

# Greener meetings still an uphill task

Experts agree more needs to be done in the region to reduce the environmental impact of events and make them more sustainable



**Yvette Jong**  
Founder, Craft House

It's impossible to be perfect, but easy to make a difference. We don't tell people to 'go green', but they need to know the pros and cons. Yet we still face basic challenges in that it's easier to keep bad habits because clients aren't requesting recycling and other measures. Too many organisers still believe that

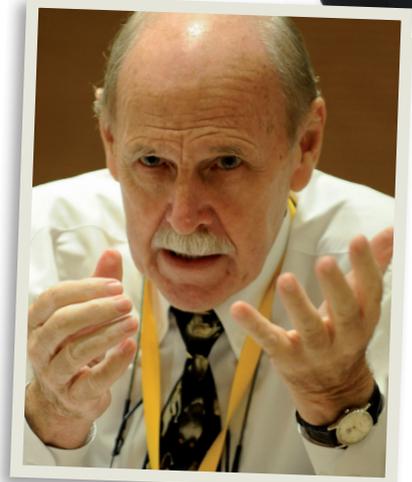
**“It's impossible to be perfect, but easy to make a difference”**

more paper, more bottled water and more cold air-conditioning will add value. Too many won't donate food because they misguidedly think there are liability issues. Instead of thinking creatively, too many still believe an abundance of giveaways justifies ticket cost.

**Ken Hickson**  
Chairman and CEO,  
Sustain Ability  
Showcase  
Consultancy Asia

Sustainability for events took a little longer to catch on in Asia than I expected, but it took off in 2013 the way it should.

Australia is moving in the right direction with some excellent work by GreenShoot Pacific in managing events sustainably, introducing ISO 20121, and educating the events industry. Thailand, at this stage, is still leading the Asia convention industry for sustainability and the TCEB remains the only MICE organisation to implement ISO 20121. The Singapore Tourism Board has attempted to go some of the way towards sustainability for events by producing a set of guidelines, while Marina Bay Sands in Singapore, along with its Venetian Macau, will introduce the ISO 20121 for its facilities and events.



**Cindy Yiu**  
Senior sustainability  
consultant, Energenz

Sustainable meetings are a win-win situation for all: from organisers, through the cost savings,

to local communities, through the procurement of local goods and services.

At Energenz we develop resource efficiency programmes for various corporations, including hotels. One of our clients, MGM Macau, is focused on three key areas: how resources can be minimised through purchasing decisions; how users can minimise consumption of resources through resource efficiency initiatives in critical areas like kitchens; and how waste can be diverted from landfills and reused wherever possible – with the back-of-house recycling programme, and

the use of food waste pulp to reduce food waste volume. This has affected meetings and events through the use of recycled paper, energy-saving lamps, FSC-certified paper supplies, the reduction of disposable goods and offering seafood deemed sustainable by the WWF guideline.

Governments must lead by example by setting a best practice guideline, mainly to measure the carbon footprint of an event and how to reduce this number, through transport, venue requirements, communication, catering and community involvement.





**Sally Greenhill**  
Managing director, The Right Solution

When we first started using the word ‘sustainability’ we were asked to find another way of saying it. In just a few short years it was the buzzword on everyone’s lips. Then the global financial crisis hit and everyone’s attention turned to economics and pure survival.

We undertake regular research on the meetings industry and this year’s results reflect how low a priority green issues are. In Europe, fewer than 25 per cent of buyers believe a CSR and sustainability focus for events can help increase attendance or improve audience engagement. As a priority, they have been overtaken by use of new technology and the freer approach for audiences to drive content on the day.

However, can the meetings industry afford to be so fleeting in its attention to sustainability? Particularly when India, China and South America are both the sources of the new conference attendees and the target destinations for so many events. Ironically many conferences are being created to discuss renewable energies and sustainability. As an industry we cannot afford to become bored with sustainability as we move on to the ‘next big thing’. Our insatiable appetite for seeing the world needs to be tempered by a level of responsibility for the environment.

**Anthony Wong**  
Managing director, Frangipani Langkawi Resort & Spa

I found it difficult to convince general hoteliers to follow the green philosophy, until I realised it’s easier to push the concept that going green results in savings in operation costs. Using the dollars-and-cents concept for water, energy, recycling and the growing of organic food gains more attention and the outcome is sustainability. But this should also come with the involvement of meeting industry organisations such as the International Congress and Convention Association, as education is key to development and therefore progress.

Another practical way of overcoming environmental challenges is for resorts and venues to appoint an environmental or sustainability officer to ensure the commitment of staff and management.

Take the Malaysian island of Langkawi, for instance, where the water of the Andaman Sea is the number one attraction. Protecting this tourism asset is of the highest priority.

It is vital for tourism ministries, hotel associations and other agencies to create awareness. Otherwise, our future generations face a great loss with environmental degradation.



**Roger Simons**  
Group sustainability manager, MCI in Asia Pacific

Global business leaders continue to focus on Asia as a leader of their growth. Many are aware that they have their biggest environmental impact in the region through the manufacturing industry or their supply chain, and have the greatest opportunity to support local communities.

This continues to influence the events industry across the region. In 2013, we saw a number of large corporate companies pass through with events with sustainability at

the core – BASF, Unilever and Autodesk to name a few.

At the same time, many of our leading destinations in the region – including Singapore, Thailand and Taiwan in particular – have made efforts to highlight their

offering to this market and stimulate the local industry.

Thailand has shown support for the ISO 20121 standard, while Singapore has launched sustainability guidelines especially for the meetings industry.

This year, we can expect to see greater maturity in the way that we plan events – limiting the impact on the environment and increasing benefit to local communities while maximising the return on investment of the event. Looking forward to 2020, this will no doubt be a large component of the Olympics in Tokyo as well.

“Expect to see greater maturity in the way we plan events”