



PROFESSIONAL MEETING PLANNERS EXPERIENCE THE ASIA PACIFIC

AN EXCLUSIVE INVITATION FROM THE PROFESSIONAL CONVENTION MANAGEMENT ASSOCIATION (PCMA) BROUGHT KEY INDUSTRY PLAYERS FROM AROUND THE WORLD TO ENGAGE AND LEARN FROM ONE ANOTHER.

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Melbourne showcased the depth of its vivid colours last week as one of North America's most professional meeting planner groups, PCMA, invited key planner members to the city in a well-managed invitation only exchange with leading convention destinations from the region to experience what Asia Pacific is really all about. From Hemophilia to Toastmasters, English Language Teachers to Corporate Travel Planners and ICT Tech companies not only from the USA but also from Europe, Asia and Australia, a cultured group of 25 experienced professionals came together for the "Cultural Experience". The common thread was that all are putting on meetings in the Asia Pacific region, and the programme was designed for them to learn how to work better with cultures that may be new to them. The Global Professionals Workshop - known as GloPro - is a regional series and part of PCMA's full international educational programme for meeting planners. Reflecting the importance of this venture for the organisation, there were four board members as well as the CEO attending.

KICKING OFF

GloPro Asia Pacific 2015 kicked off with a Melbourne Convention Bureau (MCB) and Melbourne Convention & Exhibition Centre (MCEC) workshop where the planner attendees were briefed on the services designed for them in the destination.

The next morning, the group was up early to greet the first day of spring by taking to the skies in a Hot Air Balloon. Participants were made to work for their experience by joining in the balloon inflation and packing up process, but were amply rewarded by stunning views of the sunrise and the city's CBD area, Yarra River and the footie fans holy grail "The G" or Melbourne Cricket Ground MCG.

Announcement was made for the 20,000-sq m expansion to the exhibition space, bringing the total in 2017 to 80,000 sq m. Chief executive, Peter King was proud of the accolade to have been voted recently as one of Australia's "Most Innovative Companies", and we could see why with the catering and technical services demonstrated through the event and more specifically on the venue tour.

"Always something new and something terribly exciting... It is important to make sure everyone understands how much they want your business and how much is going on here" said Deborah Sexton, president and CEO of PCMA, when introducing the Melbourne team, supported by Tourism Australia, who had worked closely with PCMA to prepare the programme of events.

Day one talked about economies, while day two discussed culture, finally bringing it all in on day three. Indonesia's growth in recent years was covered by speaker Ed Gustley of Peninda Capital Advisors Ltd. Topics include Rise of the Asia Pacific and Key Economic Groups, the Priorities for Growth with the Business Implications, as well as Country Spotlight. A surprise for some of the North American visitors was the safety within the region, their impression had been one of challenge, and their expectation was that it would not be easy to move about so freely. A point raised was the inequalities in the distribution of wealth. The planners were advised to work on their CSR activities and find a way to give back to the communities - an example given was to "hold your dental conference in the region and then have practitioners going out to give free dental treatment to underprivileged communities".

THE PROGRAMME

Facilitated by Nigel Collin, events continued with the theme of the well-known Donald Rumsfeld quote: "There are known knowns. These are things we know that we know. There are known unknowns. That is to say, there are things that we know we don't know. But there are also unknown unknowns. There are things we don't know we don't know."

With this, the group turned to day two and focused on finding their "unknown unknowns", guided by Ed's advice to identify the "Recommenders, Influencers or Gatekeepers and the Decision Makers". Discussions ensued on how there are such different internal cultures within each country. Tips and ideas flew, and the PCMA staff set about capturing these by arranging "country capsule" tables for the Asia Pacific countries attending, namely: China, Korea, Malaysia, Singapore, Thailand, Oman,



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New Zealand and Australia. Participants joined the various tables for different levels of discussion to understand the various parameters for event organisation, and sharing at the end their top take-home tips in a "speed-dating" type of exchange on one long table. These tips were then collated for the record. Top tips included the discovery of how constantly "connected" Asians are, and that in China, the country where Facebook and Twitter are not available, people just don't read their emails as everything goes through WeChat and its clones.

Summing it all up on day three, Dr Caroline Hong weaved through the experiences teasing out the threads of ideas and encouraging personal commitment to the next step in sharing their tips gained within their individual organisations.

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