



Asia Pacific Destination Report: **Perceptions of Top Five Cities**

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From the glistening islands of Indonesia, to the modern metropolises of Tokyo and Hong Kong, to the national treasures of Australia's landscape, Asia Pacific delivers an option for every style, taste and manner of event. With a breadth of culinary delicacies, a diversity of languages, a variety of social influences and cultural delights at every corner, an event in Asia Pacific can satisfy even the most discerning of event planners and guests.

And it seems the world is taking notice.

The 2019 Global Forecast from American Express Meetings & Events revealed that the Asia Pacific region is an area of profound interest and opportunity for the meetings and events industry across the globe. With such diversity, there truly is a location for every occasion. While smaller domestic meetings might be well-suited to an Indonesian island, large-scale conferences would be perfectly at home in Sydney, and exclusive executive functions would be a good fit for Singapore. It is no wonder that meeting planners across the world are turning their gaze to Asia Pacific.

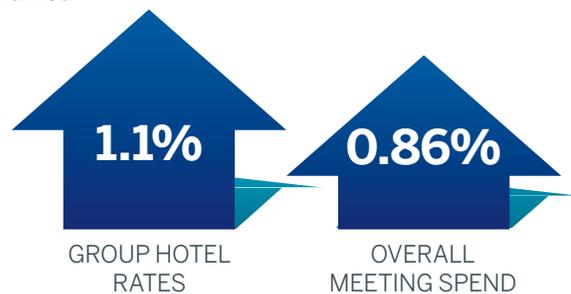
Meeting professionals in China and Hong Kong were particularly optimistic about the industry, anticipating significant growth throughout 2019. Conversely, meeting professionals in Australia were somewhat less optimistic, with an expectation of slightly lower activity levels in 2019.¹

Interest and expectations aside, across the board, meeting professionals throughout Asia Pacific have indicated they expect increased attention on results, as planners are under pressure to deliver more for less in this dynamic, well-traveled region.

That means regular, solid analyses of ROI and a constant focus on making every dollar count. What's more, planners need to maximize every dollar spent, particularly as costs begin to rise.

MAXIMIZING EVERY DOLLAR SPENT

Costs are rising **faster** than budgets in an ROI-focused market.



Source: 2019 Global Forecast from American Express Meetings & Events

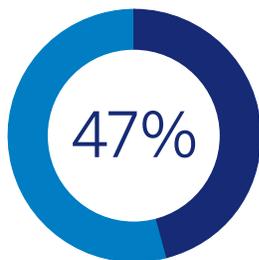
In light of these rising costs, meeting planners are casting their eyes to mid-tier cities that may not have previously been a consideration. With better options to optimize budgets as well as unique experiences for attendees, this is where the Asia Pacific region can really come to life.

As these various factors and opportunities weigh on the minds of meeting professionals across the globe, we conducted a follow-up study to gather further insights into the Asia Pacific region. We surveyed over 200 meeting professionals across the Asia Pacific region – including Australia and New Zealand – to seek to understand perceptions of the region as a whole, while diving into the top five destinations, as identified by Cvent's annual destination list.² These top destinations are Singapore, Hong Kong, Sydney, Bangkok and Kuala Lumpur.

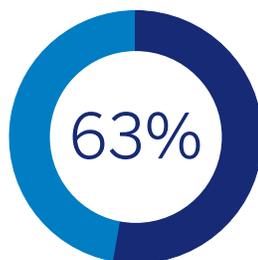
A Look into Our Findings

When we anticipated that interest in meetings and events in the Asia Pacific region would be strong, we were certainly not wrong. In fact, our survey found that 47% of respondents indicated there was strong interest in operating meetings within the region, with 63% saying that this interest was increasing.

INCREASING INTEREST



Strong interest in operating meetings



This interest is increasing

So why the sudden surge in interest in Asia Pacific? Minimal travel time (compared to destinations further afield in North America or Europe) is a leading factor in keeping things local. With increased awareness of a variety of destinations and emergence of second-tier cities, meeting planners can balance positive attendee experiences with optimized cost considerations – which is really the event planner’s holy grail.



The attendee experience is second-to-none when running events in Asia Pacific. After only a relatively short plane ride, attendees can experience a variety of cultures and experiences that are seemingly right outside their doors. Being authentic, unique and somewhat undiscovered, even well-traveled attendees can experience a new destination to excite their senses.

When asked what sets the Asia Pacific region apart, respondents to our survey noted diverse cultures led the way with a firm focus on the foodie experiences that come with diversity. Whether it’s the exotic spices of India, the unusual herbs of Thailand or the freshest seafood of Australia, it’s leaving guests wanting more. Following cultural diversity, respondents noted that the options for leisure and eco-tourism in the region came in a close second as an appealing characteristic of the region. As business travel today focuses increasingly on consumer-like experiences, this can make for an unforgettable and successful event.

Taking Note of Regional Challenges

Like all regions, Asia Pacific is not without its challenges. While the overall outlook is positive, survey respondents noted that cost and language came up as barriers when considering meetings in the region.

Regarding cost, the survey revealed insights that were in keeping with the 2019 Global Meetings Forecast data for the region, showing that the costs of Asia Pacific events were rising faster than budgets (with hotel rates rising 1.1%, compared with overall meeting spend only rising 0.86%).

It is also worth noting that in this diverse region, perspectives on cost can be skewed. With vastly different concepts of price and value, considerations need to be made.



For example, meeting planners in Mainland China will likely find that Hong Kong, Singapore and Japan would be highly expensive destinations to hold an event, whereas budget owners in those same destinations would consider their neighbors of Vietnam and Thailand to be extremely cost-effective.

Further, while cultural diversity is often seen as a positive, in some cases, meeting planners felt that cultural nuances could be a hindrance, particularly when it comes to languages. With 2,322 living languages³ in the Asia Pacific region, this can create challenges for both attendees and meeting planners.

For planners, there were concerns that organizing an event in a different culture, without a trusted network of suppliers and without being fluent in the local language, could be challenging.

Familiarity Is Key

It should come as no surprise that meeting planners look to their own personal experiences before booking their events. Our research backed this up, showing that planners are much more likely to book a destination if they have been there personally, have had experience planning meetings in that destination or have a network of local contacts. Singapore and Hong Kong had the highest levels of familiarity across these factors, so it's unsurprising that these two destinations came at the top of lists to consider for meetings in the next two years, with 39% of respondents considering Hong Kong and 38% considering Singapore. These two destinations are also the spots where most respondents operated their meetings over the past two years.

CITIES CONSIDERED FOR FUTURE MEETINGS



Conversely, Kuala Lumpur and Bangkok had the least number of respondents considering them as destinations for future meetings, and they also came in with the lowest levels of familiarity. Only 13% of respondents would look at Kuala Lumpur as a destination (with 46% reporting no familiarity with the city), while only 23% would consider Bangkok (as 41% were not familiar with the capital of Thailand). Perhaps as these destinations become increasingly popular in both business and leisure travel, the meetings industry will follow suit.



Calling on The Network

While personal travel and previous experience have an undeniable impact on a meeting planner's likelihood to consider a destination, there is one thing that factors in even more highly – a network of local contacts. Meeting planners understand that an expertly executed event comes down to the quality of the people and the suppliers you're working with – as confirmed in our survey. Respondents indicated having a deep network of contacts was considered a "must have" for destination marketing, and that a group of trusted professionals were preferred to a single point of contact. In fact, in all destinations (except for Bangkok), having local contacts more than tripled the likelihood for a meeting professional to consider future meetings in that destination.



This phenomenon is not unique to Asia Pacific, but is an industry-wide consideration. Of course, it does come down to common sense. With a trusted network to rely upon, meeting planning becomes infinitely more comfortable. However, it is an important item to keep front of mind when looking at new destinations. Building a network of contacts will ensure meeting planners receive a full overview of their proposed destination, so they can appropriately evaluate their meeting needs, rather than relying upon preconceived perceptions.

A Snapshot into The Top 5 Cities

To further explore the opportunities and challenges within the region, the following section will provide a snapshot of the top five destinations. For each destination, survey respondents were asked to rate the level of accuracy of the following perceptions:

- › Air transportation options for attendees
- › Safe location
- › Modern amenities and conveniences
- › Has the necessary infrastructure to support meetings and events
- › Has suppliers they know and trust
- › Is a destination attendees would be enthusiastic about
- › Is politically stable
- › Is an affordable destination

Based on the survey responses, we identified perceptions to capitalize upon, and what areas of concern you may need to plan for. These considerations have all been shared below so you can plan your meetings with confidence and awareness. It also goes without saying that when considering each of these destinations for your meetings and events, we recommend that you not only think about your needs as a planner (which are significant!), but also think about the perceptions of your attendees. When you are ready to announce the destination of your event, attendees may need some extra communication to not only build excitement, but to provide details about a destination many people may not be familiar with. As we all know, the more information, the better!



Singapore

39% ARE PLANNING TO OPERATE MEETINGS IN SINGAPORE IN THE NEXT TWO YEARS.

A contemporary island country located in Southeast Asia, Singapore is a dynamic, autonomous city-state with a highly developed economy. While physically small, Singapore embodies diverse cultures, providing an interesting blend of antique and modern charm, representing Chinese, Malay and Indian cultures, underpinned by an English-speaking population.

With one of the most competitive economies in the world, Singapore has emerged as a favorite destination within Asia Pacific for business travelers; becoming one of Asia's top meeting cities. With contemporary infrastructure and a multitude of meeting venues with state-of-the-art facilities, Singapore provides unforgettable experiences for meetings.

A few of Singapore's most popular spaces for meetings include:

- › Singapore EXPO, one of the largest meeting facilities in Singapore. Awarded the Best International Venue in 2016, the Convention and Exhibition Center has a total indoor and outdoor space of 123,000 square meters.
- › Suntec Singapore, a world-class exhibition center of international stature with modern amenities, convenient location and 42,000 square meters of space.⁴

Perceptions to watch out for include a smaller network of travel industry contacts for planners, with respondents also viewing the destination as expensive when compared to other areas of the region. Overall, respondents consider Singapore a safe destination and, being predominately English speaking, it becomes much more accessible for meetings from outside the country.

SNAPSHOT: SINGAPORE

Capitalize On:

Safe Location



Modern Amenities



MICE Infrastructure



Watch Outs:

Trusted Suppliers



Affordable Destination





Sydney

61% VIEW SYDNEY AS HAVING MODERN AMENITIES.

Sydney is a dynamic business hub that boasts a stunning natural landscape, cosmopolitan culture and year-round pleasant temperatures. The destination also offers over 1,000 unique venues and a world-class MICE infrastructure, making it a popular destination for meeting planners. Sydney offers more than 33,000 hotel/motel rooms and serviced apartments as well as a comprehensive public transport system, making it a truly accessible destination.

Some of Sydney’s most renowned meetings spaces include:

- › Sydney Olympic Park, an all-encompassing business precinct with 22,000 square meters of exhibition space and over 100 different function venues.
- › The Event Centre, covering 2,200 square meters with capacity to host over 3,000 people.

- › Dockside Pavilion Darling Harbour, offering custom-designed event spaces over 1,470 square meters for up to 2,000 guests.⁴

When considering Sydney as a venue, the city can be considered a mature destination for meetings and events compared to other destinations on the list. There are numerous areas to capitalize upon, but planners may be starting to look for alternate destinations to provide a unique experience for their guests, particularly when it can be provided at lower cost.

What’s more, respondents identified safety as a concern, which may be due to a few unfortunate terrorism incidents in the past couple of years. Additionally, Australia is a large country and, in places – particularly in the outback – has a history of floods and fires. Of course, this becomes a concern for meeting planners who may be looking to avoid potential issues with high-end meetings like incentive trips. When compared to other destinations, meeting professionals may simply be more aware of crime and safety issues in Sydney because it is a high-profile destination that receives more media coverage.

SNAPSHOT: SYDNEY

Capitalize On:

MICE Infrastructure



Modern Amenities



Air Transportation



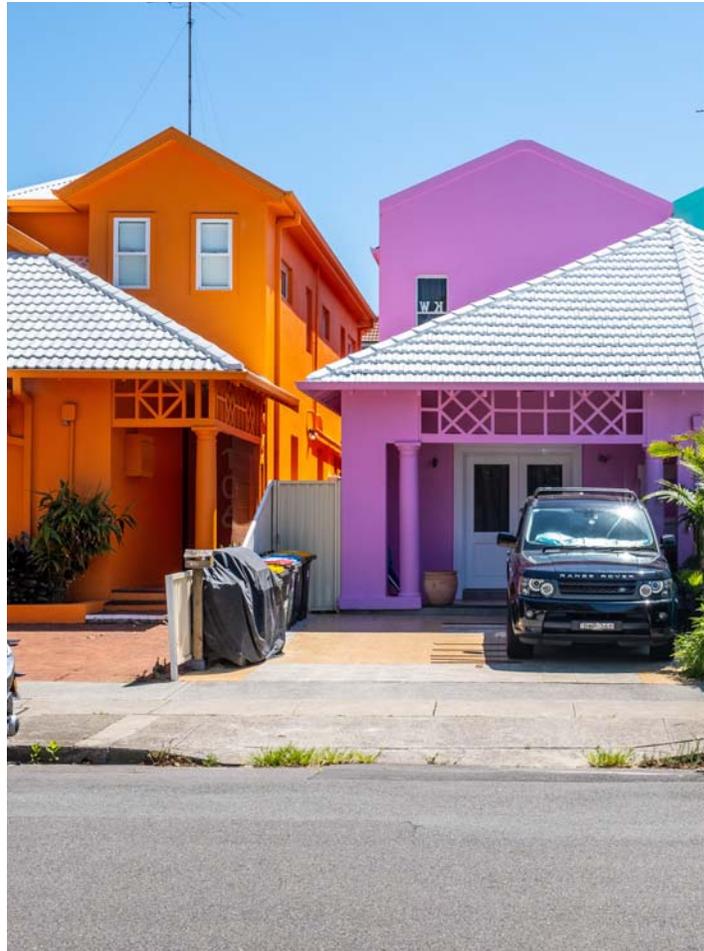
Watch Outs:

Safe Location



Affordable Destination





Bangkok

81% ARE NOT VERY FAMILIAR WITH BANGKOK.

The legendary hospitality of Thailand has long been a popular choice for tourism in Southeast Asia, with meetings and events being an emerging sector. Its vibrant capital, Bangkok, is now a top international conference destination, and its first-class meeting venues are renowned for their outstanding service.

Bangkok is also highly accessible to travelers across the globe thanks to the Suvarnabhumi International Airport. The airport is also connected to the city via electric rail, which helps guests bypass Bangkok’s infamous traffic jams.

Major Bangkok convention venues include:

- › The Bangkok International Trade & Exhibition Center (BITEC), very modern, located about five miles from the city center, with multi-purpose halls, grand banquet rooms, and state-of-the-art meeting rooms.
- › The stunning Queen Sirikit National Convention Center (QSNCC), located 11 miles from the city center, known for its modern technology and beautiful Thai architecture and décor.

Respondents noted safety, political stability, and lack of MICE infrastructure as concerns. Attendee enthusiasm was also a watch out area. Even so, Bangkok may be considered a top destination because of the affordability and unique experiences it can provide, as well as being less traveled than other destinations. The result? Greater appeal for seasoned attendees. It is worth noting that Bangkok recorded the lowest familiarity of the destinations surveyed, which may be contributing to more watch out areas.

SNAPSHOT: BANGKOK

Capitalize On:

Affordable Destination



Air Transportation



Watch Outs:

Safe Location



Politically Stable



Attendee Enthusiasm



MICE Infrastructure





Kuala Lumpur

**ONLY 4% OPERATED MEETINGS
HERE IN THE LAST TWO YEARS.**

A major business and international events destination, Kuala Lumpur provides a multicultural environment, ample venues and exciting travel experiences.

Major Kuala Lumpur meeting and convention venues include:

- › The world-class Kuala Lumpur Convention Centre in the city’s Central Business District.
- › The Sime Darby Convention Centre, located near the KL Golf and Country Club, featuring a tucked-away feel.
- › Genting International Convention Centre, known for its high-tech features.
- › The Matrade Exhibition & Convention Centre complex, located at the base of Matrade’s 24-story architectural icon.

- › The multi-purpose Putra World Trade Centre, which also serves as a city landmark.

Although Kuala Lumpur is geographically close to Singapore, there are very different perceptions of this city when it comes to meetings and events. While Singapore has invested heavily in the industry, Malaysia has yet to do so.⁴ And given that Malaysia is a huge country when compared to Singapore, many of Kuala Lumpur’s meetings are domestic. Therefore, the focus of the city has previously been on increasing and promoting leisure travel, rather than increasing meetings and events.

It is worth noting that Kuala Lumpur has received media coverage around corruption⁵, which may be impacting its perception internationally.

SNAPSHOT: KUALA LUMPUR

Capitalize On:

Modern Amenities



Affordable Destination



Watch Outs:

Safe Location



Air Transportation



MICE Infrastructure





Hong Kong

42% REPORT IT IS EXTREMELY LIKELY THEY WILL CONSIDER HONG KONG AS A DESTINATION FOR FUTURE MEETINGS AND EVENTS.

Hong Kong is one of the fastest growing financial and technological hubs in East Asia. For official purposes, Hong Kong is a part of China, but for all intents and purposes, it can operate as an independent country and reflects the essence of “East meets West” culture, with Chinese and English being its two official languages.⁴

Offering world-class infrastructure and a trading economy that supports the rapid growth of critical sectors including travel and tourism, banking and financial services, transportation services and more, Hong Kong has emerged as one of the most sought-after business centers across the globe.

Hong Kong offers an exponentially strong portfolio of event venues, including:

- › AsiaWorld-Expo, offering a huge meeting space with a capacity of more than 10,000 attendees.
- › Kowloon Bay International Trade & Exhibition Centre (KITEC), with an impressive infrastructure to support events of any scale.
- › Large international hotel brands including Kowloon Shangri-La, Hong Kong,

The list does not end here, with the Hong Kong government committed to developing the city further to establish itself as the champion of all destinations. Cvent noted that the travel and tourism industry is contributing strongly to the rapid advancement of Hong Kong’s economy, with the government investing heavily in upgrading the scope of the destination’s MICE potential.⁴ Meeting planners are taking note of these upgrades, 59% of respondents reported that Hong Kong has the necessary infrastructure to support meetings and events.

SNAPSHOT: HONG KONG

Capitalize On:

Air Transportation



Modern Amenities



MICE Infrastructure



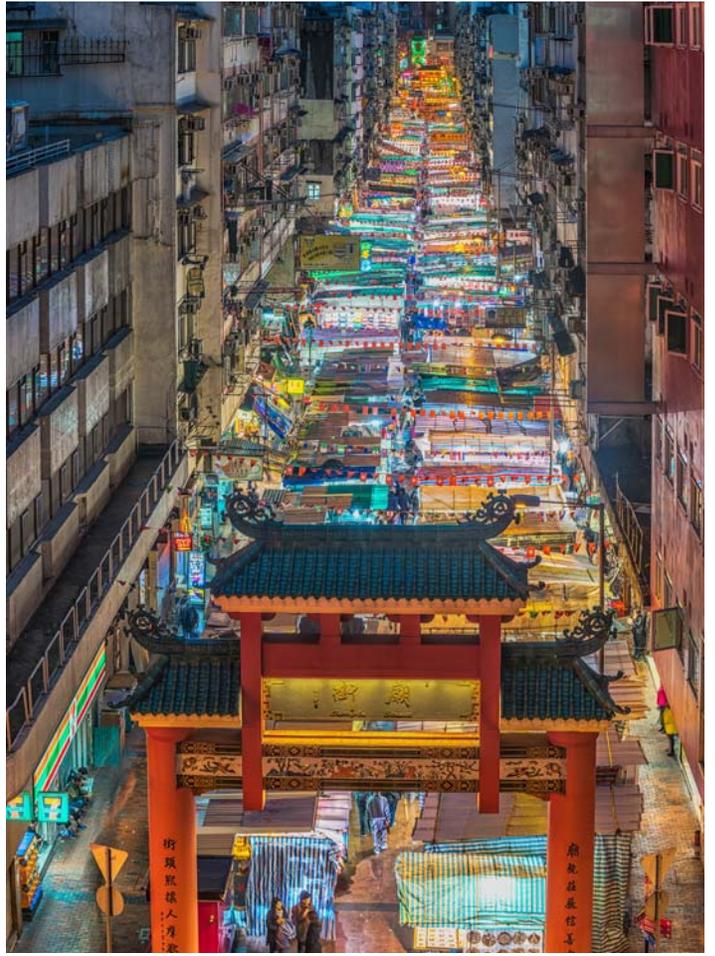
Watch Outs:

Affordable Destination



Attendee Enthusiasm





Conclusion

An Asian proverb says, “Better to see something once than to hear about it a thousand times,” and there has perhaps never been better advice when it comes to exploring the delights of Asia Pacific. Its cultural diversity, rich experiences and breadth of options means there is a destination for every flavor of meeting or event. Of course, it is important to be aware of perceptions (your own and those of your attendees), but sometimes the only way to find hidden gems is to step out of your comfort zone and to explore somewhere new. Trying a new city first-hand, either during a site visit or familiarization trip, can help to overcome uncertainties and open new possibilities. As meeting planners face increased pressure to provide unique yet budget-friendly experiences, they can look to Asia Pacific as an appealing destination.



1. 2019 Global Meeting and Events Forecast data.
2. <https://www.cvent.com/en/press-release/cvent-unveils-lists-top-meeting-destinations-worldwide-2018>
3. <https://www.nationsonline.org/oneworld/languages.htm>
4. Destination information from <http://www.cvent.com/rfp/asia-meeting-event-planning.aspx>
5. <https://edition.cnn.com/2019/02/11/asia/najib-razak-trial-malaysia-intl/index.html>



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