

Of MICE and Men: A Mission Made Possible

Meetings and Exhibitions Industry in 2012

What aspects of meetings, conventions and exhibitions lie in store for all stakeholders in 2012? Close scrutiny of MICE reveals that what lies in store are not necessarily bleak prospects. Instead, as much as pitfalls/loopholes and conundrums, resilience, recovery, hard work, and opportunities all constitute the tapestry of MICE and men worldwide. U.S. MICE performance, Asia's resilience, proactive infrastructure investment across Asia, the advent of the AEC, and inherent potential enjoyed by a great number of countries point to real-world developments and relevant factors at work.

Global Trends and a MICE Story in the Land of the Eagle

Despite a series of "Black Swan" events across many regions round the world, such as the tsunami in Japan, flooding in Thailand, the Arab spring, and ongoing bank or national debt crises, the recovery in consumer travel demand starting from 2010 is going to continue. The results of IPK International's World Travel Monitor showed a 5% rise in global outbound travel (*with overnights*) in 2011 to 750 million (*following a growth rate of 7% in 2010*), and representing a new record high in global outbound travel.

World Outbound Market Volume 2011



Source: *Global Travel Trends*, p. 2, *ibid.*

In the words of Rolf Freitag, founder and president of IPK International, tourism defied continuing crises and difficult situations to end with record levels in all respects. The 5% growth translates into a new record high on global outbound travel. IPK is cautiously optimistic about 2012, although the economic outlook in many markets indicates

recession. IPK anticipates even more distinct shifts in tourism source markets because southern “Euro crises” counties will not be in a position to travel in the manner to which they were accustomed.¹

Specifically, MICE sectors in the U.S., the world’s biggest economy, have shown that the recent economic downturn has not brought the tourism business down. This is apparent across all three sectors discussed hereafter, although this may be subject to a certain degree of qualification. In the **travel sector**, 2011 travel expenditures grew by close to 8%, due partially to the fact that prices increased significantly, primarily because of rising oil prices. The growth rate of travel expenditures in 2012 is forecast to decelerate to approximately 4.3%. Certain indicators signal that the U.S. will not suffer a double-dip recession, and business demand is likely to pick up. Growth in U.S. domestic travel is projected to slow, but in-bound travel will grow by almost 9%. Spending by foreign travelers is expected to account for approximately 30% of the growth in travel expenditures. Growth in leisure and business travel will decelerate to 4.6% and 3.3% respectively. A significant amount of travel will be driven by business confidence, by profits, and by economic activity. U.S. business meetings will be driven by growth in non-foreign business output. In general, business demand is likely to pick up, with strongly growing profit trends, resulting in enterprises with comfortable access to cash. With the upcoming election, the likelihood of any major legislative change diminishes, contributing to general certainty and business confidence. This state of affairs will, in all probability, encourage the private sector to expand their business operations, thus enhancing the meeting sector.²

Lodging prospects in the US anticipate a robust cyclical recovery of travel that will gradually move toward a more sustainable pace of growth. At present, this trajectory remains, but with significantly less certainty. Demand for 2012 is projected to continue to grow, but is unlikely to reach 2008 levels. ADR will recover slightly and could return to peak levels in 2014. In 2011, the lodging sector benefitted from a recovery in travel starting from 2010, with continued transient and group bookings. Preliminary results for the summer point towards healthy demand and growth levels. Commencing from the 3rd quarter of 2011, there were signs that strength in the lodging sector had begun to level out as a result of recent developments such as U.S. debt negotiations, deteriorating financial conditions and the European debt crisis, all of which have contributed to reduced expectations for RevPAR growth [RevPAR referring to revenue per available room] for 2012. Aspects closely linked to the economic cycle are set to pull back for 2012. Some trips will be shortened or cancelled. At the same time, travel associated with key business initiatives in strong sectors is expected to grow. The balance leans in favour of continued aggregate growth, subject to real economic development at the global level.³ Meetings will continue to be shorter, and the elimination of a signature or meal period will persist. Meanwhile, 2012 will usher in to a greater degree a return of small-scale corporate incentive trips. Travel technology will come into play. Hotels will be required to become more social and viral in their marketing. Customers will search for best value propositions, deals, and discounts at record levels. Flash-sale sites will make their presence more visible in conjunction with the growth of web-enabled mobile services, mobile sites and social marketing.⁴

With respect to **the exhibitions industry**, trade shows are a very precise reflection of the various industries and sectors they serve [unlike many other types of face-to-face events]. In the same vein, the distinctions that separate how some industries might be faring in relative terms will be reflected in how trade shows in those sectors are performing. Exhibitions serving the health-care sector and the information-technology sector perform relatively well in comparison to the government-services sector, construction, home-building, and home-repair. As such, it is more revealing to examine major industrial sectors and relevant events rather than to resort to generalizations regarding the U.S. exhibitions and

¹ Global Travel Trends, p. 2, 2011/12, IPK International 2012

² David Huether, p. 56, PCMA Convene, November 2011, <http://www.pcma.org/Documents/Convene/2012MeetingsIndustry.pdf>

³ Barry Goldstein, pp.47-48, PCMA Convene, November 2011, <http://www.pcma.org/Documents/Convene/2012MeetingsIndustry.pdf>

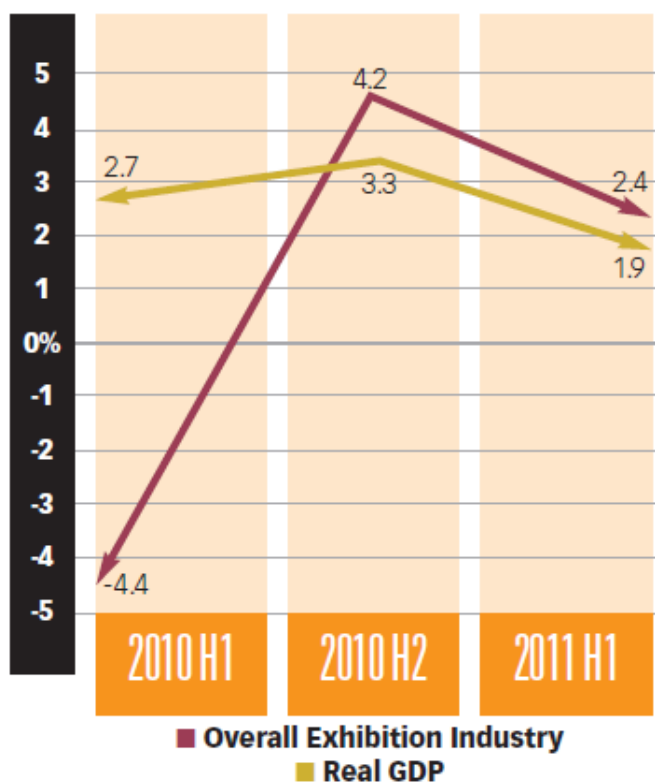
⁴ Barry Goldstein, p.54, November 2011, *ibid*.

events industry. In 2010, the **Center for Exhibition Industry Research (CEIR)** modified its analytical algorithm for exhibition industry performance, and increased the number of industry sectors monitored from 11 to 14 in order to achieve greater data accuracy.

Even more apparent is the fact that, despite the ebb and flow of the U.S. economy in recent years, the country’s exhibitions and events industry continues to demonstrate remarkable resilience, both at home and abroad, as displayed in a recent **CEIR** media release showing that performance of the exhibitions industry exceeded the U.S. GDP during the first 6 months of 2011 with a GDP growth rate of 1.9% and a 2.4% growth rate for the exhibitions industry.⁵

Exhibition Industry Growth VS U.S. Real GDP Growth

Year-On-Year Percentage Change



Source: Steven Hacker, p. 68, PCMA Convene, November 2011

Also very much in congruence with the global trend, most knowledgeable industry analysts view the growth of digital media as a new source of strength for the industry rather than as a potential threat. The innovative use of digital communications channels is extending the relevance of many tradeshow and public events for months prior to and after the actual event.⁶

⁵ Steven Hacker, p. 68, PCMA Convene, November 2011, <http://www.pcma.org/Documents/Convene/2012MeetingsIndustry.pdf>

⁶ Steven Hacker, p. 68, *ibid.*

Developments in Asia and the Pacific Region

Alongside the encouraging trends in the world at large and the U.S., new developments in Asia point to constructive forces at work closer to home for MICE sectors: 1) Asia's economic resilience and increasing relative economic size, 2) the advent of the AEC in 2015 with its associated employment and investment opportunities, and 3) MICE-related and other infrastructure investment projects in Southeast Asia and nearby locations.

Asia is the fastest region to recover from the world economic crisis. In particular, tourism demand is expected to grow by 4% in Asia.⁷ Travel and tourism are identified by the Asian Development Bank as playing an increasingly critical role in expediting the recovery of Asian-Pacific economies from a wide range of problems, ranging from economic downturns to geopolitical crises and natural disasters. In particular The Asian Development Outlook 2012 notes the importance of travel and tourism in the economic reconstruction and recovery of Sri Lanka, the Maldives, and Thailand. It also highlights the potential role of tourism in the development of Myanmar, Laos and Bhutan.⁸

Very relevant to this is the fact that the combined economies of Asia and the Pacific, the Indian Sub-Continent, and the Middle-East on a PPP basis represent together 41.1% of the global economy, as of 2011. The corresponding forecast figure for 2015 is 45%.⁹ All these represent an engine of growth for Thailand's MICE as the country is geographically located in the middle of the region.¹⁰

The advent of the 10-nation AEC in 2015 is opening employment and investment opportunities which will have great bearing on MICE industries. The AEC has combined markets of approximately 600 million people, a more liberalized labour market, and a region endowed with natural resources, tropical riches and world cultural heritage sites. It encompasses marine and air logistic hubs connecting East Asia, the Middle East, the Indian Sub-continent and Oceania. It is also an agricultural production base which is one of the world's major granary floors. All these set the forthcoming AEC on the path of a potentially flourishing region of enticing opportunity. Different levels of development in the region could mean transfer of technology, intra-regional investment opportunities, and other forms of cooperation. All these features serve as MICE topics and stimulating factors. As several ASEAN nations are already major Asian MICE players, a more strategically liberalized ASEAN can only mean a more amenable MICE market, a magnet which could lead to the much desired trickle-down effect, which in turn encourages latecomers to join the bandwagon on account of their own potential. Internal and external factors can interact to stimulate the growth of MICE activities in this region, resulting in its standing as a major global MICE platform.

MICE-related and other infrastructure investment projects in Southeast Asia and nearby locations add to the region's attractiveness and readiness and intensify the competitive tempo: e.g. the planned construction of Vietnam's Long Thanh Airport, and the expansion of Hong Kong International Airport and South Korea's Incheon Airport. Long Thanh International Airport (*Sân bay Quốc tế Long Thành*), planned for construction in Long Thanh, Dong Nai Province, is approximately 40 km northeast of Ho Chi Minh City and is projected to become operational by 2020. It will serve 50 million passengers annually by 2030 (*the end of phase 2*), and 100 million passengers when built to its maximum design capacity. The airport will be accessible via the Ho Chi Minh-Long Thanh National Highway, Bien Hoa-Vung Tau

⁷ Global Travel Trends 2011/12, IPK International 2012

⁸ Imtiaz Muqbil, <http://www.travel-impact-newswire.com/2012/04/asian-development-bank-highlights-tourisms-critical-role-in-recovering-diversifying-asian-economies/#axzz1uRIwcCDE>

⁹ Calculated by Heritage Research Division, based on IBIS World and OECD data, respectively.

¹⁰ Heritage Research Division, MICE Reference Research Series, 2011

Expressway, Long An-Long Thanh Expressway, Ho Chi Minh-Long Thanh high-speed railway, and Ho Chi Minh-Nha Trang high-speed railway.¹¹ This airport will serve as a major MICE support project for a newly-emerging Vietnam.

In the same vein, South Korea has been expanding Incheon International Airport, adding a 2nd passenger terminal and a cargo terminal. By 2017, the airport will be able to handle 62 million passengers and 5.8 million tonnes of cargo annually, up from its current capacity of 44 million passengers and 4.5 million tonnes. Upon completion of a phase 4 expansion planned for 2020, the airport will have two passenger terminals, 4 satellite concourses, and 5 parallel runways (*one exclusively for cargo flights*), ready to handle 100 million passengers and 7 million metric tonnes of cargo annually.¹² At the same time, the Hong Kong Airport Authority champions the cause of Hong Kong's Airport's future development into a three-runway system in order to maintain Hong Kong's status as a leading international aviation center. The new system is scheduled to be running at full capacity by 2020. HKIA expects air traffic demand to reach about 97 million passengers, 8.9 million tons of cargo and 602,000 flight movements per year by 2030.¹³

Implications for Thailand's MICE Industry and Possible Ways Forward

In the main, current trends all point in the same direction: rather than facing bleak prospects and despite the recent economic conundrum, the international MICE scenario is very much alive and kicking with a virtual crescendo of MICE activities and investment projects, especially in Asia. While it is of utmost importance for Thailand to fully appreciate recent global developments in the MICE industry, it is equally or even more important to ensure that constructive proceedings and initiatives are undertaken, based on its own potential at the global level, efficient administration, and collective action. What are the implications of these recent developments for Thailand's MICE industry? In light of an increasingly full-fledged industrial setting with rising new entrants such as Vietnam and Indonesia, as well as current high performers such as Singapore and China who are never idle or complacent about their past achievements, the healthy policy for Thai MICE entrepreneurs and personnel is constant improvement.

The following aspects have been identified as possible steps forward in this direction: 1) making full use of the jewels in the crown; 2) getting engaged in imaginative/creative productivity-enhancing investment; 3) capacity building to fully grasp the arts of the trade; 4) international best practices and lessons learned; and 5) embarking upon all-out, revamping efforts of the country's pitfalls/loopholes/missing links.

¹¹ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Long_Thanh_International_Airport

¹² http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Incheon_International_Airport

¹³ <http://www.cnn.go.com/hong-kong/life/green-light-third-runway-hong-kong-airport-599743>

1) Making full use of the jewels in the crown

Thailand, too, has its own potential which can serve the country's MICE industry tremendously. Some of the salient features include: 1.1 Thailand's and Bangkok's MICE potential as among the top tourist destinations, having been selected by international polls as the best tourist country¹⁴ and the best tourist city¹⁵ respectively, together with other relevant world-class facilities and support services such as accommodations and culinary amenities; 1.2) Bangkok's role as the regional location of UN family institutions for Asia and the Pacific [one of only 5 such UN network nodes across the world]¹⁶; 3) the position of Bangkok International Airport as the largest airport in Southeast Asia and one of the top 20 airports processing the most passengers in the world; and 1.4) the country's overall space capacity and support facilities for MICE activities. However, despite these undeniable attractions, much remains to be done if the country is to attain its long-overdue top selection in certain relevant areas. Close scrutiny reveals findings very much to the surprise of any serious observers – i.e. even within the tourism industry *per se*, Thailand has not been able to make full use of its potential despite the much touted backdrop. The country does not rank among the world's top 20 tourism countries in terms of top-earnings or top 20 tourist destinations. Within the Asian region, Thailand still ranks behind Malaysia.

Thailand has a great variety of natural tourist resources, anthropogenic corporeal creations, and socio-economic components which could theoretically and readily serve MICE industry, if properly administered. However, the country does not constitute one of the world's top 20 international MICE destinations, and ranks only 9th among major Asian MICE players, which is rather intriguing. This state of affairs invites further examination and points to the fact that the country's potential has not been realized. Additional elements should be factored into the equation, including public relations campaigns, communications strategies, improved facilities, relative expenses, and the readiness of the nation's human resources. Clearly, all of these have to be groomed to competitive keenness.

¹⁴ Thailand has been voted the best tourist country internationally by a number of international agencies including the following:

1) The Grand Travel Award in 2012 as "*The World's Best Tourist Country*" held by **TravelNews**, an independent Norwegian travel trade magazine. Thailand has won this Norwegian Award for a ninth consecutive year

(http://www.highlightthailand.com/main/detail_content/GRAND-TRAVEL-AWARD-2012-THAILAND-WINS-THE-NORWEGIAN-GRAND-TRAVEL-AWARD-FOR-THE-WORLD-S-BEST-TOURIST-COUNTRY-2012/169.html);

2) The "*Best Tourist Country for 2011*" as part of the annual Sweden-based **Grand Travel Award** event. The country has been the winner in this category (also) for a ninth consecutive year. The nominee countries are selected by a travel committee and the final voting is done by travel agents across Sweden. In 2010 over 400,000 tourists from Sweden visited Thailand, the leading visitors from Nordic countries (<http://www.thaiembassy.se/en/component/content/article/68>);

3) The "*Most Popular Destination*" by Go Asia, at the International Tourism Exchange (ITB) Berlin 2012, a leading world B2B platform for the travel and tourism industry [also the ninth year in a row, truly an uncanny coincidence]. Also, the **Tourism Authority of Thailand** (TAT) was honoured as the "Best Asian Tourism Board" for the fourth year in a row (http://www.traveldailynews.com/pages/show_page/48192--Thailand-wins-Go-Asia-Awards-2012-at-ITB-Berlin-2012-).

¹⁵ Bangkok was voted the best city for tourism in 2008, 2010 and 2011, and the 3rd best city in 2009 in the annual selection organized by **Travel and Leisure**, a leading New York-based travel magazine of the American Express Group (<http://www.travelandleisure.com/worldsbest/2011/cities>). This achievement, being voted the world's best tourist city in 3 out of 4 most recent years, is the highest benchmark for any major tourist city in this category in the history of this prestigious voting (Heritage Research Division, p. 15, 2012, *ibid*).

¹⁶ The **Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP)** is the regional arm of the United Nations Secretariat for the Asian and Pacific region. It is the biggest of the UN's five regional commissions, both in terms of population served and area covered. 53 countries are members of ESCAP, and 9 countries are associate members. ESCAP's regional focus is to manage globalization through programs in environmentally sustainable development, trade, and human rights (see http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Nations_Economic_and_Social_Commission_for_Asia_and_the_Pacific).

In this light, the possible expansion of Bangkok International Airport is a welcome move. The AOT has speeded up the 2nd phase expansion of Suvarnabhumi Airport to 2016, one year ahead of its scheduled completion in 2017. The plan is to strengthen Suvarnabhumi Airport's position as a regional aviation hub, raising the airport's capacity to 65 million passengers per annum. This upgrade will be undertaken in parallel with the construction of a new domestic terminal capable of handling another 20 million passengers annually. The two expansion projects are part of an overall airport enlargement that would see Suvarnabhumi raise its annual passenger handling capacity to 103 million [73 million international and 30 million domestic passengers] by 2024. The expansion includes the construction of a third runway in addition to the present two. Domestic and international terminals will be enlarged and improved with parking bays, car parks and other airport infrastructure.¹⁷ In short, all parties concerned will have to ensure that timely and cost-effective implementation of the expansion and creative route administration is actually realized. Only then will Thailand's MICE global standing be significantly enhanced.

2) Getting engaged in imaginative/creative productivity-enhancing investment

Very much related to making full use of its potential, imaginative/creative productivity-enhancing investment could well take Thailand one step further. These refer to cost-effective investment projects which enhance synergy/linkages connecting different socio-economic activities through the concepts of the multiplier effect and the distributive trickle-down effect across a complex socio-spatial milieu. One such example would be the construction of a proper international airport and cargo hub at U-Tapao Airport, formerly a military airbase. Such an adaptation would incur significantly lower budget outlays due to its solid soil structure. New construction on an alluvial plain can hardly be cost-effective. This airport could easily serve the country's second largest urban agglomeration across the Eastern region, incorporating Laem Chabang deep-sea port, industrial estates, world-renowned coastal resorts, and a naval base. The mega-project could contribute to the establishment of an intermodal network linking air, water and land logistic arrangements. It would support the already-existing, vibrant tourist activities along the coast and further inland in the ecologically-rich regions within a 250-km radius, including Khao Yai National Park – a World Heritage site. Additionally, the service scope of this aviation hub would alleviate to some extent the current pressure on Bangkok's Suvarnabhumi Airport. At the same time, it would span the border to cover the western region of Cambodia after the investiture of the forthcoming AEC. If such an aviation route administration were put in place, the upgraded and expanded airport could ideally enable the country's Eastern region to forge ahead as an international economic, tourist, and MICE centre in its own right. In regard to financial investment, this project could be managed through a public-private partnership arrangement with partial contributions raised locally from economically advanced regions without causing much debt concern on the part of the public sector.

3) Capacity building to fully grasp the arts of the trade

Also closely linked to the whole concept of MICE are capacity requirements across the board. If these are lacking, the best solution then consists in capacity building. Singapore, Asia's top convention destination, places an emphasis on personnel development and specialized professional training to build up a pool of professional conference organizers (PCOs), professional exhibition organizers (PEOs), and destination management companies (DMCs).¹⁸

If an aspiring newly emerging country such as Thailand wishes to serve as an ideal, global, outward-looking, convention and exhibition hub (*rather than just another regional hub*), it might provide training for a diverse pool of consecutive and simultaneous interpreters capable of catering to the needs of the MICE trade across a whole spectrum of 6 UN official languages, 7-8 SEA national languages, the remaining languages of the twenty most populous countries [including Hindi, Urdu, and Portuguese], and the languages of the top 20 economic power

¹⁷ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Suvarnabhumi_Airport

¹⁸ TCEB, MICE Movement in Asia, p. 47, (publication year not specified).

houses. This would provide a very practical competitive edge. In certain popular languages, one might even have to provide semantic and specialized linguistic training for technical fields. The existence of a vast pool of interpreters and translators across the most frequently used languages, together with advanced economic and logistic services, *inter alia*, have made Germany Europe's top convention destination. Likewise, across Guang Dong Province in China, great numbers of students were trained at tertiary institutions to serve at the Canton Fair, Asia's largest tradeshow (even before the relocation of its official/principal venue to the Pa Zhou Complex). It is to be noted, however, that the making of a proper high-calibre interpreter takes long and continued years of disciplined study and training.¹⁹ As such, a country inevitably needs a long-term plan for capacity building.

Another area which empirically proves vital in MICE is the development of data and statistical management. Data and processed statistical information must be comprehensive, regularly updated, strategically presented, and classified to serve administrative purposes and niche marketing. Data can be acquired from the well-developed ICCA database on the international ranking of countries and cities as convention destinations, based on its concise definition of 'international convention', which puts Thailand at Asia's no. 9 destination country. Thailand should develop its own databases to cover other types of international conventions which may not fall under the ICCA definition. It would facilitate a better picture of MICE contributions to the country's economy. This is especially relevant as a great number of the project-based meetings, seminars, and workshop series hosted by international organizations over a 2-3 year period in Thailand do not qualify as international conventions under the ICCA definition. Nonetheless, these activities make tremendous socio-economic contributions, and part of the resources and personnel utilized for ICCA-type conventions and non-ICCA conventions come from exactly the same pools. A comprehensive empirical picture of MICE contributions and the relative economic contributions of each component will be most useful. Incorporating these elements into a single picture should not be difficult, and an overview of the constituent parts of the convention industry is needed. However, collecting data necessitates a well-functioning system of accurate information gathering and analysis, hence the need for institutional capacity building. This effort will of necessity involve intensive collaboration on the part of public entities such as TCEB, the National Statistical Office, the Immigration Police Bureau, and TAT, as well as private-sector entrepreneurs.

4) International best practices and lessons learned

Although the increasingly competitive international arena is rewarding and intellectually daunting, reading between the lines always counts and pays off. Creating a pool of skilled personnel moves in this direction and might even warrant its own place under a separate heading. For a high-flyer MICE entrant, the universal sky is the limit.

Here we have identified 4 major best practices and lessons learned as a starting point for further deliberation by MICE players. Firstly, the distribution of venues across countries appears as a well-established cornerstone to enhance the numeric development of MICE activities. Particular locales have their own advantages and disadvantages. Geographic location is only one consideration. Germany and Japan are unmistakably prominent in hosting conventions in the Western and Eastern hemispheres respectively.²⁰ Bangkok seems to have a firm grip on the Thai MICE scene, but there are multiple attractive poles in any country. For example, Chiang Mai was voted the world's 2nd best tourist city by readers of Travel and Leisure in 2010. That city would stand a chance of becoming a MICE magnet with its new exhibition centre in the pipeline. The city's bid will be even more significantly enhanced should it have access to new airport facilities with more international airlines serving more routes in the wake of the AEC integration and, to a certain extent, ASEAN plus 6 cooperation. Provided that support combinations are strategically provided in a timely manner, other candidates include Phuket, Pattaya, Samui, and Hat Yai with similar

¹⁹ Charunghiat Phutiratana, Conference Interpretation, Unpublished Lecture Notes Series, pp. 18-22, (2010)

²⁰ Heritage Research Division, pp. 18-22, 2011, *ibid*.

international standing. In the case of Hat Yai in particular, its geographical proximity to Phuket, Samui, and Northern Malaysia could be a boon if supported by a truly international airport and an autobahn-type road network. Hat Yai is already one of the country's regional hubs with its educational clustering, vibrant economic sectors, and MICE facilities which have already undergone a certain level of development in the form of hotels and the PSU convention centre.

Secondly, Singapore ranks as ASEAN's number one convention destination. Thailand is the region's top exhibition hub in terms of revenue earned. At the Asia-wide level, Japan ranks first as the number one convention venue, with China close behind. At the same time, China is far ahead of the pack in terms of exhibitions. It is not stretching a point to say that China's and Thailand's rankings, to a large extent, suggest their domestic production capacity and activity. When convention and exhibition components are combined, the relative international MICE status of Thailand and Singapore are pretty much on a par. In this matter, economic size and efficiency are very much the main ingredients in each player's recipe for success, and do come into play. Accordingly, in light of its economic foundation, Thailand's station in Asia's MICE scenario should reasonably aim for structural balance. Better prospects for Thailand can be attained if greater institutional and personnel efficiency are put in place.

Thirdly, in light of the recent surge in environmental concerns, Thailand should follow suit or even take the lead, based on its natural resources and traditional wisdom vis-à-vis its varied tropical ecological milieu. The country's current and prospective World Heritage sites, national parks, wildlife, and coastlines could easily serve as stepping stones in terms of MICE topics and MICE-related recreational attractions. Meanwhile, Thai ways, handicrafts, culinary practices and traditional corpus of knowledge, as well as utilities and applications learned from international, environmentally-friendly experience may be applied in organizing and carrying out events via MICE facilities and support services and materials. All these will encourage environmentally-conscious target groups and will contribute to collective action to champion common environmental and conservative causes. Examples include the 2010 ASEAN Sericulture Conference held in Bangkok in which the role of mulberry leaves in the sequestration process was highlighted as a contribution to the mitigation of global warming; and the 2011 World Sericulture Congress held in Chiang Mai, in which the Tunisian representative reiterated the role of sericulture in restoring economic alternatives and cultural identity.²¹

Fourthly, public relations efficiency is a key element in ensuring that MICE activities will prove successful. A prime example would be the constant email-based communications in English for China's world-renowned Canton Fair liaison activities throughout the year. Hong Kong's strategy in this connection shares the same level of zeal, with certain differentiations. For example, major targeted national groups may be provided with specific web-site representations to assert Hong Kong's standing as a leading global city with international settlements. Thailand is certainly no less cosmopolitan than Hong Kong. Thailand has large expatriate communities, suggested by the presence of numerous international schools offering tuition in English, French, German, Japanese, Mandarin, and Korean. Printed media in English, French, German, Japanese, and Mandarin are also available, not to mention a Pattaya-based, cable TV station broadcast in Russian. What Thailand can pursue in this regard is the implementation of a combination of communications technology applications and a language policy which enhances MICE sectors. Tailor-made web-based contents and regular emailing through a selected language range should take this purpose one step further. By all means, a Thai initiative by TAT with web-based contents in 24 languages is one commendable example. Well-designed MICE focal websites operating in a high-speed system can be useful in this connection.

Meanwhile, China's amazing leap in the world of international media is firmly established with the operation of 24-hour televisions broadcasting in all 6 official UN languages. Practically all the programs are produced by Chinese staff. Although these stations are not geared toward MICE activities as such, the sheer existence of such television

²¹ Charungkiat Phutiratana, Translating Technical Topics, Conference Interpretation, Unpublished Lecture Notes Series, 2012

stations could be applied readily to MICE-related events.²² Thailand should seriously consider setting up its own foreign-language channels to serve purposes related to international affairs, MICE sectors strategically included, starting from English and followed by other languages as appropriate. On balance, French, Mandarin, and Japanese could well be 3 other possible options in the medium-term, as they are important international business languages and the pool of Thai nationals speaking these languages is large enough for staff recruitment purposes. Subsequent additions could well include Malaysian/Indonesian, Spanish, Russian, and Arabic. Other selected SEA languages as appropriate, and several other business languages such as Korean and Portuguese are possibly in order.

Lastly, MICE sequencing and grouping to achieve focus and attention is an interesting option to explore. As MICE activities are in a state of flux, providing focus for international reference and business planning purposes could prove remarkably useful. This is particularly the case with tradeshows. The Canton Fair is a tremendous case in question. As far as Chinese producers and traders and international attendants are concerned, the fair is easily accessible information-wise and planning-wise. It is organized twice a year in the same months and at the same venue with producers and traders of the same or similar categories grouped into particular time slots. This contributes to the Canton event's tremendous success. Thai MICE components should seriously consider the pros and cons of this arrangement, and if agreed upon collectively, could discuss possible steps to make this a reality for Thailand, as well.

5) Embarking upon a complete revamping of the country's pitfalls/loopholes/ missing links

A country's pitfalls and loopholes present challenges to its MICE capability and potential, both quantitatively and qualitatively. Some have been discussed in the above sub-sections. Of all the remaining issues requiring adjustments and improvement, the aviation industry has been selected in this case for explanation purposes. There is still room for improvement in Thailand's aviation operators, routes and coordination. For example, Thailand still does not provide access to direct flight operations with the whole of South and Latin America. This means as far as these markets are concerned, Thailand's MICE potential is definitely limited. Meanwhile, Singapore Airlines' practice is worth examining. Singapore Airlines (SIA Group), comprising Singapore Airlines, Silkair and Singapore Airlines Cargo, is the world's largest airline and cargo group in terms of stock-market capitalisation, overtaking Southwest Airlines in 2006.²³ SIA (SIA) operates flights to São Paulo, Brazil (*its only South American destination*), while its subsidiary and affiliated companies serve regional destinations in Asia and the Pacific through their lower cost operations.²⁴

Silk Air – an SIA wholly owned subsidiary - serves the short-haul destinations in the Singapore Airlines Group network, operating scheduled passenger services from Singapore to 39 cities in Southeast Asia, South Asia, China and Australia.²⁵ Meanwhile, Tiger Airways Singapore, a low-cost airline with a 49% SIA stake, operates to regional destinations in SEA, Australia, China and India.²⁶ Tiger Airways currently flies to destinations within a 5-hour radius around Singapore with 22 destinations in 9 countries. Thailand is its first and biggest market. Serving 4 cities, Tiger takes advantage of the open-skies agreement between Singapore and Thailand. However, current aviation agreements have prevented the airline from flying to Malaysia, except Kuala Lumpur.²⁷ Taken together, these 3

²² Heritage Research Division, pp. 23-24, 2011, *ibid*.

²³ http://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Singapore_Airlines

²⁴ It is to be noted that at least two airlines operators of two other Asian MICE powerhouses operate flights to São Paulo: Air China and Korean Air.

²⁵ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Silk_Air

²⁶ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tiger_Airways

²⁷ http://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Singapore_Airlines, and http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tiger_Airways_destinations

airlines, which cater to different specific markets, remarkably enhance Singapore's role across the board as Asia's number one international convention destination and a major exhibition hub.²⁸

Certainly, Thailand should consider operating flights to São Paulo, the largest city in the southern hemisphere and the Americas, and the world's 7th largest city by population.²⁹ This project could be implemented in conjunction with a Brazilian airlines operator to save operational costs. The government should also take the lead in applying social CBA, since profitability on this route is calculated from socio-economic points of view rather than from a corporate standpoint. MICE and business players could then make their appropriate constructive and innovative contributions, as they are the direct beneficiaries thereof. If this model works as suggested, a similar project could be envisaged for Mexico City and Buenos Aires or other cities of the same standing. A vertical urban axial connection for Thailand would be extended into the western Southern hemisphere – currently a major emerging economic region. This move would firmly enhance the country's status as a global MICE destination.

Meanwhile, Thai Airways' strategic response – the incorporation of Thai Smile Air – to serve the market gap between low-cost carriers and full service airlines is a welcome move. However, with its first and only confirmed international route as yet only to Macao (*first scheduled flight on 7 July, 2012*), it has a long way to fly before it can truly join the regional aviation operators' club. 2013 will be a defining moment for Thai Smile Air as it plans to expand into international markets in Southeast Asia, with potential destinations including Amritsar, Brunei, Danang, Medan and Penang.³⁰ This means that it could take the new entry from 5 to 15 years to reach a par with Silk Air, depending on the pace of development on either side. Additionally, in order to get closer to SIA's overall position, Thailand's passenger aviation operators will need to find ways to forge closer links among all the top 4 Thai airlines and major cargo operators. Further proactive and imaginative operations should achieve collective synergy in MICE-related air logistics with respect to the number of routes and passengers served as Team Thailand over the next decade.³¹

Conclusions

In the aftermath of the 2009 financial crisis, it is quite likely that global MICE sectors could go from strength to strength, taking heart from a number of positive developments, i.e. Global and U.S. MICE sectors' resilience, Asia's speedy recovery, Asia's proactive infrastructure investment, the creation of the AEC in 2015, and countries' potential across the board. The seemingly bleak prospects at the outset of the crisis a few years back will not leave indelibly negative marks on MICE sectors, but comprehensive and cost-effective implementation of cautiously-designed courses of action, charted collectively, are called for. That is all required of MICE and men.

²⁸ Heritage Research Division, pp. 19-20, 2011, *ibid.*

²⁹ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/S%C3%A3o_Paulo

³⁰ See http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Thai_Smile.

³¹ Heritage Research Division, pp. 32-35, 2011, *ibid.*

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