

# Local skills, international appeal

South Korea has developed into one of the region's most affluent countries and is a destination with numerous high-quality hotels and convention facilities. *By Shannon Sweeney*



**South Korea has undergone a period of urban renewal that means business travellers now have a wider selection of hotels and venues**

South Korea continued to improve this year as a viable conference and exhibition destination. Seoul is the main focus with COEX and Kintex being the leading convention and exhibition facilities respectively.

South Korea has welcomed some large conference groups over the past 12 months. In June, ISPRM 2007 attracted 2,340 delegates, while in October the 46th Orient and Southeast Asia Lions Forum attracted 32,000 delegates, including 7,250 from overseas.

During the past 12 months Korea Tourism Organisation (KTO) has strengthened its support of convention-related bodies, conducting site inspections and familiarisation tours.

## CONVENTION CENTRES

South Korea's newly built and exceptionally well equipped convention centres help to make the destination attractive to conference groups. "Currently there are seven centres and six convention bureaux with another two convention centres to open by 2008," says Ok-ja Shin,



**COEX...main convention centre of Seoul**

director of Korea Convention Bureau (KCB).

The two new centres are the Daejeon Convention Center with 24 meeting rooms and capacity for 2,500 people, and Songdo Convensia with ten conference rooms and capacity for 2,000 people.

"Compared to other Asian MICE countries, the Korean convention industry is still quite new and its brand image is not as strong," says Shin. "Over the past seven years Korea has seen rapid development of its

'hardware' – convention centres, airports and regional convention bureaux. Now, it is time for Korea to focus on the 'software' – educating our professional meeting planners in creating unique programmes for groups."

This year KCB launched its new campaign, 'Korea, Your Sparkling MICE destination'. As part of this, KCB has standardised its booth design so that corporate buyers can easily find them at all travel trade shows.

## NEW FOCUS

"In 2008, we will focus more on spreading our campaign by increasing the number of exhibitions we participate in as well as advertising more," says Shin. "KCB has also signed an exclusive agreement to launch a marketing campaign promoting meetings, incentives and group travel in Korea."

Outside of Seoul, BEXCO in Busan is under development and is adding a new shopping complex to the venue. Daegu EXCO has also just begun a renovation project that will run until 2011. A Novotel is due to open in Daegu as well as the 260-room Inter-Burgo EXCO Hotel. ■