

2011 and beyond - industry opinions



GUY BIGWOOD
■ GMIC President and MCI
Group Sustainability director
■ Barcelona

It has been a solid year for sustainability in the meetings industry and I am impressed by many of the actions taken by organisations around the world. Looking across the Green Meetings Industry Council (GMIC) membership, I have seen a growing number of businesses that have elevated sustainability to a strategic management priority

"The industry is not doing enough. We need to step up, scale up and speed up"

and have taken actions to embed CSR into day-to-day practices. However, while 2010 was a good year we must ask whether 'good' is good enough? Global resource issues, destruction of nature and unhealthy practices continue. Oil prices will go up and the unequal distribution of wealth and opportunity is only worsening. The meetings and events industry is not doing enough and together we need to step up, scale up and speed up. Sustainability is a key management competence. It is good for profit, builds trust and gives competitive advantage.



ROHIT TALWAR
■ Global futurist and CEO,
Fast Future Research
■ London

Some Asian destinations are still learning about the business events industry and are stuck in a 'real estate' mindset where they see the goal as just selling beds and square feet for business events. However, others are beginning to see there is far greater longer-term potential to use business events to drive economic growth and help create new industries.

"Some Asian destinations are still learning about the business events industry"

Korea has highlighted the business events sector as one of seven key engines of economic growth and is targeting events that will contribute to the growth of the other six sectors.

For example, when Seoul hosted the G20 in November the primary goal was to position Korea on the world stage. However, the Korean government also appreciates the longer-term benefits. The next two years will see interesting changes as players across the sector in Asia start to see the true size of the prize.

EDWARD LIU
■ President, Singapore
Association of Convention
& Exhibition Organisers
& Suppliers (SACEOS)
■ Singapore



With Asia emerging from the global recession in a relatively stronger position, the Asian MICE industry will come of age in the next decade and beyond.

European organisers will make Asia their battleground as they attempt to strengthen their portfolios and gain market share. The pace of change and challenges will quicken more rapidly in Asia than elsewhere in the coming years.

In Singapore, delegates at the 77th UFI Congress in November were impressed with the world-class infrastructure and facilities, and several are planning to replicate some of their more-established events here.

The successful staging of this event has helped reposition Singapore as a hub for international exhibitions and events in the minds of the global captains of industry.

"The Asian MICE industry will come of age in the next decade and beyond"

JACQUES ARNOUX
■ Managing director - Asia,
Pacific World
■ China



The outlook for MICE in China in 2011 is pretty good, there has been a noticeable upswing in corporate meetings and association conferences coming here. However the incentive market is still quite slow and has not quite returned as fully as we might have expected.

I think the places to watch next year will be Chengdu and Lijiang. They should be on everybody's list if they are considering China. I have handled three recent incentives to Lijiang and to me it is just so interesting and special to visit.

It is a buyer's market right now in Beijing and Shanghai. Not so good for the hotels, but great for corporate buyers. Shanghai post-Expo is going to be a positive time and 2011 will be ideal to visit. Right now you can get hotel rooms in Shanghai for 50 per cent cheaper than in Hong Kong.

"The places to watch next year will be Chengdu and Lijiang. They should be on everybody's list"



REBECCA LIM
■ General manager,
World Events
■ Hong Kong

In the ever-increasing regulatory environment faced by the pharmaceutical industry, event planners need to provide evidence on how we meet each criteria. These guidelines often vary from country to country. For example, the maximum spend per delegate on lunch is different to dinner, which is in turn different in Hong Kong,

“Convention bureaux could provide downloadable guides with even just basic information”

by providing downloadable guides with even just basic information like Michelin-starred restaurants, which are a ‘no’ everywhere.

Venue and destination selection is an area where companies often come under the most scrutiny, therefore it is vital that the selection is carried out carefully and does not compromise the professional integrity of the event or the company.

Singapore and everywhere else. In some countries the specific regulations can be hard to find, thus client-specific codes of compliance practice will often take precedent in such scenario. Individual venues cannot be expected to keep up-to-date. Convention bureaux could assist



IB LOLEC
■ Regional country manager,
Pacific World
■ Bali

Bali will be the MICE destination to watch in the coming 12 months. We are building a new convention centre and the government also has plans to grow inbound tourism numbers from three million to five million people.

“The roads and infrastructure are already under huge pressure from the island’s tourists”

happen if Bali wants to return to its golden years.

For MICE groups, the good news is that the government will participate if we are bidding for international conferences or incentives. This initiative will cover conferences and incentives of more than 500 people as long as the delegates come from at least 10 countries.

I am concerned that this will be bad for the current roads and infrastructure, which are already under huge pressure from the current tourists that visit the island.

The government has to look at this predicted influx and anticipate the number of people coming in to Bali in the next few years. This is what must



KIMMI SIU
■ Corporate marketing and
communications, CSC
■ Sydney

I consider four things when it comes to attending a famil trip: if I have ever been to the location before; and if I have already been, whether or not they have new attractions or sites; the quality of the food and catering; and the hotel and airline sponsors.

Most destinations do a good job, but there is always room for improvement. For example, it would be good to stay in the same hotel for at least two consecutive nights, that way we can truly experience the facilities and service. Time should also be allotted to use the spa or gym.

Each buyer on the trip usually has a very different event in mind. “Free time” with a list of recommend sites to visit will mean we can consider what other sites are on offer that may not be suitable for others’ groups.

More experience-based activities would be great – such as cooking, wine tasting and belly dancing. Yacht cruises should always be included. An event to get to know each other before the trip also helps break the ice and ensure that trips are more enjoyable.

“On a famil trip it would be good to stay in the same hotel for at least two consecutive nights”



DAVID AITKEN
■ Managing director,
Bangkok Exhibition Services
■ Bangkok

Thailand is a resilient market, but by definition this indicates there have been challenges. Obviously Thailand has to address the image challenges it is facing with regard to the political landscape.

Beyond this, in the exhibition sector we are positive about the 7.5 per cent GDP forecast for 2011 and the second year of the Asean free trade agreement. It is a slow process, but you only have to look at the European Union to see how these agreements can drastically change business environments.

Trade barriers are lessened and dropped every year, which will level the playing field and reorganise the market to some extent. Traditional trading hubs such as Singapore and Hong Kong will face more open business environments regionally.

Thailand and Vietnam offer much lower operating costs as well as the necessary infrastructure for exhibitions. Laos and Cambodia, while cheaper again, fall backwards because they cannot yet supply the skilled workforce and infrastructure required.

“Thailand and Vietnam offer much lower operating costs as well as the right infrastructure”



SERENA MA
 ■ Senior manager, Event planning and travel procurement, Manulife Financial
 ■ Hong Kong

My request for 2011 is that hotel sales teams be more attentive to RFPs. Planning approximately 15 regional events annually at hotels across Asia means I receive a number of hotel proposals.

The biggest frustration I face in the RFP process is receiving incomplete hotel proposals – especially when the event/conference requirements are clearly outlined in the event brief.

“The biggest frustration I face in the RFP process is receiving incomplete hotel proposals”

Often times, the proposals received are missing key details that have been requested in the event/conference brief – which means a number of follow-up emails to obtain the required information. For example,

when considering four hotels in five different destinations, that means potentially 20 different properties to follow up with for missing information.

A venue who gets it right the first time makes a positive impression because it shows they are careful and pay attention to detail, which in turn, makes my job much easier.

JIN-SEOB KIM
 ■ Director, Communications Korea
 ■ Korea



The Korean outbound incentive market was good in 2010. In many instances, MICE agents had already achieved their annual sales goals by the third quarter of the year and some recorded up to 60 per cent growth in their business. I am sure this trend should continue into 2011.

Popular destinations for Koreans have been Bali, Guam, Malaysia and Thailand, although the riots there made many Koreans choose other destinations in Asia. Macau has been big this year for Korean incentives too.

Japan, Hong Kong, Australia and Hawaii are all key players in attracting Korean MICE groups, and competition between these destinations for Korean business is getting tough.

Locally, Korea Tourism Organization and Seoul Tourism Organization have been active in attracting MICE groups and Seoul is really coming on as an international MICE city. The international market is rapidly becoming aware of what is on offer in Korea.

“In many cases, MICE agents had already achieved their sales targets by the third quarter”



ALLAN CHEW
 ■ General manager, Poloair Holidays
 ■ China

Next year will see a lot of long-haul travel for Chinese outbound MICE groups thanks to the appreciation of the Renminbi and the healthy economy here.

Yet many destinations, such as the US and Europe, still make it time-consuming and difficult for Chinese MICE groups to get visas.

“Why should I go through the visa hassle when I can take my Chinese groups elsewhere?”

They don't differentiate between MICE travel and leisure travel, but these are two very different market segments with different needs and wants. Therefore the visa requirements for both should be different.

Also, there are now 157 countries that allow visa-free access for Chinese visitors, so I have to ask why I should go through the visa hassle when I can take my groups, and my MICE spend, elsewhere.

On the other hand, Australia, New Zealand and Canada are great destinations to work with and really help out when it comes to assisting incentive travel groups from China.

HAZIRA HISHAM
 ■ Regional conventions & events, Prudential Services Asia
 ■ Malaysia



Having attended a number of trade shows around the region, sellers would be best advised to provide their collateral as a CD or flash disc these days. The information is much easier to bring back and use in this format.

Also, it makes a big difference if exhibitors can converse in English at a reasonable level as this is the accepted middle ground language for communications.

As for destinations, Singapore has been consistently popular for us due to its safety record, reliability and technology infrastructure.

This year, I did a familiarisation trip to Korea and found it highly stimulating and eye-catching, it would definitely impress MICE groups visiting for the first time. While there I saw Seoul, Busan and Jeju Island.

I have been promoting it already, but the safety situation there is a bit of a concern right now. However, it will only take a few active steps to bring our events there once the safety issue is resolved. ■

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