

Meetings and incentives options

The Philippines has come a long way but some challenges still lie ahead. *Kate Nicholson* reports

The economy of the Philippines, for so long the laggard of Asia, is experiencing its fastest growth spurt since the 1997 financial crisis.

Exports shot up by 13 per cent in the first quarter of this year, and investors — such as the semi-conductor giant Texas Instruments — are beginning to show faith.

Economic growth has also been felt in the meetings and incentive industry. Developments in the sector can be seen across the country. SMX Convention Centre, the largest privately owned facility, opened in October. The US\$17.5 million project offers a four-storey convention and exhibition centre.

More high-end resorts with room rates averaging around US\$200 are sprouting up.

Managing director of GBA Events Asia, Gigi Bautista, says: "This year has seen a marked increase in MICE business in the Philippines, with Cebu taking the lead in major international events.



More resorts targeting the top end of the market are being developed across the Philippines

"Although business is picking up at a slower pace in Manila, current improvements are taking place with the addition of new hotels, particularly in Makati City and the nearby Fort Bonifacio.

"The improved accessibility from Manila to major cities like Cebu and Davao, as well as popular resorts in Boracay and Palawan, will also contribute to the growth."



FUTURE FORECAST

"All these developments plus a stronger economy will lay the groundwork for growth in the MICE business in 2008," says Bautista.

But she warns: "The Philippines' seemingly unstable political situation may pose a challenge to the country's march towards MICE growth." ■

Brunei makes its break into events

The oil- and gas-rich sultanate is reaching out to events planners. *Shannon Sweeney* reports

The meetings and incentives industry in Brunei has continued its consistent growth over the past 12 months. Brunei Tourism is now trying to encourage more associations to hold their meetings there. "We hope to grow the local MICE industry and this can only be achieved by working closely with local DMCs and other conference organisers," says Sheikh Jamaluddin Sheikh Mohamed, CEO of the Brunei Tourism Board.

Large corporate groups to visit Brunei this year include Petronas from Malaysia, Amway Korea, Oracle and Microsoft. Ricoh Australia also took a group of 84 to Brunei for an incentive last January.

BRIGHT OUTLOOK

Things are also looking positive for 2008. "In April we will be welcoming a huge Metlife Insurance incentive from Korea with 3,000 people over four different waves," says Chris Robles, marketing director for Brunei



Established...Empire Hotel and Country Club

Tourism. "The group will be staying at the Empire Hotel and Country Club, and also bringing their families and partners."

Robles says the key to Brunei winning such a big incentive was the destination's reputation for safety and tranquillity. "Brunei is also seen to be quite original," he says, "so groups feel that it is new and more exciting."

The Empire Hotel and Country Club still remains one of the world's great hotel experiences, and is the central hotel out of which most of Brunei's international incentives are based. It is good for partner programmes as it is a big resort with plenty to do, including excursions into the jungle, the water village and also city tours.

"The Empire has everything under one roof, especially golf, which is loved by Asian groups," says Robles.

Flight access to Brunei is not a problem as there are now direct links daily to Singapore, Hong Kong, Shanghai and Sydney. ■