to its name. There is also Japanese restaurant Azekura, which serves *teppanyaki*, sushi and *kaiseki*, a traditional, multi-course Japanese dinner.

Spanning 373m², the Yoshino ballroom can seat between 150 to 220 pax, with the option to divide the ballroom into two. Four meeting rooms, sized between 41m² and 76m², are also available.

Star conveniences

Next door is the two-level Nara Prefectural Convention Centre, which opened in April 2020. Besides the 2,100m² convention hall – designed to host up to 2,000 guests in theatre-style, the centre features 14 meeting rooms as well as indoor and outdoor function spaces.

Meeting rooms can seat between 45 and 270 pax in a theatre setting. Selected meeting rooms can hold up to 156 pax in a classroom setting.

The centre's location near the Former Site of the Heijo Imperial Palace means delegates can spend their free time exploring reconstructions of buildings at what was once the heart of Japan's oldest royal capital. Also nearby is the

famed Nara Park, where deer roam freely.

THE KAHALA HOTEL & RESORT YOKOHAMA, JAPAN

Operating status

Opening June 2020

Hotel features

Located along the Yokohama waterfront is the 146-key The Kahala Hotel & Resort Yokohama. The property is set to bring the brand's signature Hawaiian hospitality to Japan's shores – and outside Hawaiian shores for the first time.

Delegates can enjoy panoramic views of the revitalised Minato Mirai seaside district from selected rooms and suites, and perhaps weave in some leisure time at the spa which comes with an indoor bath.

Three restaurants serving Italian and Japanese cuisine provide dining variety for meeting planners.

Social functions during the official

programme can be hosted at the hotel's 407m² ballroom.

Star conveniences

Delegates staying at The Kahala Hotel & Resort Yokohama will be within walking distance of PACIFICO Yokohama North, which is slated to open in 2Q2020.

The new convention centre will feature a 6,337m² multi-purpose hall – billed as one of the largest in Japan – with the ability to accommodate up to 5,948 guests in theatre seating. Additionally, PACIFICO Yokohama North houses 42 meeting rooms that can house between 38 to 288 pax in a classroom setting.

Delegates can also easily access existing buildings in the complex – such as the 20,000m² Exhibition Hall and the 1,350m² Annex Hall – through an outdoor pedestrian deck. The Annex Hall, suitable for up to 1,300 pax, makes for a suitable venue for closing celebrations.

W KUALA LUMPUR, MALAYSIA

Operating status

September 2018

Hotel features

The 150-key W Kuala Lumpur has an in-house events team on hand to provide planners with support in hosting up to 700 guests in the 1,022m² ballroom. Named the Great Room, it is said to be one of the largest ballrooms in the city centre.

Besides an outdoor pool that makes for a great vantage point from which to view the famed Petronas Twin Towers, hotel guests can enjoy the hotel's 24-hour gym and dine at its five restaurants that offering a range of cuisines, from Cantonese to French fare. Complimentary Wi-Fi is available.

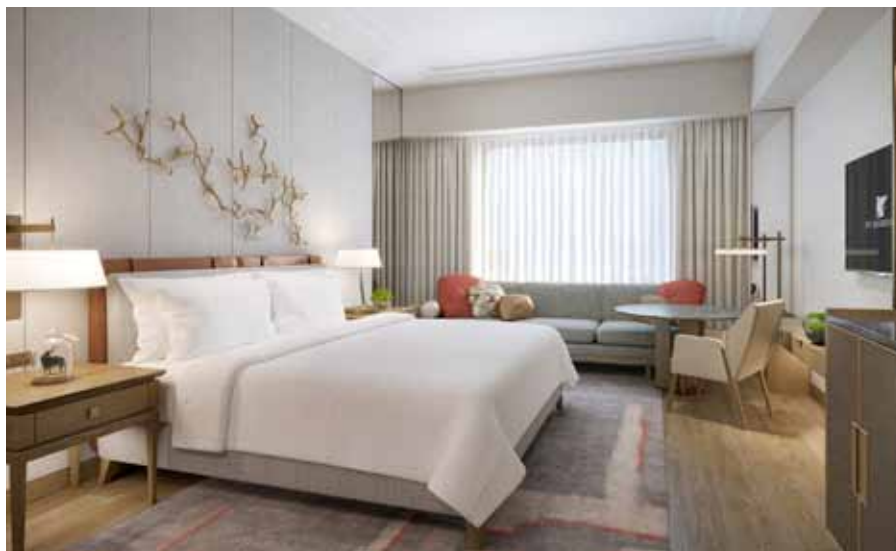
Star conveniences

W Kuala Lumpur is located in the busiest part of the Malaysian capital. Just a short walk away is the Kuala Lumpur Convention Centre, where 33,000m² of flexible function space is available for association events. Options include two auditoriums, namely the 3,000-seater Plenary Hall and the 500-seater Plenary Theatre. With tiered seating over two levels, the Plenary Hall is perfect for opening ceremonies and keynote addresses.

Additionally, the Centre offers eight exhibition halls spanning 33,659m² and a conference hall that can take in 1,800 pax or be divided into three small venues. For banquets, planners can host delegates in the 2,000-seat ballroom. There are also 20 meeting rooms, each being able to accommodate between 43 and 220 attendees.



From above: InterContinental Yokohama Pier 8's Club Lounge; a deluxe room at JW Marriott Hotel Nara



THE WESTIN DESARU COAST RESORT, MALAYSIA

Operating status

Opened April 2019

Hotel features

The Westin Desaru Coast Resort in Johor's newest tourism destination offers its own conference facilities amid a relaxed atmosphere.

Featuring 275 luxurious rooms and suites, the resort boasts a wellness focus and delivers on the promise with a full menu of holistic body treatments at the resort spa – perfect for time-strapped professionals who need some rest-and-relax before or after their meetings.

Recreation also comes in the form of a 24-hour gym and a pool that comes with cabanas where one can retreat into.

The hotel's signature Prego Italian restaurant and all-day-dining Seasonal Tastes provide private dining variety for programmes. For an after-meeting tippie, head for the MIX lounge or the resort's beach bar where views of the South China Sea can be appreciated.

Star conveniences

The Westin Desaru Coast Resort is slightly over an hour's drive from the state capital city of Johor Bahru via the new Senai-Desaru Expressway. It is also approximately a two hours' drive from Singapore.

It sits right next to the Desaru Coast Conference Centre, which is managed by the resort. The Centre takes in a grand ballroom with capacity for up to 1,400 guests, divisible into four spaces.

Planners using the venue are supported by an in-house business events team.



From top: W Kuala Lumpur's Grand Room, which can host up to 700 guests; a Kahala suite at The Kahala Hotel & Resort Yokohama; an outdoor cocktail reception setting at The Westin Desaru Coast Resort



Seoul plays the right cards

Adelaine Ng finds the city is among the world's top Muslim-friendly destinations, but greater awareness of its halal facilities and warm welcome is needed



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Modern and cultural draws in Seoul are deemed attractive to a growing community of curious Muslims

South Korea is becoming an attractive destination for Muslim travellers. For the first time, the country was counted among the top 10 non-Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) countries in the latest *Global Muslim Travel Index* by MasterCard and CrescentRating.

This means South Korea is joining the ranks of other top Muslim-friendly, non-OIC countries on the list – such as Singapore, Thailand and the UK – that are actively taking into account the needs of Muslim travellers in order to attract what is billed in the report as “one of the fastest growing tourism sectors worldwide”.

MasterCard and CrescentRating believe that the number of Muslim travellers worldwide will grow to 230 million by 2026, up from 140 million visitors in 2019. Tourism receipts from the sector are expected to reach US\$300 billion, a projected growth of 35 per cent from their estimate of US\$220 billion for 2020.

As South Korea's business capital, Seoul has been steadily introducing facilities and resources to help Muslims feel welcome, and with good reason. Muslims currently make up 20 per cent of participants at meetings supported by Seoul Convention Bureau (SCB). The number is still growing.

SCB's informal research suggests that

Muslim event attendees tend to stay longer than the average visitor, and place greater value on unique, authentic and hands-on experiences of Korean culture and traditions.

This means that Seoul is uniquely positioned to attract this market, among them increasingly powerful Indonesian and Malaysian companies and associations. After all, it has attractions and activities tailored to fans of the K-Wave, such as the broadcasting theme park tour held by entertainment company MBC World, SMTown Coex Artium in Gangnam, as well as K-pop singing and dancing experiences.

Venues in Seoul have also been stepping up to become more Muslim-friendly. Coex, for instance, has taken the first step to include a prayer room for business visitors and the option of requesting for halal food from its in-house caterer, Gramercy.

Two of its hotels, InterContinental Seoul Coex and Grand InterContinental Seoul Parnas, have included a prayer time clock, the Qur'an, and a compass in guestrooms for Muslim guests.

Ji-hyun Kim, director, MICE planning team, SCB, believes that awareness of such Muslim-friendly resources and facilities in Seoul still needs to be strengthened through initiatives like fam trips.

Currently, Muslim delegates can access the Muslim-friendly Travel page on the Visit Korea website to browse attractions and hotels with prayer rooms, as well as halal-certified restaurants.

There is also still much room for improvement in terms of Muslim-friendly infrastructure and systems.

A Jakarta-based event executive, who asked to remain anonymous, suggested that Seoul hotels could indicate the prayer direction in rooms, and the city could also encourage more attractions to provide prayer rooms.

While achieving the basics in being Muslim-friendly is becoming more pertinent, recent reports on the Muslim traveller market from MasterCard and CrescentRating, as well as communications company TBWA, show that a new generation of Muslim travellers are looking for destinations to provide more than just halal food and prayer rooms at venues and attractions.

Eco-friendly, socially responsible tourism enterprises that walk the talk are well-regarded by this new generation that is now entering the workforce and will be among event delegation.

For Seoul to shine as a welcoming destination for Muslims event delegates, the city will need to engage more tourism businesses to make the right moves.

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{ Need to know }

1 Financial support available

SCB's PLUS Seoul programme offers support that can assist in all stages of event planning with some conditions. Laxer conditions have been put in place due to the pandemic that has affected event interest.

2 Bigger numbers are better

International conferences with more than 1,000 participants, of which at least half are international participants, can unlock more benefits through SCB, including partial coverage of event app/VR development costs, outdoor advertising near the event venue, and cost support for unique venue usage.

3 Book in summer

It is likely easier to book event venues in the summer months between June and August, as they are generally quieter periods for business events. The warm weather means that there are also smaller crowds at attractions.



Seosomun Historic Park

History buffs will enjoy this historic park which tells the story of some 10,000 Catholics who were executed during the Joseon Dynasty, especially during the great persecution of 1801. The park's basement features memorial halls and an open-top Sky Square that features a flagpole-like statue which has a surprise for curious visitors willing to get up close and look up. Best experienced with a tour guide.



Deoksugung Palace

Deoksugung Palace was created as a temporary palace after Gyeongbokgung Palace was heavily damaged during the Japanese invasion of 1592. It is considered unique in Korea for its modern seal engraving and western style garden and fountain. The Korean-style changing of the royal guard ceremony is performed daily in front of the main gate at 11.00, 14.00 and 15.30, except on Mondays and depending on the weather.

MBC World Broadcasting Theme Park

Visitors don't need to be a fan of Korean drama productions to enjoy MBC World, known as South Korea's first Hallyu (K-wave) broadcasting theme park. There are plenty of fun experiences on offer such as learning dance moves from a holographic K-pop group, becoming the main character of an MBC drama production, and playing newscaster or weather reporter for a news bulletin.

Starfield Coex Mall

If Instagram photos are a priority then don't miss the Starfield Library, an open space within Starfield Coex Mall. The library's stunning, massive bookshelf houses more than 50,000 books and magazines across two storeys. It comes as no surprise that this is known as Seoul's most instagrammable spot. The mall itself, one of Asia's largest for underground shopping, also features the Kimchi Museum and COEX Aquarium.



SM Town Coex Artium

Described as K-pop heaven, SM Entertainment's cultural complex provides an immersive experience of the story behind SM Town, South Korea's most established recording artist group. The six-level complex contains a museum and an artist gallery comprising music albums and outfits worn by popular performers. It also offers VR interactions with SM artists. The complex's stunning exterior has also earned it the nickname of the Times Square of Korea.

Itaewon and Central Mosque

The cultural melting pot of Itaewon will challenge perceptions that Seoul's society is largely monocultural. Here you'll find Seoul's international district for multicultural cuisine and the Seoul Central Mosque, which is open to both worshippers and visitors. Evenings and weekends are when the area comes alive with foreigners and more restaurants open for business. You'll find cuisines from across the world, ranging from French to Pakistani.



Janggu at Jeongdong Theatre

Learn to play the traditional Korean drum Janggu from professionals in Jeongdong Theatre, Korea's hub for traditional artistic culture. The hourglass shaped drum has two leather heads and tension ropes, and has been the star of small orchestral performances. The class is taught in Jeongdong Theatre's unique Maru venue, which blends traditional and modern sensibilities, and is equipped with AV systems to host meetings for up to 60 seated guests or 80 standing guests.



Gear up in downtime

While tightening measures amid Covid-19 mean downtime for venue providers and operators, it offers the chance to gear up on offerings. By **Pamela Chow**



Singapore EXPO MAX Atria

The EXPO 2.0 Launch Festival marked the launch of new hardware and service offerings at the venue

At press time, the Singapore government has announced increasingly tight measures amid the progression of the pandemic, from further border controls to restrictions on gatherings within the country.

The measures meant downtime for the business events industry.

On March 20, Jung-Yul Choi, president, Lions Clubs International, announced that the Lions Clubs International Convention cannot be held in Singapore amid the stricter restrictions.

The event was meant to welcome some 20,000 foreign delegates to Singapore in June, and mark the largest association congress in Singapore's history.

Before the government's announcement, the World Association of Newspapers and News Publishers postponed its inaugural Asian Media Leaders Summit, originally scheduled for March.

As at press time, the event is still slated to be held in July.

While there was initial anticipation that 2H2020 would see a "bunching up" of events, according to Aloysius Arlando, president, Singapore Association of Convention and Exhibition Organisers and Suppliers (SACEOS), who expressed this prior to the latest set of restrictions

on events, venue operators now expect recovery only in 2021 and beyond.

This does, however, allow venues more time to primp up its offerings to face future demand and to send staff for training in line with the government's stabilisation and support package for the tourism industry.

Singapore EXPO and its convention wing, MAX Atria, having just had both its hardware and service offerings upgraded in January, is one of the venues poised for recovery.

SingEx Venues, the operator of both venues, introduced modular break-out room solution Flex, which allows organisers to configure sustainable and acoustically treated spaces that are reminiscent of building blocks to suit different meeting sizes and requirements.

Also launched was ApeX, a high-tech hall with customisable audiovisual and digital elements, telescopic seating and an impressive 54m-by-5m screen for opening events and major presentations.

Besides updating its event facilities, the venue has also stepped up food and beverage offerings.

Kinetic Kitchen, its central production kitchen, is now powered with research and development capabilities

and has the capacity to host more than 1,000 guests at a time.

Event organisers can host their VIPs at the new private dining room K2. Also newly-open is one77°, a bistro café that serves up fusion cuisine with Singaporean touches.

Besides being a venue provider, the SingEx Venues team has also added Xpert, its in-house event planning services branch, to its portfolio.

The venue provider exemplifies what venue operators and event organisers can do during the downtime – to gear up on offerings in the case of the former and for the latter, to study potential future venues in advance.

Should the Covid-19 pandemic come under control by 2021, the following years could prove a healthy recovery for Singapore.

Currently, the city-state is set to welcome the Asia-Pacific Life Insurance Congress and Million Dollar Round Table Conference next year.

In 2022, Singapore is already scheduled to be the first South-east Asian city to host the International Conference on Medical Imaging Computing and Computer-Assisted Intervention.

Singapore is also scheduled to host the 25th World Congress of Dermatology in 2023.

The events are expected to welcome 2,000 and 15,000 delegates respectively from all over the world.

{ Need to know }

1 Support for sustainability

If your convention has a sustainability slant, STB's list of recommended green and socially responsible suppliers and resources can be found at visitsingapore.com/mice page.

2 Distinctively local experiences

Add a local touch to your event with STB's In Singapore Incentives & Rewards (INSPIRE) programme, which comprises 63 complimentary experiences ranging from thematic tours to unique teambuilding activities. To qualify, corporate groups of 20 or more foreign attendees must visit Singapore by December 31, 2021, for three or more days.

3 Give unique venues a chance

If you have a small delegation to entertain, why not consider some of the non-conventional venues in Singapore, such as Hangar66 and Pinball Wizard. They provide a fun way insight to Singapore and make theming easier.

Magical Shores at Siloso, Sentosa

Newly-launched in January, multi-sensory experience Magical Shores at Siloso transforms the 400m stretch of Siloso Beach through vivid light, sound, and mist effects and the introduction of novel, interactive light art on the sands. Every 15 minutes, as part of the art attraction's four acts, guests will be treated to a three-minute flourish of multi-coloured projections lighting up the night sky. The "instagrammable" event will run every night from 19.30 to 22.00.



Changi Experience Studio and Canopy Park, Jewel Changi Airport

Jewel Changi Airport's two highest floors are now home the Changi Experience Studio and Canopy Park. The 3,000m² Changi Experience Studio on level four is a digital attraction featuring a garden that sings and an adrenaline-pumping runway race. One floor up, the 14,000m² Canopy Park boasts seven play areas and creative gardens. Guests can navigate through the mirror and hedge mazes, bounce on huge suspended nets, and enjoy the view from the glass-floored Canopy Bridge 23m above ground.

A Journey Across the Heartland, Oriental Travel & Tours

Oriental Travel & Tours takes groups through the residential blocks of Ang Mo Kio to meet a bird-singing club, an old-school bird cage-maker, among the last few testaments to Singapore's fading traditions. Participants get a taste of riding on a public bus and visit a mock-up of a local home.



Matisse & Picasso, National Gallery Singapore

As part of a four-year partnership between STB and National Gallery Singapore, the gallery will welcome art exhibition *Matisse & Picasso* in May 2020. The show will be the first of four special annual exhibitions at the gallery, with the next to come being *Nam June Paik* in October 2021.

Silicon Valley of Singapore Insider Tour, UBE Singapore

Allowing participants to dive straight into the heart of Singapore's burgeoning start-up scene, the tour features thriving businesses within Singapore's innovation parks – one-north and the JTC LaunchPad @ one-north – and includes exclusive sharing sessions with successful entrepreneurs.



Komyuniti, YOTEL Singapore

YOTEL Singapore's restaurant has launched a menu with a unique and edgy twist to Singapore's fusion cuisine, with unconventional dishes like potted plant tiramisu and Hoisin duck flat bread. Other highlights include award-winning mixologist As'ad Isnin's original creations, the butterfly pea flower-infused gin cocktail KOMpliment and the whisky-based cocktail Mellon Down. Groups can also order the edible balloon, an event-exclusive dessert.

Singapore Gin Jaunt, Academy of Drinks

Loosen collars after a day of meetings with this three-hour experience found on booking platform TAB. On this journey through mystery bars, dive into the origins of gin in the city-state, which is said to be home to the world's largest gin collection. Participants can enjoy craft gins neat and learn how to pair the spirit with other ingredients to make a trio of cocktails.

Resilience amid uncertainty

Despite social unrest in host city Hong Kong, organisers of two Natural Language Processing conferences shoulder on, drawing 1,900 attendees. By **Prudence Lui**

Event brief

Despite the Hong Kong protests, the organising committee of two jointly-held events – the annual Empirical Methods in Natural Language Processing (EMNLP) and the biennial International Joint Conference on Natural Language Processing (IJCLP) went ahead to hold both events in the host city during November last year.

The EMNLP was developed from a series of Workshops on Very Large Corpora (WVLC), initiated by the Association for Computational Linguistics (ACL)'s Special Interest Group on Linguistic Data & Corpus-based Approaches to Natural Language Processing (SIGDAT). WVLC, which started in 1993, was eventually renamed EMNLP in 1996.

Since then, the EMNLP, held in a different city each year, draws an average of 700 attendees each year who are interested in linguistic data.

Meanwhile, the IJCNLP, initiated in 2004 by The Asian Federation of Natural Language Processing (AFNLP) Associations, welcomes about 500 attendees a year. The goal of the IJCLP is to provide researchers and professionals a platform to share insights on natural language processing (NLP) and computational linguistics.

The five-day EMNLP-IJCNLP 2019, held primarily at AsiaWorld-Expo, comprised two days of workshops and tutorials, followed by the main conference, which was held across three days.

Delegates were treated to a welcome reception at Hong Kong Disneyland at the end of the second day of workshops and tutorials, so they could enter into the conference with a



fresh mind, said the organisers.

Amid concerns over the Hong Kong protests, safety measures and contingency plans were put in place. Despite concerns over safety, the two conferences attracted a total of 1,900 participants, exceeding the organisers' expectations.

Challenges

Following a competitive bidding process, Hong Kong was deemed to be a suitable host city. The Hong Kong Tourism Board (HKTb), which held a site visit for the organising committee, as well as venue and hotel partners, were heavily involved in the bidding process.

In September last year, committee members discussed whether both events could go on as planned. This was in light of the uncertainty and concerns over safety as a result of the protests in Hong Kong, which had been making headlines since June.

Among the top concerns of the organisers were how to facilitate the movement of delegates to and from the venue or hotel smoothly, delegates' safety and their overall experience in the host city.

Solutions

Support from the HKTb, appointed ground operator China Travel Service (CTS) and venue operator AsiaWorld-Expo gave the committee the confidence to hold the conference amid uncertainty. Together with the three parties, the committee made contingency plans, including special transport arrangements.

The committee maintained close communication with HKTb and CTS on a day-to-day basis, obtaining information on traveller and transportation advice, among others.

Key takeaways

Delegates appreciated the committee's proactive communication, which was pertinent considering their concerns on whether it was safe

Event

2019 Conference on Empirical Methods in Natural Language Processing (EMNLP) and the 9th International Joint Conference on Natural Language Processing (IJCNLP)

Organizer

Association of Computational Linguistics (ACL) and the Asian Federation of Natural Language Processing (AFNLP) Associations

Venue

AsiaWorld-Expo, Hong Kong

Event date

November 3-7, 2019

Number of participants

Over 1,900



to travel to Hong Kong, said the committee.

In fact, the importance of communication cannot be overstated, noted Kelvin Wong, chair, local organising committee and associate dean, engineering, Chinese University of Hong Kong.

He urged event organisers to provide clarity, which encourages delegates to be more committed about their attendance. Additionally, he emphasised the importance of working with local authorities and partners, no matter the size of the event.

"They have all the know-hows and insights, all you need to do it reach out and ask," said Wong.

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