

AIPC Conference and 50th General Assembly

By Natalie Chen

# The evolution of meetings in Asia



**T**he meetings industry in Asia is going from strength to strength, buoyed by the robust economies in the region. The pace of development is faster than in other parts of the world.

"It is the meeting business that is growing faster in Asia than anywhere else. But the aggregate economic statistics are not collective because most countries don't measure it. In terms of infrastructure development, the pace of development is fast in the Middle East. But Asia has a much bigger base previously," said Paul Kennedy MBE, group exhibition director, Meetings & Incentives Events, Reed Travel Exhibitions.

The evolution of the meetings business in Asia is leading to more supply to feed growing demand. Kennedy asserted that it is perhaps the only region in the world to be seeing that characteristic on both sides of demand and supply. For example, the region has massive growth in the creation of new convention centres, hotel buildings, airport infrastructure and the creation of new airlines, reflecting

that more supply is coming up. This is true not only in China but all over Asia.

Added Kennedy, "On the demand side, you have the freedom to travel. For example in China, you have the freedom to associate, there's growth in attendance at events by individuals and also the economic activity continues to increase. We're seeing many new meetings emerge in a number of economies as more economies develop - Vietnam and Indonesia for example. These will be major sources in new business."

When it comes to marketing, it looks like destinations are not abating in their promotions.

Kennedy said that destination marketing budgets are increasing, not decreasing, with new destinations coming into the market regularly.

But also more and more governments are now recognising the economic importance of the business of meetings because of the growth of domestic products that could be filled by meetings. He cited

the Singapore as an example.

"The Singapore government recognises the importance of economic activity. And really they're one of the first to really tie-in economic policy to the meetings industry," said Kennedy.

To maintain competitiveness, Asia would need to keep its service standards up and control supply.

"In China, we got 84 more centres more to come. There is a danger of over supply on the market. And certainly my own company, as an exhibition company, sees China as a major growth, potential. But not just China; we are looking at the emerging economies, Vietnam for an example," he said.

As seen, the meetings business world wide tracks the economy, so as economic development in Asia has advanced, so have business events like meetings, conventions and exhibitions. Initially, this is typically directed at meeting regional requirements but the globalisation of business today means it quickly becomes international in scope. This is what appears to be happening in Asia.

"One shift that we can expect is from an initial emphasis on exhibitions and trade fairs to a greater proportion of convention activity. As international interest grows, and appropriate facilities develop, it is likely that international associations and corporations will increasingly include Asia as part of their global involvement," said Edgar Hirt, president of International Association of Congress Centres (AIPC).

Hirt believes many Asian destinations are only recently emerging as part of the meetings industry. They will need to earn the confidence of meeting organisers, who tend to have very exacting expectations and need to be sure that a new destination can deliver

these to their satisfaction.

"However, Asian destinations and facilities have a huge opportunity to take advantage of what has been learned about the industry over many years in other parts of the world, and to avoid the mistakes others have made in the past. The best way for them to do this is to engage fully in the international industry through participation in industry organisations, and we would encourage them to do so," said Hirt. Events



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