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ASIA

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The future of travel

In a post-pandemic world, innovation and collaboration will lead the travel and tourism industry to recovery





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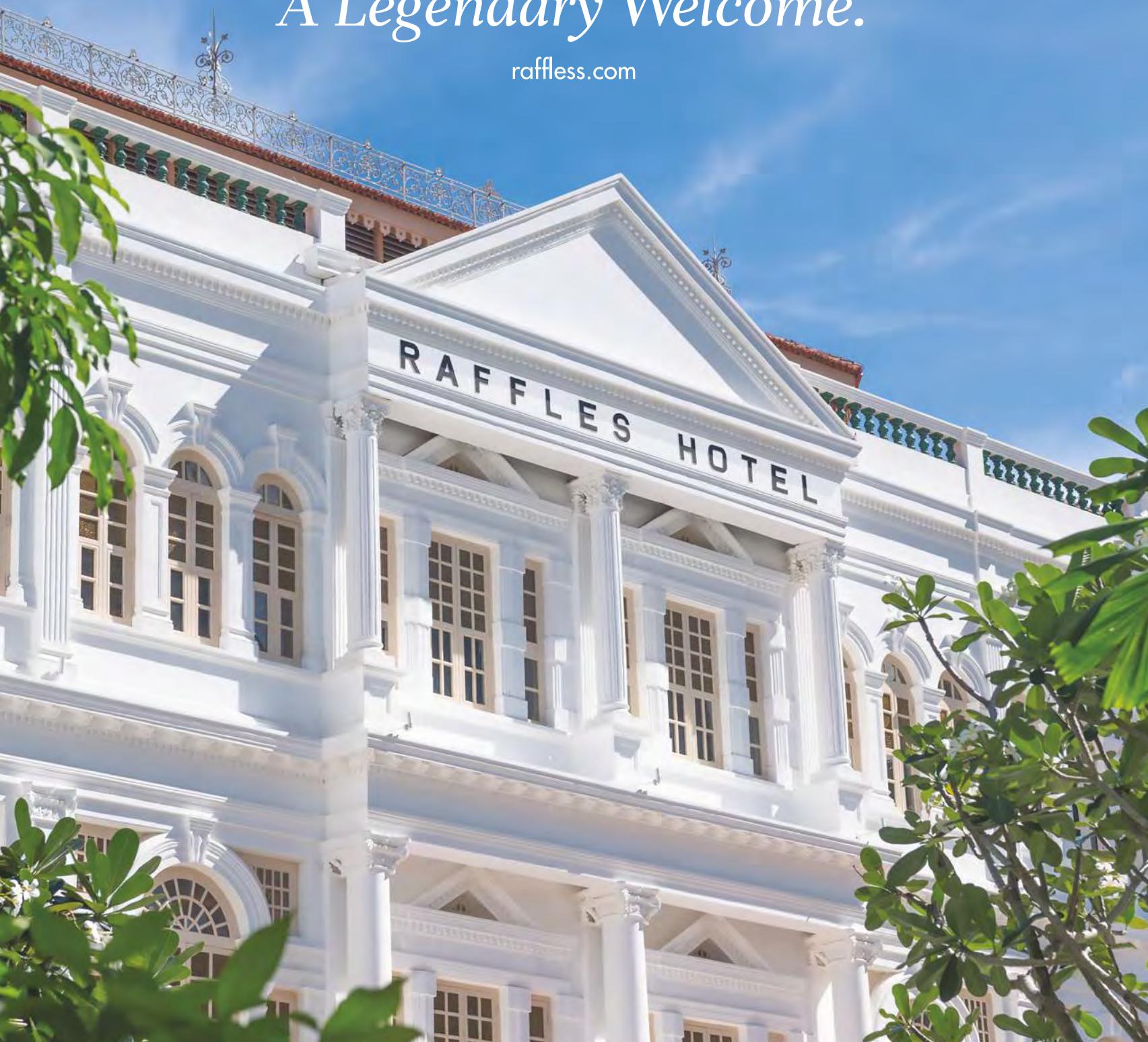
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Building back better



What is the future of travel? At this very moment last year, my vision of the future was one of abundant travel opportunities, made possible by convenient air services, some of which at affordable price points, that allow anyone to travel anytime. More destinations are opening up for tourism, fresh hotels are springing up in exciting destinations, and the growing presence of specialised tour and activity suppliers that present destinations in new light also serve to inspire travel and encourage exploration of new places.

Who would have guessed that the travel landscape would change so drastically this year because of a single virus? I would never have imagined travel to become so inaccessible, that only business-critical trips may be permissible, that costly and invasive swab tests are compulsory for travellers to be cleared for take-off, and that one may need to jump through more hoops to secure a travel visa and government-issue entry approval.

Travel Hall of Fame

Since 2002, TTG Asia Media has honoured luminaries that have won the prestigious TTG Travel Award for at least 10 consecutive times for the same award title in the Travel Hall of Fame.

At present, these exceptional organisations and their years of induction are:

- Singapore Airlines Limited (2002)
- Singapore Changi Airport (2002)
- Hertz Asia Pacific (2005)
- Royal Cliff Hotels Group - The State of Exclusivity & Fascination (2006)
- Star Cruises (2008)
- Sabre Asia Pacific Pte Ltd (2009)
- SilkAir (Singapore) Private Limited (2010)
- Lotte Tour (2011)
- Hong Kong International Airport (2013)
- Raffles Hotel Singapore (2013)
- Regal Airport Hotel (2015)
- Banyan Tree Spa (2015)
- Qatar Airways (2016)
- Thai Airways International Public Company Limited (2016)
- Thailand Convention & Exhibition Bureau (2016)

Travel and tourism for one and all who can afford it – in terms of time and money – no longer exists.

While the absence of travellers is a relief for communities struggling with overtourism, it has also provided a sobering realisation that we cannot do without tourism, for it touches many aspects of our life in positive ways – as an employer, a consumption stimulator for other industries, a supporter of community development, and a contributor to conservation efforts.

Can we rise from the ashes as responsible and appreciative travellers who make every trip count for something? Or, as professionals in the travel and tourism trade, ensure our work leaves a legacy for the communities we touch?

In these early days of tourism recovery, the answer seems promising. Hospitality players are partnering small businesses and communities within and beyond the tourism space to rebuild demand together and help each other ride out the storm.

Tours and activity operators are arousing interest in community-based tourism – even if only as an answer to safe distancing needs of travellers today.

So, even as initial travel demand seems to be mostly driven by convenient resort locations or the best deal in town, and not so much for meaningful and sustainable purposes, travel and tourism suppliers can be the heroes we need to move us towards a virtuous rebound.

A consistent move towards sustainable and responsible travel needs to start with programming, by ensuring that featured activities and contractors support host destinations, communities and local conservation efforts in some form.

Travel and tourism can build back better and stronger, and it is up to us to make that happen.

Karen Yue
Group Editor

- Royal Plaza on Scotts (2018)
- Royal Caribbean International (2018)
- Best Western Hotels & Resorts (2019)
- Travelport (2019)

TTG Asia Media is pleased to announce that it has set up a virtual TTG Travel Hall of Fame (www.ttgtravelhof.com), which will enable us to showcase the accolades, artefacts and memorabilia of the region's most exceptional travel organisations in a far more effective way and to a global audience.



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Domestic crowds throng the area around Tokyo's Sensoji Temple this October amid Japan's Go To Travel campaign to revive its ailing tourism industry

Scratching the travel itch

As more countries float the idea of regional travel bubbles, hyper-localised and short-haul travel look set to pave the way for tourism recovery, with businesses adapting their strategies to create more intimate and secure experiences. **Pamela Chow** finds out more

As cities and countries in Asia start easing their quarantine orders, the strong itch to travel has begun bubbling forth. Mirroring the successes of China's domestic travel trends, other Asian countries with accessible state borders are seeing activity peak in the period leading up to public holidays.

Data from Adara showed a spike in hotel searches towards the end of August across Taiwan, Japan and South Korea, in the lead-up to the Mid-Autumn Festival and its accompanying public holidays. Owing to the resumption of domestic flights, larger countries like China and India have demonstrated positive growth in travel

figures across August and September.

Even in smaller markets such as Singapore and Malaysia, where travel restrictions persist, residents are satisfying their wanderlust with increased demand for staycations.

Luxury group Belmond reported "a steady run of bookings" since the reopening of its Asia properties from July 1, "albeit off very low base", shared Iain Langridge, its divisional managing director Asia Pacific.

Carolyn Corda, Adara CMO, said: "Even as success in containing the pandemic plays out differently across the region, insights from the Adara Traveler Trends Tracker reveal a gradual increase in travel intent from Asia-Pacific travellers over the third quarter of 2020."

Recognising that the domestic trend is here to stay, governments and businesses in Asia-Pacific have pivoted their strategy inwards. The Taiwanese government is providing individual travellers a one-time subsidy for hotel stays of up to NT\$2,000 (US\$70).

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has debuted Discover Taiwan sailings onboard *Explorer Dream*.

Similarly, the Singapore Tourism Board (STB) is giving all adult Singaporeans S\$100 (US\$74) in digital vouchers this December to spend on staycations, local tours and attractions.

Over in Hong Kong, residents are eligible to join a free local tour by spending at least HK\$800 (US\$103) at brick-and-mortar retail and dining outlets in the city, under a new initiative by the Hong Kong Tourism Board to spur domestic consumption.



“Hong Kong is a popular destination (with our Singapore customers) and will attract the year-end holiday crowds. Collaboration with airlines, the tourism board and local operators – such as theme parks – will be critical to kick-start the recovery of leisure travel,” opined Seah.

While this is not the first reciprocal arrangement in Asia – green lanes have been established for essential and official travel between Singapore and Malaysia, Brunei, Indonesia, South Korea, India and selected regions in China – it is the first for leisure travel without quarantine, potentially setting the tone for more of such facilities to come.

Already, the UK has expanded its travel corridor to include several Asian countries, such as Japan, Taiwan, Malaysia, Singapore, Vietnam and Thailand. On October 28, Germany joined in with a reciprocal green lane for essential travel with Singapore.

any travel that resumes in the coming months will likely be more expensive than before. Hence, international travel is likely to be limited to more affluent travellers, at least in the short-to medium-term.”

Tan speculated that when borders reopen, Singapore is “likely to see travellers arrive in smaller groups, with a desire for more exclusive, personalised experiences”. In anticipation of this demand, STB is collaborating with Adobe to develop the One Singapore Experience, a programme assisting businesses and attractions with using data analytics to create bespoke and engaging products.

Other concerns from visitors of the future include a heightened desire for physical and mental wellness, predicted Tan, alongside more eco-friendly business practices and sustainable surroundings.

Leaning into this trend, Belmond will continue to pursue a hyper-localisation strategy, “focusing on markets where it will be easier to travel to from Singapore – for instance, Thailand, and other parts of Asia”.

He added: “Coming from an island nation, Singaporeans are accustomed to getting on a plane for a short getaway. We expect short weekend trips among this demographic to continue to be popular. We are anticipating more travel within Asia as Singaporeans and Singapore residents explore more of their own backyard and seek extended, private and inherently safe escapes.”

And as regional tourism opens up, andBeyond’s Robinson opined that consumers may prefer to travel within a single country, noting a rise in demand for “simpler itineraries without having to cross too many borders”.

Still, a fragmented consumer demographic is to be expected, said Corda, as the recovery pace will vary across geographical markets. With the term “revenge travel” being coined to describe the pent-up travel demand, this behaviour will play out differently across different segments and markets.

Corda advised: “Even though Asia-Pacific may be poised for a gradual resumption of regional travel in the coming months, there are challenges in predicting traveller behaviour with absolute accuracy.”

“Rather than attempting to forecast sweeping trends across the region, travel marketers would benefit from tracking a wide range of consumer data from an array of data streams, and using extracted insights to ensure individual campaigns are tailored and relevant to audiences.”

We expect short weekend trips...to continue to be popular.

Iain Langridge, divisional managing director Asia Pacific, Belmond

Facilitating recovery

With the restoration of international travel as the ultimate goal, countries are training their eyes on potential travel bubbles and corridors.

Such bilateral arrangements “appear to have greater feasibility in the region, and are swiftly being established”, noted Corda.

Already, Singapore and Hong Kong have announced the opening of their borders exclusively to each other, allowing for leisure tourism on dedicated flights without the need for quarantine or a controlled itinerary. Travellers will be subject to mutually recognised Covid-19 tests in order to fly, under the arrangement that is expected to launch in November, according to Hong Kong leader Carrie Lam.

In response to the announcement, Singapore’s Dynasty Travel leapt into action by crafting a collection of “competitive tactical offers” for airfares, accommodation and attractions, shared spokesperson Alicia Seah.

Belmond’s Langridge shared that the company is “maintaining a keen eye on longhaul inbound markets”, in hopes that “more countries in Europe will follow suit for the 2021 season”.

Luxury leads the way

Conversation about international travel bubbles has sparked interest in the luxury market, which some experts speculate will be the first segment to recover, with private travel emerging as a “more popular travel option”, said Nicole Robinson, CMO, andBeyond.

This trend has been observed in China where some hotels in the luxury segment have seen occupancy rates shoot past 2019’s figures since reopening in March, with the inflection point being the Labour Day week in May.

Noting this pattern, Singapore has jumped at the chance to develop experiences targeting the rich.

STB CEO Keith Tan explained: “With fewer flights and more requirements for testing and certification,

With powers combined

Collaboration in the hospitality space is growing in strength as hotels and resorts seek fresh ways to charm the domestic market. By **TTG Asia** reporters

Hotels and resorts eager to capture a larger slice of the domestic market are realising that the usual deals no longer appeal to an audience that is looking for fresh ways to satiate their wanderlust at a time when international travel is restricted.

To enhance guests experiences during their holidays at home, hotel and resorts are working with other organisations within and beyond the hospitality space to develop enriching programmes.

Far East Hospitality has a suite of experiential staycation packages that support local SMEs, such as home-grown aquaculture farm and floating restaurant, Smith Marine Kelong, and local photography studio StudioPlay.

These partnerships are needed as “staycationers value unique and highly enjoyable hotel experiences that they otherwise cannot get at home”, explained Arthur Kiong, CEO of Far East Hospitality. “In other words, they do not seek the standard room and breakfast.”

The new Capella Bangkok leverages its location on Bangkok’s oldest road to bring traditional experiences to its guests. Mindfulness sessions, for instance, are led by the head monk of Wat Yannawa, a two-hundred-year-old temple nearby while Muay Thai training is conducted by transgender boxing champion and movie star Parinya Kiatbusaba. The hotel also scoured the Charoenkrung area for Chinese herbal shops to bring traditional treatments to its Auriga Wellness Spa.

John Blanco, the hotel’s general manager, said these local experiences are appealing to domestic travellers, as they

Hospitality is a part of the tourism ecosystem and we must do all possible to help each other preserve core capabilities.

Arthur Kiong,
CEO, Far East Hospitality

are “excited when presented with new ways to engage their heritage”.

Bangkok-headquartered Dusit International’s Local Experiences programme, launched in summer, also offers a chance for guests to appreciate local eats and souvenirs while supporting socially responsible enterprises.

Dusit hotels in Chiang Mai and Hua Hin are planning on similar local collaboration – by bringing wet markets into the properties on certain days of the month.

Over in Malaysia, Pullman Miri Waterfront went big with its guest experience upgrade. It hosted a three-day carnival, Trois Jois, which featured activities for all ages, with booth sales, fun games, live performances as well as cooking classes.

According to Joyce Surendra, cluster director of sales and distribution, representing both Pullman Miri Waterfront and Pullman Kuching, Trois Jois was well received by all who attended. There are plans to initiate a similar event in Pullman Kuching on November 21 and 22, and possibly turn Trois Jois into an annual event for Sarawak.

Local collaboration is also seen in Penang, where G Hotel Gurney works with top attractions, Tropical Spice

Garden and Penang Batik Factory, as well as experienced local guides to introduce guests to the destination’s heritage and nature.

The partnerships with product owners brought guests cost savings and provided a hassle free experience as entrance tickets to tourist attractions

are pre-booked. “In addition, the package includes perks at the hotel such as complimentary meals and bicycle rentals,” said Michael Hanratty, general manager of G Hotel Penang.

Hanratty sees such multi-player partnerships leading the future of hotel experiences, and intends to “continue or even expand on our partnerships” once Malaysia welcomes again

international travellers. Should these packages be a hit, he hopes to take it beyond Penang through collaboration with domestic or international airlines, or to combine packages with those offered by tourism players in Langkawi to curate two-state packages.

Meanwhile, Kiroro Resort in Japan’s Hokkaido is already developing local and international collaborations to make its three hotels – Sheraton Hokkaido Kiroro Resort; The Kiroro, a Tribute Portfolio Hotel Hokkaido; and Yu Kiroro – more attractive to potential guests.

Kiroro taps its nearby, western-Hokkaido market, collaborating with other local businesses whose customers might appreciate what the area has to offer. Such activities includes luxury cruises in partnership with Otaru Port Marina, with F&B prepared and served by the resort’s team; exclusive wine-paired dinners for Yoichi Winery members; and a luxury driving experience to the resort for lunch in collaboration with a local car importer.

The company has even facilitated the creation of Akaigawa DMO. As part of DMO activities, Kiroro uses Akaigawa produce and is planning to offer a night village this winter as well as other entertainment. Hirofumi Watanabe, DMO leader and hotel general manager of Kiroro Resort, expects these activities to support local tourism long-term by making Akaigawa and other local towns more appealing as a year-round destination.

On Sado Island, Niigata Prefecture, hotels, ryokans and guest houses have joined the Sado Tourism Association’s new visitor membership club, Sadomaru. Launched in September, Sadomaru is an app that visitors download and show on arrival to earn points that can be redeemed for discounts on stays, as well as in restaurants and shops.

The scheme provides insight on the combinations of accommodations, activities and cuisine that tourists enjoy, to help local operators provide more extensive options for tourists long-term.

Room for growth

For some hotels, dangling complimentary experiences as an additional



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perk to their staycation packages has significantly boosted occupancy rates. One such example is lyf Funan Singapore which has hooked up with two tour agencies to weave free tours into its staycation experience.

These travel agency tie-ups are part of lyf Funan Singapore's signature #lyfgoeslocal programme, where guests get to experience the neighbourhood's local and authentic elements, shared Ervin Yeo, managing director for Southeast Asia, The Ascott.

"Since the launch of the joint offerings on August 1, 2020, we have seen an increase in enquiries and reservations on our staycation promotions, especially during the recent long weekends. lyf Funan Singapore was operating at near 100 per cent occupancy across the Hari Raya Haji and National Day long weekends," he added. In comparison, the hotel was running at 85 per cent average occupancy rate from April to June 2020.

Beneficial for all

Hoteliers believe that working with other sector players will motivate travel desire, unlock new revenue streams, spread business around and uplift the



entire tourism industry.

Kiong said: "Survival is the priority for many SMEs today amid the economic fallout from Covid-19 and many businesses have stepped up to help them weather the pandemic. As we continue to wrestle with the pandemic, we must not only worry about our own business survival but those of our key partners as well."

"Hospitality is a part of the tourism ecosystem and we must do all possible to help each other preserve core capabilities. If there is one takeaway from this crisis, it is – we will survive only when we consider others."

Blanco acknowledged that Capella Bangkok's work to enrich guest experiences with local expertise enables it to provide support to external entities and benefit from "relationships which allow

From left:
Penang Street Art; Trois Jois at Pullman Miri Waterfront; Sheraton Hokkaido Kiroro Resort

us to collaborate deeper and in more creative ways".

Bringing local partners into the hotel experience – literally – also has safety advantages. Dusit's plans to bring wet markets into its Chiang Mai and Hua Hin hotels "generates a safer experience overall for guests and vendors", opined Boon Kwee Lim, COO of Dusit International, as they can interact in an environment with enforced international-standard health and safety protocols.

At Trois Jois, tour operators, wedding and events service providers, independent artisans and cottage traders, and more were among the 21 commercial participants, allowing the carnival to function as a platform for local businesses to sell their products and services, thereby reaching benefits beyond travel and tourism.

ADVERTORIAL

 **GANGWON PROVINCE** Tourism Marketing Department

Wonderland of Snow

An array of activities and cultural experiences await intrepid MICE travellers in the snowiest province of Korea

Following the success of PyeongChang 2018, ski resorts in Gangwon Province have been capitalising on its "Olympic Legacy", by incorporating ice sports games and cultural programmes into marketing a premium winter experience to diverse markets in South-east Asia and beyond.

Gangwon Province hosted 5,000 incentive group members from Millionaire Club Indonesia in February 2020 for its corporate teambuilding programme.



Visitors had a go at competing in snow sleds, which culminated with an award ceremony at High 1 resort.

Cultural samplers included learning about the Jeongseon Arirang, and experiencing the Jeongseon Arirang Market, with shopping vouchers sponsored by Gangwon Province.

Ski resorts in Gangwon offer foreigner-friendly ski lessons led by expert instructors, luxurious accommodation, a variety of entertainment and even wellness-themed attractions in the complex.

As hosts of the Winter Olympics, **Yongpyong Resort** boasts Korea's first, and biggest ski resort, as well as breathtaking views on Korea's highest skyway – Mt Balwangsan Skywalk. IHG chain **Alpensia Resort** commands fantastic views of Daegwallyeong, and features an all seasons complex to soak up the elegant atmosphere and pure nature.

Never a dull moment at **High 1 Resort**, the dynamic ski park features long runs and varying slope varieties, on top of entertainment options such as golf, firework shows and casino. Otherwise, the



trekking trail at Untangodo – 1200m above sea level – makes for a refreshing forest-bathing experience overlooking the lush forest of Jeongseon.

With good accessibility from Seoul and a four-season leisure complex, **SONO Belle Vivaldi Park** proudly showcases Snowy Land, a 14-zone snow sled park that appeals to children, and the young at heart. The Muslim-friendly resort comes with a halal restaurant and prayer room.

Fresh wonders

From reimagining past grandeur to bringing nature within, these new hotel openings will certainly make for impressive stays.

TTG Asia rounds them up



KAGI Maldives Spa Island

Big on wellness, the 50-villa KAGI Maldives Spa Island boasts a 1,500m² spa and fitness hub, a dive centre and house reef.

Accommodation options are spacious, spanning Beach Pool Villa, Lagoon Pool Villa and Ocean Pool Villa. Every unit comes with a private pool, sun deck and expansive indoor-outdoor bathroom.

The property is accessible by a 15-minute seaplane or 60-minute speedboat transfer from Velana International Airport.



Parkroyal Collection Marina Bay

The iconic building that was once Marina Mandarin is being transformed into a “garden in a hotel” – the first concept of its kind in Singapore – as part of its rebranding to Parkroyal Collection Marina Bay.

Crafted as a soothing sanctuary that takes in a soaring, 13m-high landscaped wall designed to offer a panoramic view of a forest as well as sculptural pavilions and glass greenhouses, the hotel’s interior will be a sight to behold.



Mondrian Seoul Itaewon

A debut for the brand in Asia-Pacific, all 296 keys and range of dining and leisure options at the Mondrian Seoul Itaewon seek to present Seoul’s dynamism through bold designs and colourful art.

An outdoor pool and bar offers views of the city, while lobby restaurant Cleo blends Miami vibes with Mediterranean cuisine. Rumpus Room and Blind Spot entertain with uplifting DJ sets, while Privilege bar boasts some of the world’s finest single malt whiskey stocks.



Andaz Xiamen

Drawing inspiration from the “garden on the sea” concept and styled as a modern Southern Chinese mansion, Andaz Xiamen offers 304 rooms and suites that come with complimentary non-alcoholic minibar drinks and snacks.

Built for both leisure and corporate clientele, the hotel has almost 2,000m² of event space as well as a 24-hour fitness centre, heated outdoor pool, and four F&B venues.



FCC Angkor by Avani

The neo-colonial FCC Angkor by Avani in Siem Reap’s former French quarter has reopened with the introduction of a new resort wing, a second saltwater swimming pool and Visaya Spa. While the spa is a contemporary interpretation

of the region’s traditional wellness culture, the new all-suite wing will see envelope guests in a fusion of French colonial and Khmer-inspired interiors. Family-friendly outdoor relaxation zones are available.





Forging a new path forward

As the hospitality industry ushers in a new world of travel defined by safety and hygiene norms, melding sanitation with service remains a tough balancing act, says Garth Simmons, COO, Malaysia, Indonesia, Singapore and South Asia at Accor. By **S Puvaneswary**

Accor was one of the first hotel chains globally to launch a cleanliness and safety protocol, ALLSAFE, with some unique features, such as free medical teleconsultations offered in partnership with insurer, AXA. What are Accor's guiding principals when deciding what to include in the ALLSAFE programme?

Accor has been prioritising the safety and well-being of customers and employees on a daily basis for more than 50 years. High standards of hygiene and cleanliness are already delivered across all our brands globally. However, due to the Covid-19 pandemic and to ensure guests' safety as hotels reopen, we have elevated those norms with the launch of the ALLSAFE label which represents some of the most stringent cleaning standards and operational protocols in the world of hospitality.

ALLSAFE is co-created by Bureau Veritas and leading medical authorities in each country to reinforce confidence and trust in travel.

In each country, we have to follow the local authority rules in addition to ALLSAFE guidelines, so that we get the strictest and most comprehensive protocols in place.

We know our guests are keen to get back to travel – and we want to be ready to welcome them in a safe and hygienic environment.

Now that health and safety protocols are a given, and the hospitality space is flooded by cleanliness promises, how will Accor evolve its ALLSAFE programme so that it continues to be a unique proposition?

New stringent cleanliness standards will be implemented and continued to be monitored across all Accor hotels and will include a reinforced cleaning programme, with frequent disinfection of all high-touch areas like elevators, lounge areas, and public

restrooms with staff in restaurants to wear masks and gloves. An enhanced in-room cleaning programme using hospital grade cleaning materials will now be a standard across all Accor hotels.

Dining outlets at the hotels will also be reconfigured to ensure seating areas comply with government restrictions on social distancing. Diners and all guests will be provided with hand sanitiser, wipes and masks.

The ALLSAFE label will help guests understand when these standards have been met in our hotels. Guests will be able to verify hotels that are certified compliant with ALLSAFE standards on hotel property websites, through our customer contact centres as well as on property.

With so many properties across the globe, how will Accor ensure that each abides by the ALLSAFE standards?

Safety is our most important concern at this time. Training and education of employees around the world is a critical aspect of health and safety and will be included in the ALLSAFE label. Accor will launch a new comprehensive safety and hygiene training programme to ensure all employees worldwide have the skills and education necessary to protect themselves and our guests.

Online training as well as classroom training at each property has been mandated prior to any Accor hotels reopening. In addition we are providing temperature screening, masks, sanitisers and personal protection equipment to all staff to ensure they are safe when they are working and at home.

How does Accor balance the traditions of hospitable service with new hygiene norms, such as safe distancing and contactless service?

Covid-19 has put some unique pressures on our hotel teams to deliver a warm welcome to guests, while also ensuring their wellbeing through additional hygiene and safety measures.

While we cannot greet our guests in the same way we might have in the past, our duty of care and our commitment to meeting their needs remains the same. The use of contactless payment solutions and desk-free

check-in doesn't mean that our guests don't have interactions with our team members; it simply means that these interactions will be a little more physically distanced but still very much from the heart.

Our teams are so excited to welcome guests back that we have seen some really heart-warming stories emerge as travellers return to hotels and we are

Where possible, we have made the introduction of hygiene welcome packs, masks, etc. more fun... and we are careful not to make it all seem like people are in a hospital-like environment, while ensuring hospital-grade cleanliness.

doing more than ever to ensure we provide extraordinary experiences to our cherished guests. Where possible, we have made the introduction of hygiene welcome packs, masks, etc. more fun in a way that dovetails with our brand personality and we are careful not to make it all seem like people are in a hospital-like environment, while ensuring hospital-grade cleanliness. Our teams are trained in delivering ALLSAFE standards to our guests in a way that does not interfere with the enjoyment of their stay as much as possible.

The future of experiences

Emerging from the pandemic, tours and activities are becoming more intimate and digitalised, and featuring sharper storytelling, finds [Anne Somanas](#)



The shift in guest touchpoints for experiences post-Covid is not just about safety; it's about new forms of delivery, more deliberate choices by travellers and the rise of virtual and hybrid experiences that can enhance experiences even further.

Heavier doses of social distancing and sanitisation, more intimate experiences in smaller groups, a proclivity for less congested spaces and new forms of delivery and new ways of immersion will shape the future of travel experiences, said tours and activities specialists throughout Asia.

Shifts in guest touchpoints

Safety, sanitation and health measures are impacting the entire continuum of travel experiences from start to finish, leading many operators to implement advanced bookings, e-maps and cashless payments. In many cases, operators are leveraging technology and digitalisation to create what can be

deemed "contactless touchpoints" for equally memorable experiences.

"Aside from making processes safer, digitalisation also allows us to enhance the overall visitor experience," said Patrick Lee, sales and business development director at Singapore's One Faber Group, drawing an example of its Singapore Cable Car attraction which now has a "geo-location commentary system" that functions as a personal tour guide in every cabin.

At the Siam Piwat Group's ICONSIAM shopping mall in Bangkok, whose basement contains an indoor floating market of eats from around Thailand, changing their touchpoints has meant engaging shoppers right in their homes. "Our Luxury Chat and Shop is a first-ever service that no other shopping malls have operated before, and it has become a benchmark service and case study that draws attention from many world brands," shared a spokesperson for ICONSIAM.

Ethical travel operator Local Alike

has pointed out that the biggest operational change is in how they transport guests, having solved the issue of limited van capacity due to social distancing by encouraging guests to drive to the destination themselves.

"It's not only safer for them; it reduces the costs of the tour so guests are happier with the price," said Chitpol Watcharapan, senior director, international programmes at Local Alike.

To cater to FITs growing demand for self-exploration, Klook in May 2020 launched a dedicated private car rental page.

Rise of virtual and hybrid experiences

People's hesitance to step out the door has led to a rise in virtual and hybrid experiences and forced operators to get creative with their delivery, creating many new business opportunities for leisure and business events.

Airbnb in particular seized on the market space for virtual experiences

ANALYSIS

early on. Having temporarily paused its Airbnb Experiences offering globally from mid-March to May to support social distancing efforts, the company launched Airbnb Online Experiences in April 2020.

"We had 50,000 seats booked within the first two months since launch," shared Parin Mehta, director, Asia-Pacific, Airbnb Experiences. "The online experiences are now our fastest growing product (for leisure and team-building purposes)."

Singapore's Sentosa is also playing with what they term "phy-gital" formats.

"On the consumer front, we collaborated with our Island Partners (tenants) to roll out several free online offerings, such as the virtual Sentosa on Animal Crossing: New Horizons and other leisure experiences like video conferencing backgrounds and Yoga by the Beach," shared Lynette Ang, chief marketing officer of Sentosa Development Corporation.

Prioritising safety and social distancing has also meant a predictable downsizing of groups.

"Where I see the permanent tectonic shift is that before we comfortably had groups of over 40 people on a tour. I think those will taper off a bit," opined Jason Loe, founder of Tribe Tours.

"The other change has to come from operators and activities themselves...in terms of the delivery means," he added.

To this end, Singapore's Tribe Tours, which has previously gained a name for its cutting-edge experiences such as its Good Morning Singapore and Mr Lee Kuan Yew guided tours, has launched a new product: livestream hybrid experiences which allow large groups of people to participate in the safety of their homes.

The most popular ones so far feature a livestream behind the scenes of famous traditional food factories

Ultimately, if you pair a good story that's told well (with an activity), it doesn't matter if it (was built for Covid or not).

Jason Loe
Tribe Tours



paired with an ingredient box – delivered to participants' homes during the livestream – allowing guests to cook along under the guidance of factory chefs on screen.

It debuted to an immensely positive reception. "Since our launch in mid-September, the tour has been fully booked out every weekend," said Loe, who also saw corporate interest in the tours for teambuilding.

Another very popular livestream addition is Tribe's escape room-style tour in Singapore's Chinatown where participants can direct and solve a murder mystery and learn the history of Chinatown through the eyes of characters in the outdoor puzzle adventure.

All livestreams are limited to 30 minutes "to keep it entertaining (and punchy because our attention span online is not as focused)", said Loe.

Intimate, secluded experiences are hot

Klook described travellers post-pandemic as being "more measured and deliberate," and points to travellers gravitating toward "smaller-group trips that are more intimate and personalised" – a growing opportunity for activity aggregators like Klook, whose predominant focus has been on serving the FIT segment.

Klook has witnessed a stronger demand for outdoor adventurous offerings, especially in Taiwan which resumed domestic travel early. "Our traffic data in Taiwan for outdoor and island-hopping activities surged 10 times in June this year," said CS Soong, vice president, corporate development.

Local Alike's Chitpol stated that the desire for seclusion and the outdoors paves the way for the rise of community-based tourism (CBT). "The capacity of local communities is in itself too small for mainstream tourism, which automatically reduces risk. In the past, we may have looked at large mass markets as desirable; now it turns out that the smaller capacity of CBT helps it to shine because it means less health risk," he told *TTG Show Daily*.

"There are still thousands of communities that nobody is looking at yet. People want to be the first to everything. If we can develop new destinations that have never been explored before, it will be the choice for people who want to be the first to announce 'I'm here'. We also want to be the first to offer these experiences to tourists," added Chitpol.



...it turns out that the smaller capacity of CBT helps the activity to shine because it means less health risk.

Chitpol Watcharapan,
Senior director, international programmes
Local Alike

Coordinated recovery

Aviation communities have worked out sensible formats for travel resumption, and it is now up to world governments to agree on consistent and clearly communicated border controls to facilitate sustainable recovery. By **Pamela Chow**



A harmonised approach is needed for air travel recovery

As the aviation sector readies for take-off again, experts assert that authorities must implement a consistent system of protocols and policies across borders, or the rate of travel recovery will be significantly stifled.

To set a precedent, industry bigwigs have rallied behind the International Civil Aviation Organization's (ICAO's) *Takeoff: Guidance for Air Travel through the COVID-19 Public Health Crisis*, an authoritative and comprehensive framework detailing a series of risk-based measures for air transport operations during the Covid-19 crisis.

Pushing this framework, IATA has joined hands with Airports Council International to develop a manual that can help airports and airlines integrate ICAO's guidelines into their own operational manuals. IATA is also developing a certification to ensure that aviation players are properly implementing the guidelines.

Conrad Clifford, IATA's regional vice president for Asia Pacific, said: "(We need to) ensure airlines can safely restart passenger flights in a harmonised manner. The priority now is for governments to facilitate the restart of air connectivity in line with the ICAO guidance and principles."

He impressed that it is pertinent for "the entire travel and tourism sector to send an aligned message" about the new measures adopted by the industry.

Marco Navarria, global content

director, CAPA – Centre for Aviation, agreed: "The most important measure would be for this coordinated inter-governmental approach. Meanwhile, there is in fact some useful interaction among industry bodies like IATA, ACI and WTTC towards producing ground-rules to encourage travellers back into the sky. But so long as governments are unilaterally closing borders, without any consultation, the situation makes for little prospect of sensible progress."

This situation must be addressed before travel can approach any prospect of recovery. Subhas Menon, director general of the Association of Asia Pacific Airlines (AAPA), added that an united message would "inspire public confidence in air travel".

He noted: "Each government has imposed its own version of travel bans so much so we are faced with a labyrinthian patchwork of restrictions that suppresses demand and stymies travel confidence. For flights to resume, the most important factor is for governments to mutually agree on favourable conditions to facilitate cross-border travel."

Evaluate quarantine needs

One of these favourable conditions is reasonable quarantine policies. Even for countries that have reopened their borders, rigid quarantine requirements are a strong barrier to entry, opined experts.

Clifford shared that an analysis has found that 83 per cent of travellers "would not even consider traveling if quarantine measures were imposed at their destination".

He stressed: "Mandatory quarantine measures stop people from travelling. We urge governments to avoid quarantine measures when reopening their economies."

The EU has set a good example of this by implementing ICAO's guidelines to remove travel restrictions and quarantine requirements within union countries. It is also looking at opening its borders to third-party countries that are at a similar or better level of containment of the virus.

Coordinated rebound

The top priority for stimulating corporate travel – which may see quicker recovery than leisure traffic, thanks to fast lanes and relaxed travel restrictions between borders – is coordination and transparency on safety standards and quarantine requirements, said Navarria.

He shared: "While no one has the secret sauce to lure executives back into corporate travel, it is restoring traveller confidence, and not stimulating pricing, that should be the top priority for airlines and our wider industry. Travellers need to know what to expect from the entire travel experience. This will require wide collaboration and coordination to ensure consistent quarantine requirements, airline safety standards, hotel protocols and beyond."

Governments must facilitate the restart of air connectivity in line with the ICAO guidance and principles

Conrad Clifford,
Regional vice president,
Asia Pacific, IATA



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As locals represent the face of a destination, understanding the sentiments of the resident community can provide invaluable guidance to destinations in structuring their tourism developments. Olivier Henry-Biabaud, CEO of TCI Research tells *Karen Yue* why and how

Heart of the matter

TCI Research pioneered the Resident Sentiment Index model. What is it and what does it do?

It is a survey that has been created to help destinations gauge and benchmark the level of tourism support they have in their community. It has 40 key sentiment indicators which are related to the residents' perception of tourism impact and the level of tourism engagement. It also tracks points of vigilance for tourism promoters to address.

It has been successfully developed in Europe over the past four years, and is now expanded to the US and Asia.

The survey is standard, but there is room for destinations to apply particular context. For example, destinations that are cruise-dependent or event-driven will use a specific set of questions. Today, we have questions to take in the Covid-19 context.

Why is a regular study on host community sentiments important?

Residents are the faces of destinations. We know from our surveys that the local attitude is the top factor shaping visitor experience and satisfaction, and is more impactful than the quality of accommodation or attraction.

Local attitude today has the power to activate a positive story for a destination. Today, there is a uniformity of tourism products across destinations – the same shopping brands, the same hotel brands, and even the same type of attractions. So, for destinations to differentiate, they will need to rely on local attitudes.

Furthermore, destinations can create unique experiences with supportive locals, as well as enhance and secure a safe sense of place – something that visitors are now prioritising.

We have clear evidence to show that destinations cannot be competitive and appealing if they lack local community support.

Another great benefit of having strong local support, along with other key factors like safety and cleanliness, is that destinations can justify the high prices they demand from visitors.

What are the risks of rising disenchantment towards tourism?

There is the risk of local community pushing back against tourism, which affects visitor experiences and creates a negative reputation for the country.

We know that people tend to choose a destination based not just on the selection of

tourism products, but also the environment and context of visiting. If the destination is constantly in the news for protests against tourists or rejecting tourism, there is a lower chance of it being selected by travellers compared to a destination that is seen as always being welcoming.

Would a contented host community mean the absence of overtourism or overtourism potential? Should destinations still work to ensure balanced tourism development even when their residents are happy about the state of development?

Yes! This is interesting. Some destinations see no need to capture resident sentiments because they feel that their people are happy or have never heard anything negative.

It may be true that nothing is wrong when residents are not complaining. However, taking care of resident sentiment is important and should be a permanent concern because when problems happen, it is often way too late to remedy.

The other thing is, the vast majority of your community may be happy with tourism but we know from experience, particularly in Europe, that a vocal and angry minority of just 10 per cent can generate a lot of problems and plenty of negative media exposure as well as bad experience for visitors.

That is why we have also created a predictive indicator in the Resident Sentiment Index model. Destinations should monitor at least once a year, and make sure the level of tourism-phobia is kept below 10 per cent on average. Once a destination sees double-digit tourism-phobia, there is potential anti-tourism activism and protests.

What was the tourism-phobia level pre-pandemic?

We have good data set in Europe where we first started the Resident Sentiment Index model, as well as in the US. On average, there was a five per cent tourism-phobia level – a safe level – in Europe pre-pandemic; in the US, it was three per cent.

The problem we saw there, was that the numbers were just an average. The dispersion of tourism-phobia across European cities ranged from one per cent to 25 per cent. It was a low one per cent in cities like Lisbon and Prague, and above 20 per cent in cities like Barcelona.

Our other concern was that tourism-phobia level could also range widely across

different parts of a city and across the year. For example, a city with a popular ski resort might get a safe average level all year round, but that level would spike to 20 per cent during peak season and in a particular district that received a lot of tourist traffic.

It is interesting to note that tourism-phobia is not correlated to tourism pressure. Popular cities like Rome and Paris get a relatively low and safe tourism-phobia score.

The profile of tourism-phobiacs is rather interesting, in that their fear of tourism development wasn't driven by personal experience of overtourism. Why do you think they have felt this way?

Tourism-phobiacs are defined as people who do not want to see tourism in their city. The roots of tourism-phobia can be very diverse. Sometimes it stems from very tangible problems in their everyday life, such as traffic jams, overcrowding, environmental degradation and encounters with disrespectful visitors.

Others may complain because they have seen tourism increasing housing prices or depleting livable spaces in the city centre to make way for tourism developments. There are some places in the world where we see residents believing that tourists are spreading the Covid-19 virus.

We have also seen tourism-phobiacs using tourism as a weapon for pushing their political agenda.

Fortunately, there is strong overall support for tourism in most cities.

It remains important for destination authorities to understand the roots of tourism-phobia, and address them early. In most cases, problems can be easily resolved, such as by rearranging traffic in the city centre, directing more tourist taxes to public cleaning and maintenance, or communicating to visitors on the right way to behave and to respect the locals, which will also show residents that the authorities are taking care of them while pushing for tourism business.

Did media content and social discussions on the good of zero tourism during the lockdown have a significant impact on host community sentiments?

There is some impact. The pandemic is casting a bright spotlight on pre-existing sentiments that are now reinforced.

During the lockdown, people have seen their surroundings becoming quieter and less polluted, native animals coming back or coming out, and so on. These observations have strengthened the pre-existing belief that tourism has a direct impact on the environment.

Our studies now show very clearly (that respondents perceive) that the main at-risk

impact of tourism is the environment.

In Asia, the net sentiment score for impact of tourism is very high and positive for factors like the economy (51 per cent), cultural activities and leisure on offer (50 per cent), infrastructure development (49 per cent), and the atmosphere and entertainment in town (43 per cent). However, right at the bottom of the list sits cleanliness of public spaces (30 per cent) and protection of the environment and natural sites (20 per cent).

It is important to understand that these impacts existed before the pandemic. The pandemic has not created new negative or positive sentiments, rather it has changed the ranking of these sentiments.

Destinations can improve visitor satisfaction easily through products, but bad reputation (caused by angry tourism-phobiacs) can be hard, long and pricey to fix.

Despite negative discussions on social media on the tourism industry's continued push even during the pandemic, your study has yielded largely positive sentiments. Why do you think this has happened?

Perhaps people have forgotten the good of tourism when tourism was thriving. When they saw the problems created by the absence of tourism – the loss of jobs and empty shops, for instance – they realised that they are missing something.

While people have been happy to enjoy less polluted skies, silent surroundings and improved nature conditions, many are also sad to see the destruction of local businesses and so many jobs. For many residents, knowing that people travel from afar to visit their home is a sense of pride.

The lockdown has highlighted both the positive and negative impact of tourism.

Few may have realised that balanced tourism has benefits. If you speak to residents, few would understand the meaning and concept of sustainable tourism. But they now see, through the lockdown, concrete examples of what it means to not have tourism. Today, the public is more aware of the ills of overtourism, and also that there needs to be some visitors.

What other surprising findings did you get from your Asian study?

I was delighted to hear that across the six

iconic Asian cities we surveyed (Seoul, Sydney, Shanghai, Bangkok, Tokyo and Singapore), overall sentiment is very supportive of tourism. Most are ready to welcome visitors again and are very proud to see tourists return.

There is a good contrast between the growing discrimination against certain tourists that emerged from our social listening and the actual findings from our survey; at least 70 to 80 per cent are still very much in favour of tourists coming back. We had expected more negativity.

Another good surprise is the very supportive attitude from young Asians. If this generation is able to see the good of tourism, and want to be part of tourism planning and development, then it is promising for the future of tourism. It also means that when tourism recovers, the industry can pick from a pool of passionate youths.

You mentioned earlier on that some tourism-phobiacs regard visitors as virus carriers. Will ongoing government messaging around Covid-19 prevention as well as measures help to reassure these residents?

Absolutely. The better destinations communicate to tourists their health and safety protocols, the greater support they will likely get from their residents.

However, we have seen some destinations that are restarting and having problems enforcing their protocols. It is not so much due to the lack of professional staff to enforce the practices, but more due to guests learning how to interact correctly with tourism staff and residents. Protocols are harder to enforce on the streets or at non-touristic places.

Which cities have done well in getting their residents on the side of tourism development?

There are good resident inclusivity initiatives in Asia but because Europe has had problems before, there are stronger examples from that part of the world.

Flanders, a small region in Belgium, has invented the concept of 'flourishing destination', where everything done for tourism development must have a positive impact on the visitor experience, the residents' quality of life, and the local business ecosystem which will in turn attract new investments to grow the city.

Copenhagen has a concept of localhood, which regards visitors as temporary residents. Every tourism development is measured against a set of KPIs that consider the satisfaction of both visitors and residents, and tourism experiences are co-created with residents.

In Lisbon, the DMO worked with the local population to identify specific shops or attractions that reflect the roots of the city and tell the real story of the destination.

Maintaining presence

Seoul has a variety of ways to stay top-of-mind among its global audience during this pandemic. By **Rachel AJ Lee**



From left:
Cooking activ-
ity in session
with safety
measures;
Seoullo 7017,
an elevated,
linear park



Seoul Metropolitan Government

Although South Korea's borders have not completely reopened, its capital, Seoul is actively preparing for tourists' eventual return.

Its top-of-mind initiatives include promotional videos by famous South Korean boyband BTS, where the seven members presented the city's charms, hidden spots and activities. This is how

Seoul Tourism Organisation (STO) brings Seoul to the global audience, instead of waiting for visitors to come to them. The videos are a hit, reaching 100 million views in the first 10 days.

Meanwhile, attractions such as museums and theatres are taking the virtual route, with many creating online tours, exhibitions and performances

to remain connected with audiences globally.

As business survival is crucial to weathering Covid-19, STO is financially supporting travel agents, adding on to assistance offered by the central government.

STO also continues to support industry stakeholders through the Discover Seoul Pass.

On the MICE front, Seoul has added Nodeul Island – an island in the middle of the Han River that has been transformed into an Ecological Park – to its unique venue list. A Jamsil MICE complex is also under development, set for completion in 2025.

Seoul Convention Bureau (SCB) currently offers two types of support – international conferences, and corporate meetings/incentives. In light of the current crisis, support for hosting online or hybrid events has also been shifted to the top of the revised PLUS Seoul programme.

SCB has lowered the minimum number of participants for corporate events from 50 to 20. A *Discover Bleisure Charms of Seoul* was also recently published, to help corporate groups inject local experiences into itineraries.

The way forward

RIU believes adaptability is key to coming out stronger in the face of challenges. By **Therese Tan**

The proverbial saying, when life hands you lemons, make lemonade, could not have been more true for RIU Hotels & Resorts. As the pandemic ravaged global travel and forced all of its hotels into temporary closure, the company used the opportunity to step up health, safety and cleanliness standards for its properties.

It developed a manual for post-pandemic operations with Preverisk Group, an international consultant specialising in health and safety consulting, auditing and training for the global tourism industry.

Up to 17 protocols were created or modified from existing standard operating procedures by the RIU team.

In addition, 62 of its 99 hotels audited by Preverisk Group have attained hygiene response certification for satisfying measures aimed at preventing or mitigating the possible spread of Covid-19 outbreaks among guests, staff and visitors.

Meanwhile, to maintain a brand presence, the hotel company launched RIU Pro (www.riupro.com) to facilitate travel agents' work in marketing the brand, with all sales and marketing tools as well as current corporate information available on a single website, explained Luis Riu Güell, CEO of RIU Hotels & Resorts.

Riu is also moving ahead with new

Top and
bottom: Hotel
Riu Dubai



openings. Soon to come in December 2020 is Hotel Riu Dubai on the Deira Islands, a joint venture with renowned Emirati developer, Nakheel.

The four-star beachfront resort with 800 rooms will check a couple of milestones for RIU – a first in the destination, the only 24-hour all-inclusive hotel in the city, and its 100th establishment worldwide.



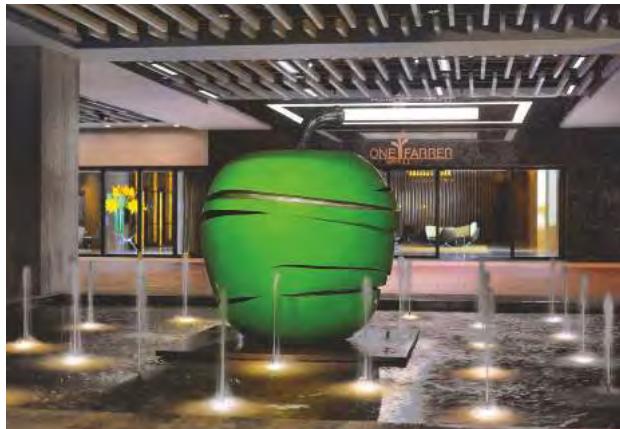
A smarter redesign

One Farrer Hotel's new look and feel will boast optimal hygiene and wellness standards, discovers Karen Yue

One Farrer Hotel in Singapore is undergoing extensive refurbishments, which will see a redesign of the majority of its guestrooms, facilities and processes. And the experts shaping the hotel's future look and feel are not just the usual designers – medical experts and technology specialists are also contributing their expertise to ensure the highest possible standards of hygiene and wellness for guests.

The works, costing more than S\$2 million (US\$1.5 million), will marry aesthetics that evoke positive and calming emotions with science to facilitate infection control best practices.

Carpets will make way for custom



gapless vinyl flooring, while specialised wallpapers, moveable furniture and anti-viral fabrics will be used across guestrooms and common areas – all to make cleaning and disinfection a cinch.

At the same time, the hotel is re-inventing its processes and including new measures to safeguard guests and employees. These include the launch of a Pillow Lab to improve the hygiene standards of its pillows through sci-

Above: One
Farrer Hotel

tific research into material choices and cleaning processes. A menu of pillows has been curated to offer the best and most restful sleep experience for guests.

Other measures include contactless entry points, sterilisation processes using specialised UVC chests and lamps, as well as staggered check-in and check-out times.

Works will complete this December, paving the way for the launch of The Mint Hotel, a safe and hygienic concept making its debut under One Farrer Hotel's 'Hotels within a Hotel' concept.

The Covid-19 pandemic has led the hotel team to recognise an opportunity for hotels to function as ancillary facilities for the care of non-emergent patients when critical healthcare facilities and hospitals are overrun.

The design principles of The Mint Hotel, such as movable furniture and materials that are suitable for terminal cleansing, make the property ideal for conversion to a 'hosptel' quickly should the need arise.

In redefining its dining concept for the age of safe distancing, the hotel is also launching the Nest at One Farrer to satiate the growing demand for private dining experiences.



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Opportunity in crisis

From embracing technology to investing for the long-term, Santika is sowing the seeds of recovery. By **Mimi Hudoyo**

Even as the pandemic rages on, Santika Indonesia Hotels and Resorts (SIHR) continues to seize new growth opportunities, positioning itself to capitalise on an eventual upturn.

With an eye on long-term potential, this year, the hotel chain signed two new hotel management contracts, and is on the prowl for more, according to Sudarsana, its corporate general manager of business development and marketing communications.

He reasoned: "It takes two to three years to develop a hotel so the idea is to build the hotels during this (lull) period and have them ready when business returns."

The hotel group also plans to open two out of six hotels targeted this year, with Hotel Santika Bukittinggi in West Sumatra welcoming guests on October 18, followed by Amaris Hotel Tasikma-

laya in West Java on November 11.

Sudarsana let on that hotel occupancy in the city of Bukittinggi is still above 50 per cent, while its existing Hotel Santika Tasikmalaya is faring well, allowing room for growth.

Sudarsana added that the company, which now manages 113 hotels, is on track to operating 150 hotels by 2024.



Top right: Hotel Santika Bukittinggi

Below: Amaris Hotel Tasikmalaya



As more consumers turn to digital platforms to meet their needs amid the pandemic, SIHR has shifted its focus online in a bid to grow direct booking sales from corporate and FIT travellers.

"We have done two online travel fairs during this pandemic where MyValue (the hotel's loyalty programme) members can buy room vouchers which are valid up to May 2021. The response has been positive," he said, adding that the programme targeted the domestic market to generate cash flow for the group's properties.

In 2019, SIHR launched MySantika, an online booking app available for its MyValue members.

"We want to focus and make it our new unique selling point (USP), in addition to the Indonesian hospitality service and our authentic local cuisine which have been our USP over the years," he said.

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Heart of hospitality

Therese Tan uncovers how Royal Cliff Hotels Group plans to cement its position in the new travelscape, utilising strategies which involve customer touchpoints



From left:
Aerial view of Royal Cliff Hotels Group; driveway of the renovated Royal Cliff Beach Hotel



Having been in the business for 46 years, Royal Cliff Hotels Group is no stranger to a tourism downturn and has been agile in developing initiatives that resonate with the current climate.

Take the pandemic for example: the Group collaborated with Thailand's Ministry of Health and Thailand Convention and Exhibition Bureau

to develop a Prevent and Protect programme to ensure safe experiences at its hotels and meeting venues, mirroring directives laid down by World Health Organization's Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Along with pricing adjustments, domestic market campaigns, flexible cancellations, sustainability efforts, and

staff training to keep up with health and safety measures, the Group is going the distance to meet the needs of travellers today.

Meanwhile, frequent communications with guests via e-newsletters and social media are vital in expressing the "human touch" in the age of social distancing, shared Maria Gequillana, director of marketing and digital, Royal Cliff Hotels Group and Pattaya Exhibition and Convention Hall (PEACH).

Keeping up to date with evolving consumer demands, Gequillana said Royal Cliff Beach Hotel recently renovated its rooms and facilities, and launched the multifunctional event space, Majestic Lounge at Royal Wing Suites & Spa.

PEACH is also staying competitive by implementing social distancing practices, hardware upgrades, and sustainability initiatives to cater to new business norms as well as the growing demand for hybrid meetings.

A first for Pattaya hotels, the Group also introduced ultra high-speed Internet, Wi-Fi 6, across its properties – an investment that will be appreciated by events today that rely more heavily on live-streaming.

ADVERTORIAL

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Adding to its illustrious event organising resume, the Group's four award-winning hotels situated in the same estate – each defined by its own individuality and spectacular ocean views – bring about an unforgettable resort experience for delegates and their families.

Socially responsible

Benchmarking social responsibility excellence, the Group has been lauded the Asia Responsible Enterprise Award (AREA) for its Green Multiples project in championing sustainable and socially responsible practices to reduce mounting sustainability challenges confronting the hospitality industry today.

Organised by Enterprise Asia, the Group's winning entry this year entailed creating public awareness to conserve resources, producing biogas with organic wastes, the manufacturing of organic fertilisers and operating a large-scale wastewater treatment plant in providing a long-term solution to water scarcity in the area.

Readiness for the new norm

As the industry progresses in these unprecedented times, the health and safety of all guests and employees remain the number one priority. Aside from the Amazing Thailand Safety



and Health Administration: SHA accreditation issued by the Tourism Authority of Thailand, the Group has also developed a Prevent and Protect Program at its hotels to ensure a safer guest stay experience. Measures include contact tracing, contactless payments and check in/out, and a 24-hour onsite clinic with quarantine facilities.

Similarly, PEACH showcases its readiness by creating a Protection-C Package which incorporates specific preventive measures such as hybrid event facilities, a la carte buffets and well-ventilated venues with ozone air-conditioning to allow planners, organisers and corporates to conduct their events with a peace of mind.

To find out more about the Protection-C meeting package, which starts from 2,700 baht per person, visit <http://www.royalcliff.com>, email success@royalcliff.com, or call (66) 3825 0421

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Communicating confidence



Karen Yue
Group Editor

For all of us in travel and business events, the pandemic has been a massive test that prodded at our agility, humanity, loyalty and faith.

How quickly were we able to pivot for survival? How well were we able to protect our team as we fought to extend our business runway? How determined were we to take all the bad times, not just the good, with our organisation? How confident were we of a rebound in time to come?

Beyond these trials and tribulations, I too regard the pandemic as a test of our communications capability.

In the early days of the pandemic and lockdown, we witnessed how organisations in our industry approached communications. Some went silent, quickly offloading marketing and communications staff as they saw little need for their role at a time when cashflow security was priority. Some swiftly altered their messaging to one of empathy, ditching sales pitches in favour of guidance for clients towards remedial processes as travel and event plans were disrupted.

And as companies found their footing and restarted event planning, the savvier of travel and events communicators shifted once more, this time to convey messages of inspiration, be it to spark travel intentions, encourage optimism, or position themselves as stable entities that are able to care for external communities while protecting their own. Some also estab-

lished channels that shared frequent factual information to help clients make educated decisions on travel and events.

Today, as companies increasingly discover the benefits of online events – expanded audience reach, extended engagement and reduced travel pressures, the test we are given is for our ability to convince event organisers and attendees that face-to-face events remain the most efficient and exciting form of interaction and knowledge exchange.

To make this message stick, one needs to do more than show studies supporting attendees' desire for real life interaction or scientific data on how the human brain retains information. Event organisers are faced with practical concerns that need practical answers – how far ahead can they plan, what contingency plans can they afford should sudden new infections render face-to-face gatherings impossible, what penalties will suppliers and contractors impose for last-minute changes, what value can suppliers bring to the table, and are their deposits safe with contractors and suppliers that are financially stable?

Travel and events players that chose to lay a foundation of continued market presence and positive communications during the darkest period of the pandemic, and are able to now demonstrate an ability to walk with their clients from start to end as confident and capable content partners will be the ones to recover the swiftest.



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Stay in the light

Despite bleak business, some of the region's CVBs have chosen to remain visible, vocal and useful to keep inspiring their industry partners. By TTGmice reporters



Bangkok's dazzling landscape at night

Travel manashutterstock

ommendations are provided. It allows the bureau to keep international clients and domestic operators up to date on official government statements that shed light on how the kingdom is dealing with the crisis.

And as the crisis deepened, TCEB worked closer with both the public and private sectors to tackle pain points of the industry, especially in helping stakeholders keep their business going when business events came to a standstill. Among its efforts are relaxed qualifying criteria for supported business events and funding for venues to beef up their hygiene practices. Financial aid was also provided to help the domestic MICE sector kickstart the economy.

An extensive communication campaign was also deployed to connect and engage with customers. The campaign sought to shape the idea of safety around events, as well as gain an understanding of market trends and client concerns to facilitate the creation of useful packages.

Through its messages, TCEB encouraged industry stakeholders to stay positive and move forward, as well as suggested business models to adopt post-pandemic.

And as the pandemic started to stabilise, TCEB moved into recovery planning. It collaborated with local associations to develop a standardised MICE hygiene protocol, with standard operating procedures (SOPs) at each touchpoint, starting from the airport, through to the DMCs and hotels, until the customers depart Thailand. With these SOPs, TCEB successfully lobbied the government to reopen the MICE sector. – Rachel AJ Lee

Business Events Sarawak

Business Events Sarawak (BESarawak) stood as an emotional pillar of strength and positivity for those in the business events sector throughout the Covid-19 pandemic.

Its messages reflect strength and positivity, and centred on the community – in line with



PLUS+CITIES is a regional cooperative program to create positive synergy combining MICE infrastructure of Seoul with unique tourism contents of Gwangju to give greater enjoyment to MICE participants.



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FEATURE

BESarawak's branding around the 'tribe spirit'.

Amelia Roziman, acting CEO, BESarawak, also emphasised the importance of the bureau's dual role of an active listener and voice of the industry. This allowed BESarawak to take the concerns and challenges of stakeholders to the relevant government ministries, which in turn led to solutions to alleviate the hardships of the industry during such trying times.

In July, following the government's decision to restart business events in the country, BESarawak organised its first hybrid event known as Tribal Gathering 2020, where it launched the Business Events Sarawak Incentivised Packages.

The hybrid format allowed industry partners from outside the state to witness the event virtually, from the comfort and safety of their offices and homes. It also served to communicate to business event organisers and the industry at large that Sarawak is ready for the future of events – the destination has the digital infrastructure and event technology specialists to successfully execute a hybrid event, should event organisers choose such a format in the future. – *S Puvaneswary*

Conventions and Incentives

New Zealand

New Zealand's can-do attitude in navigating the pandemic showed through its peak business events body Conventions and Incentives



Blue Planet Studio/shutterstock

From top: Japan's iconic Tokyo Tower; scenic Pyeongchang Samyang Ranch in South Korea

New Zealand (CINZ), which lobbied the government for aid and kept communication channels open with industry stakeholders.

While MEETINGS – CINZ's annual tradeshow in April – had to be cancelled, the bureau launched a recovery plan in the same month and announced it would host a new one-day industry showcase called BE Reconnected in Auckland on December 1, aimed at kickstarting the NZ\$5 billion MICE industry. Instead of an expansive programme and exhibition floor, the event would prioritise conversations and relationship-building.

CINZ also announced a partnership with Business Events Council of Australia in June, followed by a strategic agreement in July with the Professional Convention Management Association to stay connected with Asian industry players. A voluntary Covid Code was also introduced to help the government with contact-tracing processes.

CINZ chief executive Lisa Hopkins has been leading the public charge for the recovery of business events in the country. She remained visible in trade and local media as well as in government sectors to highlight the issues facing the industry.

After a second wave of Covid cases and a return to gathering restrictions in August, Auckland has at press time entered into Alert Level 1, which enables unrestricted domestic meetings across the country. This is expected to give decision-makers the confidence needed to plan and book events again. – *Adelaine Ng*

Tokyo Convention & Visitors Bureau

Since the outbreak of Covid-19 in Japan, Tokyo Convention & Visitors Bureau (TCVB) has been working to bring situational updates to planners and business partners through news posts on its Business Events Tokyo homepage. These updates include newsletters, posted in March and July, which outline rules and guidance on domestic movements and gatherings from the Japan Convention Management Association, Japan Exhibition Association and other key organisations.

In addition, TCVB launched a new webpage, Tokyo Updates Towards the New Normal, to raise awareness of activity in recent months. Set up with Tokyo business events stakeholders, the page introduces guidelines



aimed at making Tokyo safe for international conferences and corporate events, as well as bear messages from Tokyo partners and examples of best practice in the new normal of events – remote and hybrid meetings.

It presented examples of Tokyo's first fully remote conference – the 120th Annual Congress of Japan Surgical Society – which welcomed more than 19,000 registrations from Japan and overseas, and a hybrid meeting of the Japanese Association for Infectious Diseases which was attended by 600 people in-person and 2,400 online. – *Kathryn Wortley*

Gangwon Provincial Office

Gangwon Province is boosting its destination branding online, riding on the wave of heightened Internet usage throughout the pandemic and restricted movements.

Jeong Il Sub, general director of culture, tourism and sport bureau, Gangwon Province, said online branding not only enhances destination knowledge, it also communicates Gangwon's readiness to welcome visitors when international borders are reopened.

Jeong added that many previously undiscovered places in Gangwon Province were introduced through multiple online channels, fuelling international interest.

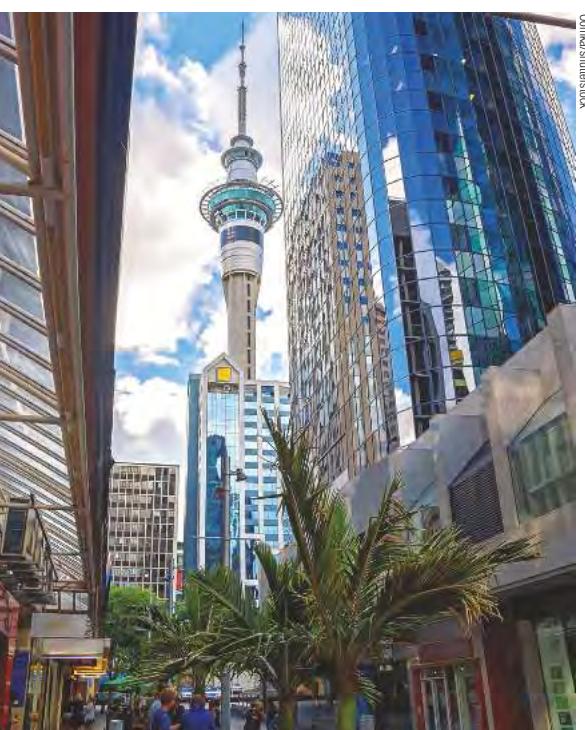
Branding campaigns now focus on wellness themes and include a multilingual video series promoting key attractions under the Clean Gangwon slogan. Gangwon is also working with global influencers and the media to market the destination.

Supporting these communications are webinars and online destination training as well as virtual trade fairs and live-streaming events that engage industry stakeholders.

Gangwon's visibility is further enhanced by its hosting of the East Asia Inter-Regional Tourism Forum. Along with fellow member provinces, Gangwon maintains a joint risk management system that distributes timely destination updates throughout the pandemic. – *Therese Tan*



From top: serene Kuching Waterfront in Malaysia; Auckland's landmark Sky Tower rises in the background



Loud and clear

In times of suppressed business demand, communications need to be strategic, frequent and clear to pave the way for a quick return to activity when the time is right. **Rachel AJ Lee** gets the details



Correct execution, constant reassurance, and clear messaging are what destinations and MICE suppliers need to focus on during this period of travel restrictions and border closures, to stay at the top of buyers' minds.

Such actions also help brands be prepared to pounce once the global market moves again, said independent tourism communication specialists.

A critical message to convey today is the destination's ability to contain Covid-19, opined Paul Hicks, founder and chairman of GHC Asia.

He said: "Destinations and MICE suppliers will first have to demonstrate that they have

the disease under control, and thoroughly review the protocols of how they operate with increased hygiene, cleanliness and a degree of social distancing to mitigate any health risks."

In their bid to stay visible, brands must also ensure that their communications are not tone-deaf and executed at the right time, advised Felicity Zadro, managing director of Zadro Communications. She added that there is also value in telling stories of their people, brand promise, care, and effort.

When asked for examples of brands that have managed their crisis communications well, Hicks pointed to the cruising industry "because they have a greater reassurance job to do".

For instance, Norwegian Cruise Line Holdings teamed up with Royal Caribbean Group to launch the Healthy Sail Panel, which has just recommended to the US Centre for Disease Control a range of health and safety protocols.

Just try not to fall off the map completely in your communication.

Paul Hicks, founder and chairman, GHC Asia



Brands need to position themselves as relevant, adaptive, and creative.

Felicity Zadro, managing director, Zadro Communications

"It's well thought out, and goes much further than any other areas of the travel industry. It's likely to help cruise resume more quickly and (may be) taken as the gold standard across the travel industry," he opined.

For Zadro, the Professional Convention Management Association stands out, for launching a fresh research piece which offered regional insights about the current MICE situation.

"They took those insights and developed practical sessions as part of their Convening Asia-Pacific: The Global Recovery Forum. This is information plus action, playing up to their brand promise and relevance in the sector," she elaborated.

While there seems to be no daylight to break this long winter spell, Hicks said this would eventually come to pass, and "there is absolutely no doubt that people will still want to travel".

He advised companies to use the time to analyse and refocus their brands, get their communications strategy in order, and make sure that messages used before will still resonate in the future.

Zadro recommended a six-step framework for managing communications through the pandemic and beyond: Response, Recovery, Reimagination, Relationships, Rebuild, and Results. These stages aren't linear, for every company would be going through them at different paces. Aside from offering insights and directions, the stages were designed to be thought-provoking and spark conversations among teams.

"Keep your name and your destination out there and in people's thoughts, let them dream and yearn to come back. And they will. Because when the industry makes its comeback, those with the louder voices will (stand to gain more) market share," Hicks concluded.

Rotorua, Bay of Plenty



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Top: Ride through narrow canyons at thrilling speeds with Shotover Jet

Below: The Hobbiton™ Movie Set is a great place for a new product launch



TOURISM NEW ZEALAND

Explore new horizons with a New Zealand incentive

Mimi Low, managing director, EU MICE Singapore, is a travel industry veteran with more than 27 years of experience. She specialises in bespoke MICE travel experiences for the Asian market, and shares why New Zealand ticks the boxes for the ultimate incentive trip

WHY CHOOSE NEW ZEALAND?

Home to the majestic Mount Cook, scenic Milford Sound and Fox Glacier, New Zealand's sublime landscapes and spectacular natural attractions are key reasons to send my incentive groups here.

TREAT

The thrilling Shotover Jet boat ride amidst the natural landscape was breath-taking! It is fascinating to see New Zealand in all its beauty, a definite activity I would introduce my clients to. Not forgetting the Highlands Experience, it was like living the Fast & Furious life! I'm not an adrenaline junkie but the fast rides were truly enjoyable against the beautiful backdrop of the region.



Mimi Low enjoying a scenic flight with alpine landing from The Helicopter Line in Queenstown

EAT

It is a toss between Mudbrick Vineyard on Waiheke, Skyline, Puketutu Island Estate, and Aorangi Peak in Rotorua. New Zealand has the freshest produce for gourmet meals, from vegetables to meat to herbs. I also recommend Manuka Honey to my groups. Totally natural and with its high antiviral, anti-inflammatory and antioxidant benefits, it is well sought after.

MEET

To name just a few venues: Skyline New Zealand, with two locations in Queenstown and Rotorua, is well suited for our customers whether they are in the North or South Island. Enjoying a bird's eye view of the beautiful cities from the Queenstown Gondola is a good start for any event. You can also include fun activities like a Luge ride! At Puketutu Island Estate, the food is well-presented and mouth-watering, and spacious enough for creating any gala dinner theme.

SLEEP

In Auckland, the Sofitel is my favourite, equipped with suite-like rooms facing the harbour or marina. It is a short walk to a

plethora of restaurants at the Viaduct, and the America's Cup boats are just around the corner. In Queenstown, the Hilton Resort and Spa boasts a private jetty, perfect for an airport transfer by jetboat. Room views are sublime and come with fireplaces! For golf fanatics, Millbrook Resort certainly has wow factor. The accommodation is luxurious, and the gorgeous grounds are surrounded by snow-capped mountains.

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Catering for creativity

Heightened health and safety measures have forced hotels to rewrite their event F&B playbook. **Pamela Chow** finds out how creative catering in Asia is evolving

Despite the major blow to the hospitality and events industry due to the pandemic, hotels in Asia-Pacific have been swift on their feet to adapt.

Since as early as April, many have reopened their doors to domestic clients and intimate business gatherings – but gone are the days of catered canapes and laissez-faire networking.

Instead, with stricter hygiene pro-

ocols and social distancing measures in place, what awaits is a suite of new catering solutions. Clients no longer return to the buffet lines of old, but are instead greeted with fresh, out-of-the-box F&B experiences.

Unique angles

For many hospitality brands, the downtime presented an opportunity to revise their strategies and explore ways

in which creative catering can thrive in a world with pandemic restrictions.

For instance, One Farrer Hotel Singapore's Meals-on-Wheels package delivers gourmet lunches and coffee break bites to the homes of delegates attending remote events.

The Capitol Kempinski Hotel Singapore has formulated hybrid catering packages that include individually-boxed meals, sustainable food packaging, and plant-based menus.

And as part of its HY-brid meeting concept, Hyatt Group also delivers its F&B offerings – such as lunch bento boxes and cocktail kits – to the homes of virtual event attendees.

At the Australasian Hotel Industry Conference & Exhibition 2020 in Hyatt Regency Sydney, individual bento boxes and afternoon tea caddies were part of the safe dining experience. Taking several steps further, Grand Hyatt Singapore brought back Le Petit Chef, an immersive dining adventure in the hotel's mezza9 La Cave wine cellar featuring a theatrical 3D projection mapping performance. Limited to just eight people per seating, this offering has sold out bookings for every session

Grand Hyatt Hong Kong's boxed afternoon tea set



since its launch.

Andreas Stalder, senior vice president – F&B operations and product development, Hyatt Group, said: “Creativity is key for restart and recovery efforts in our industry. We have been listening to event and meeting planners, PCOs, corporate customers and World of Hyatt members throughout the Covid-19 pandemic – and what we have learnt is that we need to reimagine the event and meeting experience with a focus on hygiene and well-being, cost-effective and seamless meeting solutions, and flexible cancellation policies.”

As a mark of assurance, all of Hyatt’s 149 hotels in Asia Pacific have a Hygiene & Wellbeing Leader to oversee the execution of the Group’s Care & Cleanliness Commitment. The properties have completed the first phase of this programme, and are currently preparing for the second phase, which is obtaining the Global Biorisk Advisory Council’s STAR Facility Accreditation before the end of 2020.

For The Capitol Kempinski Hotel Singapore, the shift towards individual food packaging has spurred conversations about sustainability as well as personalised food safety.

“I believe that with the effects of Covid-19, guests are taking a keen interest in their immunity system, which ultimately leads to a greater awareness of food functionality and food safety.

“(Additionally,) a hotel’s catering and events scene post-Covid-19 will (also) have to rethink its position on sustainability, that is, producing less waste and creating more meaningful environmental awareness,” expressed Matthias Al-Amiry, managing director of The Capitol Kempinski Hotel Singapore and regional vice president, South-east Asia.

Taking the high line

One Farrer Hotel sees safe distancing measures as an opportunity to boost its more exclusive offerings for bigger spenders.

To cater to a growing demand for



From top: The Nest at One Farrer is ideal for corporate events with enforced safe distancing; The Capitol Kempinski Hotel expects greater focus on food safety and sustainability

private dining rooms, particularly by its “high net worth clientele”, the hotel launched The Nest at One Farrer on level 20, Adrian Quek, director of catering & events, One Farrer Hotel, shared with TTGmice.

The Nest comprises 13 safe dining environments, which may each accommodate between four and 12 diners. Since Singapore softened its quarantine restrictions earlier in the year, the facility has hosted several small-scale meetings and classes, serving as breakout rooms with in-room smart TVs enabling live streaming from the main event hall. After the conferences, keynote speakers and VIPs dined at The Nest with five diners per room.

Quek noted: “There is most certainly room for creativity. We aim to provide that ‘wow’ factor to participants with plated lunch and coffee break menus that are tailored to the needs and themes of our clients’ events. These little touches go a long way in providing value for our clients.”

“...we need to reimagine the event and meeting experience with a focus on hygiene and well-being, cost-effective and seamless meeting solutions, and flexible cancellation policies”

Andreas Stalder,
senior vice president – F&B operations and product development,
Hyatt Group

A race for relevancy

In a rapidly digitalising events landscape, event venues need to transform themselves into agile content incubators to survive. By **Karen Yue**



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This is what the future of events looks like – think online video conferences to socially-distanced seating at physical events

The accelerated digitalisation of business events throughout the pandemic and travel crisis has threatened the existence of convention and exhibition venues, forcing a change in their traditional roles, observed industry leaders.

During the Venue Technology Update presentation on October 7, part of ICCA Congress 2020's six-week-long Global Hybrid Congress Experience, speaker Manish Chandak, president and CEO of Ungerboeck Software International, noted that changes in the way events are delivered today are "hitting venues the hardest".

"There is a fear that venues are being left behind," Manish said, adding that "venues have to fiercely fight for onsite events because that is the core of our industry".

To fight right in today's environment, Manish said venues would need technology that allows them to establish high levels of collaboration with event organisers, as well as agility to manoeuvre from large-scale physical gatherings to smaller scale online or hybrid events at short notice. Such abilities will give event organisers confidence to commit to the venue and begin planning.

Manish further suggested that

venues adopt an events portal that will enable collaboration between all parties through continuous and transparent task management; sharing of attendee lists and functions and orders; room diagramming systems to allow continuous updating of an event design with social distancing and flow; mobile tasks and checklists that demonstrate safety guarantee through evidence and action; visitor tracking capability that allows self-serve; sign-in for visitors prior to the event, with the option of asking about recent travel and current health; and a sophisticated event showcase that projects the venue as a highly technical destination capable of bringing the organiser's content to life.

A change in business model is also needed, opined Sven Bossu, CEO of the International Association of Conventions Centres (AIPC), who urged venues to become "content incubators" going forward.

"Venues will need to provide multi-channel platforms that enable organisers to connect with their communities and distribute content in the way delegates want it. Venues will no longer be selling square metres and catering packages; no more pre-established price list; no more use of technology just for advertising earnings," he elaborated.

A case study: ICC Sydney

The government-imposed shutdown of all in-person events during the pandemic led International Convention Centre (ICC) Sydney to alter its operations and services to remain relevant to clients.

It launched its virtual event offerings in March, which then evolved into Hybrid Event Solutions. Debuting in July, the solution merges technology with live experiences.

Geoff Donaghy, CEO of ICC Sydney, said: "This has enabled our clients to continue to run events, both during the height of the pandemic and as restrictions ease. As we look ahead, this service will allow for the continued transition back to more and bigger in-person events, which we know there is strong appetite for, and give clients greater choice in the longer term."

Since March, ICC Sydney has delivered more than 100 world-class events in a virtual or hybrid format.

And as the appetite for online and hybrid events continue to grow, the venue finds itself innovating further. In October, it launched ICC Sydney Connect, offering end-to-end virtual and hybrid event solutions that allow clients to broadcast their virtual events from a state-of-the-art studio with a customisable interface.

These transitions are supported by a team that is "fully equipped with the latest collaboration and communications technology to ensure they can work effectively while at their desk, from home or from any space within the venue," added Donaghy.

Casting his eyes on the longer-term future, Donaghy expects venue operators to see a "different business and sector". What would put ICC Sydney in good stead for that future is its role as "an incubator for ideas, a champion for change and advocate for the community".

"While the way we run events will continue to evolve, and virtual and hybrid formats will be part of the future, there is nothing quite like the experience of meeting in person," he concluded.

Setting the right conditions

Corporate travel recovery will require health and safety assurances to travellers, as well as a simplified application and approval process to cross borders.

By Karen Yue and Rachel AJ Lee



Personal health and safety considerations have emerged top priority among corporate travellers as they prepare for the resumption of business trips against the backdrop of an ongoing pandemic.

SAP Concur 2020 APAC Business Traveller survey found that ensuring personal health and safety while traveling is most important to Asia-Pacific travellers, with 67 per cent placing it in their top three considerations.

A whopping 97 per cent of respondents identified at least one measure they consider to be critical for their company to implement when travel resumes, and the top options include mandatory personal health screenings for traveling employees (45 per cent), limiting business travel to only the most business-critical trips (39 per cent), and easier access to personal protective equipment like gloves or facemasks (37 per cent).

FCM Travel Solutions' *State of the Market Survey* found that 59 per cent of respondents regarded traveller and supplier health and hygiene factors as top priority.

BCD Travel's research with 1,260 business travellers also turned up similar concerns – quarantine measures after travel, followed by social distancing and cleanliness of their environment during trips are top concerns among respondents.

As such, for business travel to recover, travellers must first feel confident about travelling and that their health and safety are taken into account, advised Carl Jones, vice president and head of travel, SAP Concur Asia Pacific and Greater China.

While it is clear that attention to duty of care is critical and compulsory now, Bertrand SAILLET, managing director for Asia, FCM Travel Solutions, warned that companies' prudent approach to risk management today

Business travellers are paying greater attention to personal health and safety

could hamper corporate travel revival.

"One of the most critical influence for business travel at the moment is a vaccine and without one, many companies are unwilling to put their employees at risk unless the travel is deemed absolutely critical," he explained.

At the same time, there are also companies that recognise the impracticality of restrictive travel conditions to support zero-risk policies. "There is no zero-risk when considering international travel," remarked SAILLET. "These zero-risk policies do not support business continuity and the impact on the economy is too great to be sustainable."

Besides heeding their employer's decision on travel – FCM's study found that 89 per cent of respondents would travel if their "organisation deems it safe to travel and this is reflected in our travel policy" – corporate warriors are also relying on travel suppliers to provide reassurance of their safety and cleanliness protocols.

Nine in 10 respondents to a BCD Travel study rated frequent enhanced disinfection of airport and aircraft as extremely or very important, followed by new boarding procedures and empty seats on airplanes to accommodate social distancing.

For those who are willing to travel now, James Chua, general manager of Singapore's Global Travel, opined that they would want to be clear about the safety measures put in place by the airline and have updated access to travel requirements for the intended destination including transit.

But even when the heart is willing, corporate travel possibility hinges on border access. Here in Asia, establishment of travel bubbles and green lanes for official purposes has been slow.

Among major Asian business hubs, Singapore has made the most progress with the establishment of reciprocal green lanes with Brunei, South Korea, Japan, Malaysia and six select Chinese cities. On October 15, Singapore and Hong Kong agreed in-principle to establish an air travel bubble, which will exempt travellers from quarantines.

However, for the other green lanes, complex and time-consuming application processes and rigorous quarantine measures have presented stumbling blocks.

"Travel has an opportunity to return to acceptable levels only if there is relaxation of quarantine measures for most of Asia, Europe and the US, with companies and their travellers able to mitigate and accept a balanced travel-risk ratio," concluded SAILLET.

The digital move

Success comes to those who dare make bold changes and advancements. During the ongoing pandemic and event freeze, these event agencies swiftly altered their operations to support the rising tide of digital and hybrid events. **TTGmice reporters** share their stories

Aavii Worldwide

A determination to remain relevant during event and travel bans led Malaysian event agency Aavii Worldwide to focus on supporting clients in the online space.

Despite the enforcement of Malaysia's nation-wide Movement Control Order in March, Aavii managed to deliver 106 webinars and hybrid events with live-stream elements between April and September, as well as four offline events in September when the event ban was lifted.

Of these, 18 were hybrid events produced in Aavii's very own office studio as well as hotel function rooms.

The company's group CEO Francis Cheong recalled that the transition was not an easy one, with some "casualties" along the way.

"Some of our team members simply weren't savvy enough for platforms like such Zoom, GoToWebinar, Webex and Microsoft Teams, and they stumbled. I had to transfer certain employees to manage social media or write articles. Many of them had numerous late-night (meetings) via Zoom and private training sessions during the lockdown,

and they encountered numerous trial-and-error to ensure that our webinars work," said Cheong.

"I was extremely lucky to have a dedicated team," he said, adding that all existing team members were retained during the transition.

As the company has been moving towards digital capabilities and investing in relevant hardware and software through the years, Cheong did not make further purchases specifically to support the virtual event shift. Recent purchases included US\$250,000 in early-2018 for LED panels, and US\$80,000 on lightings, cables and servers right before the pandemic.

Aavii's hard work has paid off, according to Cheong. "We've run webinars and livestreams for more than 17,200 viewers and trained 160 speakers on how to use various webinar platforms," he said.

The digital pivot has also led to new business opportunities, according to Cheong, as a result of stronger capabilities in content development.

"We are diving deeper into crafting and designing campaign

communications alongside video production. Another new opportunity for us is post-webinar video production, copywriting and podcast.

"But the most exciting new opportunity for our StarGazer team (Aavii's creative division) is by far, gamification," he said.

As business events continue to recover, Cheong remains committed to his work with audio/visual partners "who understand hybrid and green screen technology, not just locally in Malaysia, but regionally in Thailand, Singapore and Hong Kong".

– Karen Yue



Congress Rental Australia & Singapore

Congress Rental Australia & Singapore has been preparing for the eventual shift towards a remote events solution for the past three years, but Covid-19 has accelerated its efforts.

Managing director Jeremy Ducklin said: "We are now seeing more remote interpretation jobs, and a change in attitude towards the technol-

ogy. Now, rather than going out for set-up at live venues, our technicians are supporting remote events around the clock. They also train clients and interpreters on how to use our remote interpretation platform."

While the company has offered Remote Simultaneous Interpretation to clients for many years, most have rejected this in favour of having interpreters physically at the venue. The pandemic has led a change in attitudes, with more clients taking up this option today.

In the earlier stages of Covid-19, Ducklin shared that clients treated remote interpretations as a plug-and-play solution they could purchase

and use right away, but noted that has changed too.

"Clients are realising that a team of experts is needed to run an online smoothly, professionally, and successfully. In many cases, they realise that they need more than just a platform in order to achieve the desired level of audience engagement," he observed.

Another new business opportunity to have surfaced is live transcription being added to online meetings. In addition, clients initially rented items such as microphones and institutions, but as soon as they realised Covid-19 was not going away anytime soon, these turned into purchases.

– Rachel AJ Lee





Gyeonggi Tourism Organization leads global MICE in Gyeonggi-do, Korea where equips the nation's largest convention center.

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FEATURE

EGO Global Asia

Harry Dwi Nugraha, founder of EGO Global Asia, has discovered that the pandemic is a catalyst to the digital meeting evolution, a change that had taken a long time to effect prior to the present crisis.

He explained that the adoption was quicker now, as event companies "have no choice but to adapt to the market demand and switch from offline to online".

EGO Global Asia itself moved with the times, by first converting its warehouse into a mini studio equipped with cameras and green screens. It also improved its staff capabilities to meet the new needs of clients, such as by equipping graphic designers with visual graphic designing and multi-media knowledge.

Between June and October 2020, EGO Network Asia organised 25 online and hybrid events.

The challenge event agencies face today



Jublia

For Singapore-based events specialist Jublia, the shift towards hybrid events was a challenge on all fronts of the business, but it was something the team embraced wholeheartedly.

COO and co-founder of Jublia, Errol Lim, said: "The hybrid meetings model required us to quickly adapt our existing operations to effectively service the digital attendee, (while not forgetting) the physical attendee."

Reading the potential market development right, it developed a one-to-one virtual meetings software called Match Virtual, which "has been used widely in various virtual and hybrid events since March 2020" when the outbreak emerged in Singapore, Lim shared.

Lim sees various business opportunities from taking the digital route. For instance, digital allows events to extend their engagement timeline as well as expand its global reach because the

Internet does not have geographical limitations.

Going digital also increases event revenue opportunities, from selling banner ad spaces to sponsored content.

That said, Lim expects greater appreciation for in-person events as people realise that live events are still the best platform for generating quality leads. This awareness would encourage clients to invest in more premium in-person programming.

- Rachel AJ Lee



MICE Matters

Singapore-based MICE Matters has unveiled a new division, Virtual Edge @ MM, as the typically incentives-focused company shifts its focus and business model to ride through the pandemic.

The end-to-end digital platform is able to implement, manage, and operate customised tech solutions, from pre-event communication and preparations, to event-day logistics and management, rounding off with post-event services.

As such, MICE Matters has also set up a working digital studio within its Singapore office, and named it The Upper Room.

Its director, Melvyn Nonis, shared with TTGmice one of the main objectives of setting up Virtual Edge @ MM is so that the company can continue to value-add and remain relevant for its clients in the new normal.

He added that it was "important to upskill the team digitally" along with the times. Moreover, learning about digital technology can be applied to various facets of the incentive tour experience to ensure tours run more efficiently, especially so for large groups of 1,000 people the company regularly managed prior to the pandemic.

In line with this, the team has also commenced on a new project entitled GMX. GMX takes its lead from a teambuilding mobile app MICE Matters previously ran for its client's event. However, the current objective is to design and create a corporate teambuilding gamification app that will help rediscover Singapore.

Nonis said: "We are targeting to

is to be able to elevate the audience experience and ensure they stay tuned until the end. The need for such digital event specialisation has created a new breed of professional talents, observed Harry.

"What we need now are event strategists who can translate what the clients want and need into programmes.

The strategist must find a way to deliver digital experiences that result in a (satisfactory) output despite existing limitations," he said.

Harry told TTGmice that nobody in the team was made redundant by the digital meeting evolution.

"We will continue to rely on audiovisual engineers and camera switchers. Stage designers for physical events still have a place in the business too, but now they are required to use their talent to design virtual stages," he explained.

He regards the pandemic as a harbinger of the future of business events, with new business opportunities within reach of events specialists who are able to pivot right. - **Mimi Hudoyo**

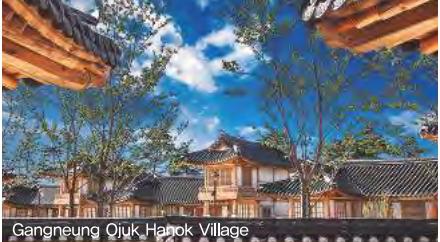


complete this project by year-end and roll it out to the market at the beginning of 2021."

When asked about its incentives business, Nonis said: "MICE Matters' post-Covid-19 core business and clientele will mainly revolve around the organising of outbound corporate meetings and incentive programmes."

He strongly believes that "virtual reality tours will not replace actual incentive tours", and hence the company will also be diversifying its core services to other industries. Currently, its incentive groups hail from the financial planning, insurance, and multi-level marketing industries; and meeting and conferences from the IT sector.

MICE Matters is also exploring several corporate programmes based on the recent initiatives rolled out by Singapore Airlines. Possibilities could include behind-the-scenes tours of Singapore Airlines' training facilities, or experiencing its flight simulator. - **Rachel AJ Lee**



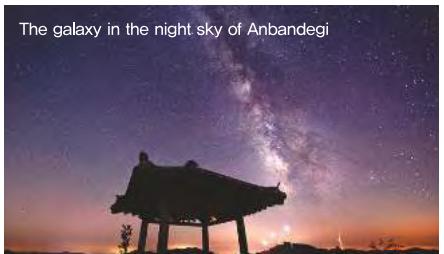
Gangneung Ojuk Hanok Village



BTS Bus Stop, Jumunjin Beach



Beach Coffee Street is a place where the ocean scent and coffee aroma are in harmony, the No.1 must-visit sight during family and couple trips. Also, tourists can have curling experience in Gangneung Curling Center at the Gangneung Olympic Park in all seasons.



The Galaxy in the night sky of Anbandeagi

Seoul, Busan, Jeju Island, and Incheon are already engraved in the mind of MICE organizers as representative MICE destinations in Korea. Let's draw our attention to Gangneung, known as the 'City of Pines' and the No.1 tourist destination in Korea that is trying to revamp itself as a second MICE destination.

'Feel the Rhythm of Korea: Gangneung' one of the videos presented by Korea Tourism Organization to promote cities designated as tourism hubs in Korea, demonstrates the beauty of Gangneung, boasting an incredible popularity of more than one million views in just a few days since its release on YouTube.

According to the statistics by Korea Tourism Organization for 2018, Gangneung ranked No.1 in the rate of tourist increase as well as in accommodation booking rate during the summer vacation season. Recommended by CNN Travel as "the best place to visit" during the 2018 Winter Olympics, Gangneung is the No.1 tourist destination loved by Korean people, both in name and reality.

To K-pop and K-drama fans around the world, Gangneung is also known for the Jumunjin Beach Bus Top, which was the location for shooting the jacket image of BTS album, You Never Walk Alone, and is also famous for being the shooting location for many popular K-dramas including Dokkaebi (or Guardian: The Lonely and Great God).

In addition, Gangneung was recognized as a city of literature and arts from old times. It is a city of tradition and is labelled as 'the birthplace of the world's first mother and son featured on banknotes,' for Shin Saimdang is featured on the Korean 50,000 won banknote and her son, Yulgok Yi I, on the Korean 5,000 won banknote.

With the growing staycation trend around the world, Gangneung is becoming a famous heaven for 'hocance (hotel vacance)' sought after by young people, especially because of its improved accessibility via Seoul-Gangneung KTX and Yangyang International Airport and affordable high-class hotel accommodations (over 14,000 rooms) such as Lakai Sandpine Resort, Golden Tulip Skybay Hotel, St. John's Hotel, and Seamarq built along Gyeongpo Beach. Thanks to the clean natural environment, Gangneung City continues to be a favorite untact tourism destination even in the midst of COVID-19 pandemic. Gangneung is truly a treasure trove of tourism resources: The Anmok

As a city of tourism, Gangneung successfully held the 2018 PyeongChang Winter Olympic games and is slated to host the 2022 World Choir Games, the 2024 Winter Youth Olympics, and the 2026 World Intelligence Transport Systems Congress. Thus, it has an ambitious plan to revamp its brand power into a global boutique MICE destination by remodeling some of the Olympic facilities into convention facilities in connection with hotels along Gyeongpo Beach that are equipped with conference facilities.

Gangneung City is currently planning to designate 'Gangneung Tourism Development Corporation' as an exclusive MICE organization pursuant to the 'Gangneung City MICE Industry Promotion Ordinance.' After making organizational arrangement to assume the role of a local convention bureau, Gangneung Tourism Development Corporation will implement detailed plans to provide the best services connected to the rich experience resources in the local area to attract global tourists and business events in earnest.

This year, 'Gangneung Ojuk Hanok Village' operated by the Gangneung Tourism Development Corporation and 'Haslla Art World' in Gangneung City were included in the list of 40 'Korea Unique Venue' jointly designated by Korea Tourism Organization and the Ministry of Culture, Sports, and Tourism. Gangneung Ojuk Hanok Village is a traditional hanok accommodation where guests can have first-hand experience of the tradition of Gangneung as the city of literature and culture. It operates a variety of traditional experience programs for tourists from home and abroad to participate, playing a solid role as a landmark of Gangneung loved by both Gangneung residents and tourists from overseas. Haslla Art World is a complex art space that became quite popular among overseas reporters during the 2018 PyeongChang Winter Olympics: It has a Museum Hotel, outdoor sculpture park, modern art galleries, Pinocchio and marionette museum, restaurant, and an ocean café.

The competitiveness of Gangneung as a global tourism & MICE destination is proven by the fact that the city was selected by the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism as one of the Five Tourism Hubs, which will be promoted over the next five years with the investment of 100 billion won so as to expand foreign tourists visiting Korea. This intensive support will certainly enhance the brand value of Gangneung City. With great anticipation, let's encourage the successful growth of Gangneung City as a boutique destination in Korea.

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Intangible Heritage of
Humanity by UNESCO.



Danoje Festival
UNESCO Masterpiece of the Oral and
Intangible Heritage of Humanity



Haslla art World



St. John's Hotel
1,000Rooms, 1,000pax Grandballrom



Jeongdongjin

KOREA TOURISM ORGANIZATION

Gangneung Tourism Development Corporation

GANGNEUNG OJUK HANOK VILLAGE

KOREA UNIQUE VENUE

A winning formula

Fresh draws, a supportive CVB and excellent track record in pandemic management make New Zealand a star destination for top achievers. By Karen Yue

Renowned for its natural beauty and wide, open spaces, New Zealand is a bucket-list destination for many – all of which make an incentive trip to the country an irresistible idea.

Leading up to a return in international incentive programmes, New Zealand's tourism community has been birthing fresh experiences that would impress top winners.

Opening in December, the All Blacks Experience at Auckland's SkyCity is a guided and interactive journey through the New Zealand rugby story. Visitors can learn what it takes to make, shape and be an All Black, one of the most famous sports teams in the world.

Plans are also underway for a new entertainment experience from Weta Workshop, New Zealand's Academy Award-winning design and effects company. Weta Workshop Unleashed

will bring together movie magic, from film effects to massive miniatures and monsters in-the-making, to add an impressive dimension to corporate events. Hands-on workshops, film effects demonstrations, character transformations and unique setups are all possible.

For winners who appreciate a tasty bite, Riverside Kitchen Cooking School at Christchurch's new Riverside Market will make an attraction stop. Visitors will get to pick some of New Zealand's finest produce and turn them into a three-course meal – with wine – under the guidance of authentic Kiwi chefs.

For memorable stays, consider these new properties: Park Hyatt Auckland which dangles expansive views out to the Waitemata Harbour; The Hotel Britomart which is recognised as the country's most eco-friendly hotel; and Gibbston Valley Lodge & Spa, a luxuri-



From top:
Riverside
Kitchen cooking
school;
All Blacks
Experience

ous retreat set in a organic and historic winery.

Event planners looking to deliver a quality incentive programme in New Zealand are in good hands – the Tourism New Zealand team has extensive knowledge of accommodation and activities suitable for incentive groups, and will connect planners with local professional suppliers and operators who will make dreams come true.

Domestic courtship

As global travel remains subdued, Koh Samui's hoteliers strive to capture local bookings. By Anne Somanas

As countries hunker down for a travel season focused on the domestic market, Koh Samui's luxury hotels are doing the same in Thailand.

"With the domestic market being the only lifeline at present, we learnt very quickly that the key to attracting the local market is to use social media – such as Facebook, Line and Instagram – to both promote and facilitate simple transaction options," shared Remko Kroesen, Banyan Tree cluster general manager for both Banyan Tree Samui and Banyan Tree Krabi. The latter opened its doors in October 2020.

Kroesen added that other initiatives such as hosting bloggers or celebrities – who post regularly on social media platforms – have also helped to promote the resort and destination. Selling vouchers at travel fairs have proven popular too.

All these "attractive deals and aggressive promotions via the right channels" are key to driving business, cited Kroesen.

As for Meliá Koh Samui, the hotel



From top: Melia
Koh Samui; wed-
ding setup at
Banyan Tree Koh
Samui



is aiming to make its Sunday brunch profitable, said its general manager Ernesto Osuna.

Meliá Koh Samui has also packaged the brunch with pool and gym access, which has brought about "very good response" from both locals and expats. Previously the Imperial Boat House Beach Resort, the overhauled property opened just before the pandemic hit in January 2020.

Christian Lueke, cluster sales and marketing director for Meliá properties in Koh Samui and Chiang Mai (pre-opening), shared that the properties are now focused on "creating experiences" and additional packages that will entice the local market, such as add-ons like on-property childcare for parents.

The Thai government's *We Travel Together* campaign, and Bangkok Airways' Flyer Pass promotion in the past few months has given Koh Samui's events industry a boost.

"This has encouraged some domestic group and incentive business, but numbers remain modest in comparison with destinations like Phuket and Krabi.

"However, weddings will continue to play a large part of (bringing) guests to Koh Samui as is one of the (country's) most popular wedding destinations," Kroesen told TTGmice.

Swiss bliss

The safe, compact country offers a bevy of enticing incentive reasons. By *Rachel AJ Lee*

South-east Asia has become an increasingly important market for Switzerland, with a noticeable increase in corporate groups from the region choosing it for their incentives.

An insurance company from Thailand that chose Switzerland for its reward programme, said that the “dream destination” was one of the safest and cleanest in Europe. One of its cities, Lausanne, also holds a special place in their hearts.

Its spokesperson added: “Lausanne is where Thailand’s beloved King Rama 9 studied and lived for many years. We could not deny selecting Lausanne as a destination to take our top agents there to follow in his footsteps.”

Over in Indonesia, Ary Leonardo, vice president MICE from AntaVaya, spoke of how accommodating suppliers were, when it came to adhering an incentive group’s dietary requirements.

“The group was extremely impressed how restaurants, even the remote mountain ones, were able to come up with delicious Muslim-friendly meals. The highlight for the group was a gala dinner that showcased Swiss traditions and cuisine in a farm near Zurich,” he shared.

But a farm-style gala dinner is just a small part of the rich variety of landscapes and cultures that a five-day programme can pack in. It takes only four hours to cross the country from East to West, and three hours from North to South.

There is also a range of social programmes available, such as skiing in the morning, cow-milking in the afternoon, and a evening dinner cruise.

Backing the country’s myriad offerings are Switzerland Convention & Incentive Bureau’s and its partners’ varying support policies.



Above: Sledging down a Swiss mountain makes for a memorable incentive moment

For example, groups of 300 pax will be given access to an additional airport counter for tax refunds, while a 500-strong group will be provided with an award ceremony with folklore music group as entertainment.

Meanwhile, Lake Lucerne Navigation Company offers a 10 per cent discount on charter cruises excluding F&B and additional services, while over in Lake Geneva, Glacier 3000 offers a free Snowbus ride on the glacier.

In light of the pandemic, Switzerland’s tourism suppliers have also implemented a Clean & Safe protocol.

Reto Kaufmann, Kuoni Tumlare’s vice president sales and operations, South-east & South Asia, summarised: “Switzerland offers MICE organisers from Asia a value for money proposition. Critical supply such as hotels, transportation, venues, F&B as well as entertainment can be found in a wide quality and price range, which is key to building enticing incentive programmes.”

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Stepping forward

S Puvaneswary reveals how Accor continues to evolve to ensure it remains a strong contender for business events

The rapid take up of hybrid events in 2H2020 has not gone unnoticed across Accor's business events properties in Singapore, Indonesia, and Malaysia.

And as this trend is expected to continue even when borders eventually reopen. As such, Accor is poised to meet this demand with souped-up technology and reimagined spaces that allow for the comfortable hosting of hybrid and virtual events.

Garth Simmons, CEO, South-east Asia, Accor, pointed out that the hotel company now has to be more creative in how they package hybrid events and reimagine events spaces, as well as provide the right technology to allow the "virtual world to blend seamlessly with its live elements".

"It is also important to have flexible cancellation policies to give people



From top: Pullman Bandung Grand Central; MGallerie Singapore

reassurance that should things change, they could cancel or postpone their event if necessary, without a big penalty," he added.

In light of the pandemic where hygiene is of the utmost priority, Accor also launched ALLSAFE, its cleanliness and prevention label centred

around a range of actions including more rigorous cleaning and sanitation, temperature screening, reinforced food safety procedures and social distancing in common areas.

"Event organisers need assurances that enhanced safety measures are in place," Simmons noted.

For a greater peace of mind, Accor has also partnered with insurance company AXA to offer free tele-medical consultations for all guests staying or meeting onsite.

This hygiene ethos and technology shift will carry on to two new properties opening soon in South-east Asia.

For example, the Pullman Bandung Grand Central in Indonesia will feature two ballrooms, 16 function rooms and meeting technology such as a giant video wall, built-in multiscreen video walls and digital flipcharts.

Meanwhile, MGallerie Singapore is set to open next year with 168 keys. It will boast natural furnishings, lush gardens and a cantilevered rooftop pool to evoke a feeling of wellness, which also doubles up as unique spaces. Guests will be able to enjoy health and medical treatments provided by Fullerton Healthcare Group.

A safe way to meet

ICC Sydney rebuilds confidence in events with an industry-leading health and safety framework. By **Karen Yue**

International Convention Centre Sydney (ICC Sydney) is one of the first purpose-built MICE venues in Australia to establish a comprehensive set of operating principles to guide the safe resumption of events in a Covid-19 era.

Described as an "industry benchmark" by ICC Sydney's CEO Geoff Donaghy, the ICC Sydney EventSafe

From left:
Safety hygiene marshalls are available to lend assistance; Event-Safe measures enforced at the HealthCert conference

Operating Framework spans 16 key areas of event management, including the customer journey, environmental hygiene, food service, technology and equipment, employees and public awareness, and covers meetings, conferences, exhibitions, live events and internal operations.

Besides consolidating inputs from national and international industry



bodies, the Framework also integrates best practice from parent group ASM Global's VenueShield, an advanced hygiene programme built on the expertise of public health authorities as well as medical and industry leaders.

In addition, the protocol abides by Safe Work Australia's Codes of Practice and national COVID-19 Safe Workplace Principles.

ICC Sydney's safety assurance is built on a strong track record – the venue has numerous International Standards Organisation Certifications in areas such as food safety, environment, Work, Health and Safety, and quality management.

Donaghy said the Framework would safeguard clients, visitors, contractors and team members against the risk of Covid-19 and reinstall confidence in events, which would in turn reboot the industry and Australia's economy.

"As Australia and the rest of the world starts to return to business as usual, it is critical that we all continue to safeguard against further outbreaks of Covid-19, especially when bringing people together," he remarked.

ICC Sydney's events specialists are on hand to help event owners and organisers navigate health and safety guidelines while fulfilling their unique event requirements.

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*A visitor night is defined as one person staying for one night in Tokyo. (e.g. 500 attendees x 2 nights = 1000 visitor nights)
*All offers and criteria are subject to change. *Other restrictions may apply.

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