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Asian destinations are proving formidable

By Mike Heuer

The United States and Europe have dominated the international exhibitions and events market the past few decades, but several Asian destinations have become some of the world's top locales for tradeshows and other events.

The city-state of Singapore is making a strong claim as "Asia's convention city" and has won recognition as one of the world's best spots for tradeshows. Thailand also is growing in popularity, and Hong Kong remains one of the world's best locales to conduct business and commerce.

The International Congress and Convention Association in 2012 ranked Singapore as the top destination for conventions in Asia for the tenth straight year. Singapore is the only Asian city to rank among the world's top five cities since 2006, along with Vienna, Paris, Berlin and Barcelona. The Union of International Associations also lists Singapore as the top nation as well as top city for international meetings and conventions – well ahead of more traditional international powers.

"This year we overtook the U.S.A. and Japan, so that's a big deal for us," said Serene Tan, regional director, Singapore Tourism Board. "We've undergone quite a bit of transformation with many new resorts and entertainment venues and a much more vibrant nightlife."

Situated off the southern end of the Malay Peninsula about 85 miles north of the Equator, Singapore and its many islands is a thoroughly modern city-state with a bustling economy and about six million bilingual citizens who speak English. Singapore also has one of the world's busiest seaports and one of the highest per-capita incomes anywhere. Its nearness to burgeoning Asian markets and stable political system has convinced some 7,000 multinational corporations to make Singapore their headquarters, including many previously located in the U.S.

Singapore's cosmopolitan population of about six million speaks English, Malay, Chinese and Tamil with equal aplomb, and the stable economy and government have made it a popular location for thousands of international corporate headquarters.

"We are a young state and very small, so education is critical to us," said Tan. "Everyone learns English and at least one other language, such as Chinese. Our forefathers are from all over – India, China, Japan. It's become a neutral ground."

While Singapore has earned recognition as one



of the world's top convention sites, Thailand also is seeing a surge in business from conventions and other events. And a new promotion by the Thailand Convention and Exhibition Bureau (TCEB) called the "Sustainable Mega-Events Campaign" targets U.S. businesses and organizations with the intention of luring more large-scale events to Thailand.

"We expect this campaign to accomplish two goals," said Vichaya Soonthornsaratoon, acting director of meetings industry, TCEB. "First, to encourage more American companies and organizations to bring their large corporate events to Thailand. Second, to highlight the need for industry-wide action as responsible global citizens. The leadership and commitment Thailand's MICE industry is demonstrating will contribute to its overall standing within the global industry and cement its status as the destination of choice for international mega-events."

Although its marketing campaign targets large-scale events, Thailand welcomes and accommodates events of all sizes and created its convention and visitors bureau in 1994 to promote its then-fledgling MICE industry.

Long known as an international destination for commerce, Hong Kong has been an international economic powerhouse since the 19th century and remains one of the world's top destinations for business and leisure. And its cosmopolitan background means there are no surprises for overseas exhibitors.

"There are no differences if a first-time exhibitor were to participate in a convention or tradeshow in Hong Kong as compared to elsewhere," said Mill Luk, director of Kingsmen Hong Kong Ltd. "Hong Kong is one of the most dynamic cities in the world – a living fusion of East and West. Most locals are bilingual in English, Mandarin or Cantonese, and some are even

trilingual. I don't think there're any major issues."

While no major issues should be encountered, sound logistical planning is necessary to ensure exhibits are set up and dismantled in a timely manner and to avoid potential fees.

"The installation and dismantling period given by organizers is always very short. Exhibitors are typically given half a day to move in and set up, and dismantling will take place right after the show closes," said Luk. "Sometimes, exhibitors might require workers to be on stand-by at the booth before the show closes to assist with the packing of exhibits just to catch up with the schedule. Once the show closes, the workers will tear down the booth and have it evacuated before midnight. Otherwise, a penalty will be imposed by the exhibition hall.

"Exhibitors should prepare a checklist before dismantling if they need to keep stock of any furniture or construction materials for future usage," Luk continued.

Like other places, clear communication is critical toward ensuring success when exhibiting in Hong Kong.

"Communication is very important not only for sending the requirements and briefing information via email, but also for calls to discuss further details," said Luk. "A clear cost breakdown in quotations with samples of finishing materials is crucial to ensure quality deliverables, while a well-planned working schedule would help all parties to work together to meet deadlines. Production and pre-setup photos from factories are also beneficial to ensure that all exhibits are in good shape and alterations could be made before the move-in to site."

Because Hong Kong is such a popular destination for tradeshows and other events, early planning is necessary.

"Book your space early as the two convention centers in Hong Kong are fully packed with different exhibitions, tradeshows and conferences all year round," said Luk. "Registered delegates and buyers participating in conventions and exhibitions in Hong Kong during campaign periods can enjoy an array of privileges and offers, including special discounts from airlines, merchants, restaurants, attractions and airport lounges."

Whether choosing to participate in marketing events held in Singapore, Thailand, Hong Kong or elsewhere, Asia offers a number of business opportunities for international exhibitors and associations in some of the world's most modern venues.