

MODEL CENTRE

OFFERING A FULLY INTEGRATED FACILITY, SUNTEC SINGAPORE IS OFFERING A DIFFERENT MODEL FOR CENTRE DEVELOPMENT, EXPLAINS CHIEF OPERATING OFFICER, PIETER IDENBURG



With the development of Asia as one of the fastest growing economic regions in the world, Singapore has also become one of the most-sought after locations for conventions in the world. The government recognised this and has initiated programmes to continually re-invent and develop new competencies with exciting offerings to maintain its edge.

Like many other countries in the world, Singapore has increasingly seen that, apart from being a great avenue for exchanging ideas and introducing cutting edge innovations and new products, international meetings, conventions and exhibitions have great positive effects on the local economy. As a result, the competition is global and has heated up in recent years, with convention and exhibition bureaus, meeting planners and venues teaming up on a country level to pursue this business, armed with the full financial and incentives support of their governments.

However, Singapore has taken a very pragmatic approach towards the capital investments into large venues. Unlike other city and state governments where convention and exhibition facilities are largely state-funded, Singapore instead invests heavily into providing the fundamentals that make investing in the country attractive – seamless infrastructure, roads and public transport systems, first-class telecommunications network, island-wide broadband and wireless Internet, as well as ease of access from all around the world and a business friendly environment where setting up and operating business is a breeze. Then, it invites investors to underwrite the costs, build and operate the venues, while committing and delivering on-going strategic support.

One such example is Suntec Singapore International Convention and Exhibition Centre. Back in the mid-eighties, a group of Hong Kong businessmen recognised the opportunity and realised that such a centre while serving the community could also be used as a focal point of a large mixed-use development of commercial, leisure and retail space designed with attention to quality, efficiency and comfort. In 1988, they eventually went on to build one of the biggest private projects in Singapore – Suntec City – at the heart of Marina Bay which URA (Urban Redevelopment Authority in Singapore)'s master plan had identified as the new downtown

core. Its centrepiece is Suntec Singapore International Convention and Exhibition Centre, the finest in Southeast Asia and among the best in the world.

Since opening, there have been strategic shifts in Singapore's economy, and Suntec's business model has closely reflected them. Back in 1995, when the Singapore economy was fuelled by the manufacturing boom, the centre focused predominantly on exhibitions. More than ten years down the road when Singapore is gearing up its finance, medical, education, IT and communications and service sectors, its economy is becoming more service oriented and knowledge based, and its people more affluent. Reflecting this trend, exhibitions with heavy manufacturing focus gradually moving to other cities and there is an increase in lifestyle and consumer trade shows. And, as Singapore pours in capital into research and development and competes with the world's best cities for the top talent to be a knowledge hub, more and more world-class researchers, scientists, financiers, IT professionals, etc. now come to Singapore to exchange ideas and learn from each other. For us, this means more international meetings and conventions.

Of course, all these business development efforts and capital improvements are supported by sound marketing plans and initiatives. Since 2001, Suntec

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Singapore has spearheaded an active and successful marketing alliance with the surrounding five-star hotels; leading destination management company, Pacific World Singapore; the national carrier, Singapore Airlines and the Singapore Exhibition & Convention Bureau. The alliance markets the precinct around Suntec Singapore as Asia's Convention City in the heart of Marina Bay. Between Suntec Singapore and the five other venues in the alliance we have 75,000 square metres of meeting space, 5,200 five-star hotel rooms, access to 300 restaurants and 1,200 shops in six malls – all this within 15 minutes walk from the centre.

This infrastructure is a great proposition for any meeting planner and something unique that few, if no other, cities globally can boast with.

What's the result? Last year for the second time in a row, Singapore was ranked second on the list of the world's top convention cities – and we're targeting number one position. ■

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