

Singapore

Staying ahead of the pack



IT has been fashionable in recent years to say that Singapore's regional neighbours are putting the heat on the island-state's status as Asia's leading meetings and incentives destination.

The truth is, Singapore considers the larger global platform as its arena and has been quietly making moves to ensure it will retain its standing for years to come. Ashley Yew reports.

Singapore runs itself as a business entity and its strategy has always been to stay ahead of the pack. If the 1970s and 1980s were bumper crop years in terms of economic growth, the 1990s presented new challenges in terms of other rising Asian economies and emerging markets including China and India, especially. Singapore has been a model for several of these countries, some of which have quickly mastered the steep learning curve.

This new paradigm is also reflected in the business events industry as destinations in the region realise the value and worth of the industry and have invested heavily in promotion and attracting

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planners to bring events to their shores.

Money has also been poured into spanking new convention and exhibition venues as well as into new hotels — and refurbishing existing ones.

Besides its traditional rival Hong Kong, Thailand and Malaysia are also promoting themselves as meetings and incentives capitals and launching trade events focusing on the sector.

Singapore's response has been to focus on its core competencies — in particular that things work in the city-state.

Efficiency has been a core facet of the attractiveness of the island to meeting planners. Coupled with the coordinated approach by government agencies in lending support, event planners are only too happy to avail themselves of the incentives on the platter.

The Singapore Tourism Board, the main steering body to promote the country as a meetings and events destination, is offering event planners intending to hold their events here a bag of goodies under its "Make It Singapore Plus" campaign.

The "Make It Singapore Plus" campaign offers event organisers an attractive basket of incentives, including up to 30 percent financial support to event organisers for overseas marketing costs.

It includes complimentary rooms from participating hotels, discounts on F&B for welcome functions at the venues, special rates from national carrier Singapore Airlines, event enhancement value-adds in the form of videography services, the provision of welcome gifts for foreign delegates, team-building activities for corporate meetings and incentive groups, as well as publicity



support for all groups.

The STB said financial incentives aside, what organisers look for in a destination are "value, experience and efficiency".

"The provision of financial incentives must be complemented by key factors such as the existence of excellent MICE infrastructure, professional and skilled industry players and a strong track record in organising successful events," said Aloysius Arlando, the board's acting assistant chief executive, Business Travel and MICE.

"Without these necessary components, financial incentives alone will not ensure the event organizer a successful event."

With the campaign in place, the STB expects to generate 100,000 visitor nights and an estimated S\$100 million in tourism receipts.

Already the Business Travel and MICE sector contributes about a quarter of total visitor arrivals and about 30 percent of tourism receipts.

According to the STB, the business travel and MICE industry is set to grow at an average rate of 15 per cent annually over the next decade.

"We aim to substantially increase this sector's share of visitor arrivals and tourism receipts, in line with the important role that the BTMICE sector will play in helping STB achieve its aim of doubling visitor arrivals to 17 million and tripling tourism receipts to S\$30 billion by 2015," said Arlando.

According to the STB, the business travel and MICE industry is set to grow at an average rate of 15 per cent annually over the next decade and contribute to 35 percent of total tourism receipts by 2015.

The targets look achievable, with some 30 conventions already secured for 2006, which could be bringing in more than 25,000 foreign delegates.

Already this July saw the 117th International Olympic Committee Session bringing in 5,000 delegates and worldwide media exposure.

Next September will see the mega annual meetings of the Boards of Governors of the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank Group bringing in 16,000 foreign delegates

Taking the cue from the STB, several massive projects coming on-stream will dramatically change Singapore's attractiveness quotient as a meetings

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Business Travellers spend more - STB

According to statistics* provided by the STB, a leisure traveller to Singapore spends S\$705 per trip. A business visitor, on the other hand, spends an average of S\$900 to S\$1000 per trip - about 30-40 percent more than the leisure visitor.

A MICE visitor's expenditure in general is about S\$1500 to S\$1800 per trip, more than twice that of the leisure visitor.*

* Figures obtained from Research and Statistics Department, STB, and the MICE Surveys conducted by The Gallup Organization from 1999 - 2003.

For meetings, incentives, conventions and exhibitions there's no place like Singapore. Boasting an award-winning international airport, world-class facilities and infrastructure and a spectacular variety of venues from the ancient to the modern, the Lion City is the true business centre of Asia. It's a place where the old meets the new, the past meets the future and business meets business. And business is booming, as Singapore reinforces its position as the region's leader in key industries such as biomedical sciences and info-communications, increasing the opportunities for companies in those fields to experience all Singapore has to offer. To discuss your business requirements contact the Singapore Tourism Board in Sydney: (02) 9290 2888. www.visitsingapore.com/mice



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Singapore

SINGAPORE FOR BUSINESS: ONE AMAZING DESTINATION, A THOUSAND INCREDIBLE VENUES.



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and incentive destination.

Two integrated resorts will be up and running at the end of the decade at two locations to offer a new slew of options for MICE groups.

A completely new downtown is also coming up, with new ideas for residential, commercial and leisure uses. Orchard Road, the country's retail thoroughfare, which houses many of the top hotels, is also undergoing a major makeover.

Several of the hotels in the Marina Bay area have also been refurbished and new ones are coming up in resort island Sentosa and elsewhere.

The Singapore Expo has recently added four more halls and a brand new exhibition site near the airport is also being built to house a new aviation event there from 2008 (The long-running Asian Aerospace will have its last show in Singapore next year).

"We will work with our industry partners to determine how we can leverage on them and inject fresh ideas to provide new incentive options and packages to target our key markets such as India and China," said Arlando.

The competition from its regional neighbours has been key behind the drive to keep two steps ahead.

Putting it nicely, the STB said it welcomes the competition because it spurs them to improve their products and service standards.

"Singapore has stepped up on its efforts to entrench its position as Asia's premier business and MICE destination. One example is the formation of strategic trade partnerships with key economies such as the United States, Australia and Japan. Recently, Singapore signed the India-Singapore Comprehensive Economic Co-operation Agreement (CECA) which will create many opportunities for businesses using Singapore as a base for operations to India," the STB said.

It's a simple strategy — build the foundation for doing business and business, as well as business visitors and business events, will come.



Incentive isle

IN RECENT months, Singapore has played host to some huge incentive groups. In May, a 1800-strong incentive group from Amway Japan was there. Despite its small size, Singapore has been offering incentive groups a variety of options to keep its achievers suitably entertained.

For incentive groups, Singapore offers great shopping experiences, excellent F&B options, an exciting entertainment scene as well as top-class attractions such as the Night Safari, the Singapore Zoo and Sentosa. Asian incentive groups are especially thrilled by the shopping options available in Singapore.

"However, what gives Singapore an edge is our ability to develop customised programs which not only gives incentive groups a truly unique or exclusive experience, but also assists their companies to achieve corporate objectives such as business networking, team building and information exchange," said the STB's Arlando.

Among the options available are:

- combining team-building activities like hands-on friendly cooking competitions at the Culinary Academy, or dragon-boating activities to encourage corporate bonding
- exclusive incentive experiences like dining on the Gourmet Express Safari at the Night Safari or a fun beach party at Sentosa complete with a fountain show and a foam pool.
- exclusive F&B options such as dining on Cavenaugh Bridge under the stars, or closing a street in Chinatown for a hawker festival.

Another plus for incentive groups heading to Singapore is the ability to twin their incentive experiences there with a cruise or with other nearby destinations such as Bintan, Bali or Cambodia.



Singapore to set up casino watch

SINGAPORE is to set up an official watchdog in an attempt to wipe out criminal activities from its planned casinos.

The city-state's first gaming complex is due to open in 2009.

According to a government minister, the proposed watchdog will be a full-fledged government agency and will enforce the rules and regulations governing the casino industry.

Home Affairs minister, Wong Kan Seng, said the watchdog would ensure that casinos remained free from criminal influence and that illegal activities on the premises were kept under tight control.

He said the regulator would also have the power to punish casino operators who violate the rules by imposing fines or suspending their gaming licences, as well as settle any disputes.

Wong, who has voiced his opposition to the proposed casinos, said that where there were disputes between the casinos and their patrons - such as over winnings - the regulator would step in and adjudicate.



Singapore announced earlier this year that it will give the go ahead to two Las Vegas-style casino resorts to attract more tourists and lift its staid image.

Meanwhile, it has delayed a request for proposals for the two integrated casino resorts to November and the first quarter of 2006 after missing a September deadline.

The Singapore Tourist Board (STB) says that under a two-tiered process, it will start seeking request for proposals (RFPs) for a casino resort at the Marina Bayfront area by the end of November.

Tenders for a second casino complex on Sentosa Island have been moved to early 2006.



STB goes for broke with plans for 'Biggest Transit Lounge'

THE SINGAPORE Tourism Board (STB) is pulling out all the stops to enhance facilities for transit passengers at Changi airport.

It has launched phase two of its Transit Program to turn Singapore into 'The World's Biggest Transit Lounge'.

The STB says that as well as offering a world-class experience at Changi, it also wants to host transit passengers by providing them convenient access to the many attractions outside the airport for those with a longer stopover time.

More than five million passengers a year transit in Singapore with 80 of the world's airlines converging through 3900 scheduled weekly flights to more than 180 cities in 56 countries.

The phase two transit program incentives include:

- Bus shuttle services from the airport to Suntec City, Little India, Parkway Parade with return transfer to the airport. This new free shuttle takes transit passengers through areas showing a snapshot of the different sides to Singapore.
- Tourist Day Pass — transit visitors who want to travel and venture through Singapore on their own can redeem a complimentary day pass that gives them up to 10 free rides on SMRT and NEL trains within a 24-hour period.
- F&B/shower facility vouchers for use at the airport after returning from the transit experience - passengers can choose to freshen up with a choice of a food and drink voucher or complimentary use of the airport shower facilities. These can be collected at the Singapore Visitors Centre located at the airport arrival hall.
- Taxi Tourist Guide — transit visitors can also engage the services of such guides for a personalised guided tour of Singapore.

ZoukOut on for fifth year at Siloso

SINGAPORE's definitive and celebrated annual dance festival — ZoukOut — will be staged for the fifth time this year at the newly upgraded Siloso Beach area on Sentosa Island, where it was first held in 2000.

For 12 hours from dawn until dusk (8am to 8pm), the Singapore Tourism Board (STB) says the event will transform the resort landscape into a "magical clubland" with four stages featuring a broad spectrum of genres - including house, tribal, progressive, techno, trance, electro, indie, hip hop and the popular Mambo Jambo soundtrack.

The STB says this year's blockbuster festival features some of the biggest artists in the ever-growing field of electronic music, giving local and foreign clubbers the opportunity to interact in a friendly environment.

The event will be held on Saturday, December 10.

STB website revamped to position the island as a premier global destination

SINGAPORE's destination website has been revamped and is now bigger, better and brighter.

The Singapore Tourism Board (STB) says the soft launch of the website —www.visitsingapore.com — has been timed to assist travellers with their year-end travel preparations.

It says the re-launch of the website is aimed at achieving a strong brand recall among travellers and positioning Singapore as a premier travel destination around the world.

"Increasingly, travellers are turning to the Internet to make their travel plans," said Bill Ang, the STB's director, brand management. "So it is important that we have a website that is easy to navigate while at the same time, showcasing our Uniquely Singapore brand. With a refreshing and vibrant new look, and several unique interactive features, the Visit Singapore website is an ideal first stop for them to find out all they need to make their visit a Uniquely Singapore experience."

Improvements to the revamped website include the option to customise to travellers' specific interests and purpose of visit. Before entering the portal, users are asked what they are interested in — and an events calendar that caters to their purpose of visit is instantly created on the home page for them.

Another customisation option is the print card compilation feature. This allows travellers to pick and choose only the events or attractions that they want to visit, which will then be compiled automatically for easy printing. For true portability, by the end of this year travellers can also opt to download PDA versions of sections such as 'What to see', 'Where to stay' and 'What to do' — so they will have the information at their fingertips, wherever they go.

Apart from customisation, the portal also offers visitors the opportunity to scratch beneath the surface to get to



know the real Singapore. They can get 'insider information' through the new 'Ask a Singaporean' feature. Some of the topics in this feature are 'Where's the best place for tailoring suits'. There are also quick and handy guides, such as '10 must-try dishes' 'the Makansutra DIY food tour' and '20 unique things to do in Singapore' to give them ideas to jumpstart their travel plans.

By next April, visitors to the website will be able to see other useful planning tools, such as an itinerary planner, a web service-based events calendar, weather information, currency and transportation information.

In addition, portal visitors can enjoy other fun and interactive features. They can play games developed by Singaporean polytechnic students, send e-cards designed by Singaporean primary school students, participate in online polls and surveys, catch up with the latest on the bulletin board — and even share their experiences with other visitors by posting their photographs on the 'Post your Photos' section.

The new portal will be available in a number of languages, including English, Simplified Chinese, Traditional Chinese, Thai, Vietnamese, Bahasa, Japanese, Korean, Russian, Arabic, French and German.

Essential things to do in SINGAPORE

1) Spend an evening at the Night Safari — take the tram ride as well as a walking tour.

2) Indulge in Singapore's National dish Black Peppered Crab at Jumbo Seafood on the East Coast Parkway.



3) Buy intricate cushion covers, pashmina, oils and curry pastes in Little India then head for the Banana Leaf Apollo Restaurant for a tureen brimming over with spicy fish head curry and other spicy delights.

4) Sip the famous Singapore Sling at its very birthplace — the Long Bar at the Raffles Hotel then enjoy a 3 course extremely good value for money luncheon at Doc Chengs.

5) Go shopping at 3 am at Mustafa Centre in Little India, a bustling mall that is open 24 hours.



Sandra's personal must do's

Sandra Devahasdin is the Singapore Tourist Bureau representative in Western Australia. She travels frequently to Singapore hosting famils and keeping up-to-date with new product and experiences. Her tips for getting the most out of your visit include:

1) Indulge in one of Singapore's unforgettable Sunday brunch's. For around \$60-\$80 you will enjoy gourmet cuisine plus free flowing French champagne.

Some of my favourites include Mezza 9 at the Hyatt Hotel, Equinox at the Swissotel the Stamford, Town at the Fullerton Hotel.

2) Sip on a Caprioska during happy hours at the top of the Swissotel the Stamford — and soak in the best views of Singapore at a very affordable price. Happy hour 3pm — 9pm daily.

3) Pamper yourself like never before at one of Singapore's spas. My favourite is the Sentosa Spa at the Sentosa Spa and Resort (ask for an outside villa).