

GULF HOSPITALITY / Taking stock of GCC hotels and venues

CVENT CEO SPEAKS / Big Interview with Reggie Aggarwal

ASIAN CO-OPERATION / Thailand and Japan in sync





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Over 130 years in the making, Thailand has set its eye on Japan as a long-term partner for MICE industry development.



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CMW meets the new head of Istanbul Convention Bureau, Hicran Özbük.

Together in turbulent times

CMW MEETS THE NEW HEAD OF ISTANBUL CONVENTION BUREAU, **HICRAN ÖZBÜK**, WHO IS KEEN TO SHARE THE VERY BEST MEETINGS EXPERIENCES IN ONE OF THE WORLD'S GREAT CITIES

How are you coping with the aftermath of the terrorism incidents and how has Istanbul's MICE business been affected?

Unfortunately, we are living in a time of turbulence throughout the world. Istanbul has not been an exception.

Over the last year, there have been coordination efforts led by the Istanbul Governorate and the Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality to address security and avoid undesired events. We also collected video testimonials from associations and organisers during their international congresses in Istanbul. Rather than us just saying the city is secure, it was time to let them speak.

Which countries bring in the most MICE business?

In 2016, the top five countries of origin congresses for Istanbul were the USA, UK, Germany, Austria and Belgium.

Which destinations are your main competitors and why?

All destinations have different culture, history and infrastructure and all offer different experiences. Rather than competitors, I would say there are many destinations that are in the same league as us, especially the big metropolitans in the same region.

Which sectors are strongest for Istanbul for conferences?

In 2016, for Istanbul they were: technology (19.3%), science (17.5%), medical sciences (10.5%) and law (8.7%).



In this International Year of Sustainable Tourism for Development, what initiatives does Istanbul have?

The Turkish Ministry of Culture and Tourism's Green Star Certification Programme' won the Green Apple Environment Award by The Green Organisation and Istanbul CVB member venues are leading initiatives to create a natural environment, reduce energy usage and use minimal non-renewable resources. Istanbul also saw a 100% increase in the number of Green Star hotels in the past year.

What initiatives are coming from government designed to help the tourism industry in the city?

As Istanbul CVB, we are taking the industry needs and suggestions to relevant ministries in order to create new services and opportunities for the industry, such as tax exemptions,

financial support, promotions activities, and so on. Several topics are with the ministries and in the process of approval.

We are living in a time of turbulence and this situation creates misperceptions about destinations. On behalf of Istanbul, including the public and private bodies, we all need to be more visible in the international platforms. We need to interact face to face to explain the real situation in Istanbul and spread out one single message for our city. More importantly, we also need to host more international clients so they can witness the daily life with their own eyes.

What message would you like to give to the international MICE industry?

First of all, we would like to thank all international associations that have selected Istanbul in our difficult times. We are confident that Istanbul will always stay as a desired city for both leisure and business tourism. ■



Hicran Özbük
Head of Istanbul
Convention
Bureau