

Pattaya event praised for business management and increased participation

Australian buyers attending Incentive Travel & Conventions, Meetings Asia (IT&CMA) and Corporate Travel World (CTW) in Pattaya, Thailand last month praised show organiser TTG Asia Media for its handling of the event.

The 13th staging of IT&CMA, now held in tandem with CTW attracted 350 buyers in the 1425 registered delegates and 301 exhibiting companies representing 29 countries from Asia-Pacific, Middle East, Europe and the US.

The largest country pavilion was again host country Thailand with 252 sqm and 42 co-exhibitors. Then followed Singapore (24) Malaysia (22) and Australia (15). First time exhibitors included Czech Tourism, Dubai Tourism, Yokohama Convention and Visitors Bureau and the West Japan Industrial and Trade Convention Association. Cambodia elevated its promotion to country pavilion status.

Emerging Abu Dhabi airline Etihad Airways was a first time exhibitor at the CTW show.

This year the IT&CMA mart was condensed to two days and the conference fast-tracked to facilitate CTW certification courses and executive workshops. Also, travel managers attending the CTW section could make appointments with IT&CMA participants. Training and education was more evident this year with ICCA again hosting its popular workshop sessions on branding, sales, management and marketing.

Darren Ng, TTG Asia Media manag-



ing director said Co-locating the two events had definitely increased participation from exhibitors and buyers alike. "As the organiser of premier events such as these, we are constantly looking at taking the two shows to the next stage. After studying the feedback received from our last event we have incorporated several changes aimed at enhancing the shows as a one-stop shop for business travel and MICE under one roof."

Second time attendee Gleseppina Sinni, marketing program manager for Melbourne-based AWB Limited praised the organisation of the Pattaya event saying it was a big improvement over Bangkok's staging of the mart two years ago.

"Event management was excellent everything ran very smoothly," said Sinni. "Conference transport was on time. Entertainment venues and site inspections were well organised and the conference venue, accommodation and facilities were all of a very high standard," she said. "There was plenty of time for networking and I achieved all my objectives."

One area she felt could be improved

was the buyer/seller appointment scheduling, held over two days.

"Quite frankly, the second day was a waste of time as my appointment schedule for the mart was filled the first day. Sellers wanted to see me but I just could not fit them all in. She suggested the appointment scheduling be held on the same day in future. She said she had no problems with recommending the conference venue to her clients but still had a few reservations about downtown Pattaya. The IT&CMA conference area at the Royal Cliff Beach Resort was exclusive, set on hills overlooking Pattaya and is self-contained.

The downtown beach front area however, still left a lot to be desired.

"The problems with the sex trade seem to have worsened since I last visited Pattaya on a post-tour after the Bangkok event two years ago," said Sinni.

She attended a mid-week function for conference delegates at the Hard Rock Hotel, Pattaya and was shocked by some of the antics of gatecrashers at the official function. "It appears outsiders were also allowed to attend the function and got up to all sorts of things that did

Business focus, participation

not reflect well on the host venue for the evening."

First time buyer Debra Keating, special events manager for Kodak Australasia said the IT&CMA mart was excellent and she enjoyed the experience. "I was really quite surprised at the range of venues and product on show," she said.

Pattaya was also an enjoyable experience for Keating. "It was good fun and I liked the night life and entertainment." She followed up IT&CMA with short stay in Bangkok and preferred Pattaya of the two destinations. I found the two-hour drive from Bangkok to Pattaya a bit tedious but when the new Suvarnabhumi Airport opens next year it should make access to Pattaya a lot faster and easier. It should cut travelling time in half." She thought Pattaya would do better as a MICE destination with the exposure gained from staging the mart again next year. IT&CMA needs an international consultant to improve catering arrangements according to Margaret Reid. Reid, conference organising director for her Sydney-based PCO business has attended three IT&CMA marts and says the event gets better each year. One area that needs attention she believes is the function catering. She does not like to see food wasted and believes a little more attention to the needs of delegates during hosted functions would improve the event. "I estimated most functions apart from the opening event had 25 per cent no shows with delegates spoil for choice. Younger delegates wanted to party whilst older delegates wanted to retire earlier and prepare for the next day's meetings. Etiquette and health safety among some hotel staff also needed to be addressed. "I mentioned to one young waiter that the food was cold and she stuck her finger in it to test it. Worse she left it on the table. I had to put a note on it — not to be eaten! Pre-conference analysis of the delegate mix



and specific requirements could save costs and assist buyers and sellers to be more productive," said Reid. "Buyers no showing for appointments with sellers, which apparently was a problem for some, could be avoided."

Reid believes future events could also benefit from pre-show electronic scheduling. "I like to see a balance of sellers from each country. Unfortunately, 60 per cent of my appointments were with sellers from Vietnam. I am interested in Vietnam and actually did my post-tour to the country but also like to get an update from other countries and it required unnecessary appointment shuffling to see the people I needed to see.

Reid says Asia has a good price advantage over Australia for meetings

and incentives. "In Vietnam and Thailand I can get a delegate rate of just US\$28 and really attractive hotel rates to match," she said. "Most of my clients enjoy travelling to overseas destinations, it's all part of the experience." She said security was not a major problem as it had been significantly improved throughout the region especially at airports, hotels and resorts. A bigger concern was problems like SARS and the threat of bird flu. Bad press certainly affected numbers. Pattaya also had a poor image as a holiday destination and it was unlikely Reid would return next year.

"The conference venue and accommodation were very good because they were in an exclusive area," said Reid. "But Pattaya is still very sleazy and the sex trade is very evident.

ATF relocates 2006 meet to Davao after problems rule out Myanmar

The ASEAN Tourism Forum has relocated its annual travel mart and conference to Davao City in the Philippines for 2006. The original host country Myanmar was to have hosted its first ATF but it is understood political problems with the ruling military junta forced organisers to seek a more reliable environment.

ATF is the premier tourism industry gathering in Asia. ATF is a cooperative regional effort to promote the Association of Southeast Asian nations (ASEAN) region as one destination. The event is held on annual rotation among the 10 member nations of ASEAN: Malaysia, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, Lao PDR, Cambodia, Vietnam, Brunei Darussalam and Indonesia.

The theme for ATF 2006 is 'Celebrating the Many Faces of ASEAN'.

TRAVEX 2006, the exhibition component of the mart will be held at the NCC Exhibition Centre. The main conference hotel is the 245-room Marco Polo Davao.

Host city Davao is the capital of Southern Mindanao and a gateway to the East ASEAN region. The city boasts good beaches, diving and mountain resorts and is home to the Philippines highest peak Mt Apo.

Next year, show management returns to TTG Asia Media. More information and registration is available at e-mail atf@ttgasia.com or the website www.atfdavao.com

