

Pattaya on the rise

A US\$50 million spring cleaning, a new airport and some big international names are doing wonders to Pattaya's events market. Jeffrey Studebaker reports.

After a US\$50 million waterfront cleanup, Pattaya's MICE market prospects are improving and, with the new US\$2.7 billion Suvarnabhumi Airport scheduled for completion in early 2006 and an influx of new international hotel brands, overseas markets are seeing Pattaya in a new light.

Pattaya already possesses PEACH, the Royal Cliff Beach Resort's world-class convention centre, and other international-standard hotel names – including Sheraton, Novotel and Central – will soon be moving in.

Royal Cliff director of marketing and sales, Mr David Holden, said the PEACH convention venue continued to attract major MICE events, and large conferences this year would include 1,500 delegates from the Australian global travel distribution network, Flight Centre, scheduled for July.

"We are continuing to improve on our product to stay competitive as a MICE venue, adding wireless Internet access to PEACH and all public areas, and we will soon

be building a fast-track check-in area for groups," he said.

On the opposite side of the city, Accor is moving onto the North Pattaya beachfront with the new 234-room Novotel Garden Cliff Resort featuring a 350m² ballroom and two 60m² meeting rooms, and there is talk of a partnership with Central Hotels and Resorts to open a Sofitel on the site of the Central Wong Amat.

Accor communications co-ordinator, Ms Siriporn Treepornpairat, said developments in infrastructure had been crucial for bringing conference and incentive groups to Pattaya, but it was the city authorities' efforts to improve Pattaya's reputation that was the catalyst for Accor to add Pattaya to its hotel network.

Whether or not Accor joins in, Central will proceed with plans to close the Central Wong Amat Resort in April 2005 and spend 1.3 billion baht (US\$32.5 million) to reopen it as a four-star, 470-room resort with convention facilities for up to 800.

Central executive vice-president, Mr Gerd Steeb, said the MICE market would be important for the Wong Amat, especially during the summer months. "We expect MICE guests to account for 50 per cent of our occupancy from May to September," he said.



Barrett: bright skies ahead.

Starwood will be moving in towards the end of the year with the new 156-room Sheraton Pattaya Resort on a beachfront location near the Royal Cliff, and managing director Thailand, Hong Kong and Macau, Mr Peter Thompson, thinks Pattaya has terrific potential.

"With the advent of the new airport and the branded hotels, MICE organisers can be confident that international standards will be maintained and marketing will be greatly augmented," he said.

Many destination management companies are aware of Pattaya's improvements and Destination Asia CEO, Mr James Reed, said the new airport and new properties would fuel the demand for Pattaya incentive programmes. "The city is perfect for the Asian corporate incentives market and, when we had a group of 1,700 Amway India salespeople at the Royal Cliff last year, they loved it," he said.

Diethelm events manager, Mr David Barrett, said markets that were previously uninterested were beginning to come around. "We recently held a successful cocktail reception for 763 delegates from Hagemeyer Australia at the Sanctuary of Truth attraction in northern Pattaya. With the new airport on the way, the next five years ought to be very good," he said.

Former Pacific World general manager, Mr Marc Sayer, who recently left, said the company would be sending several large groups from Europe and America. "Last year we saw virtually no interest in Pattaya from these regions but we are seeing a much more positive response now."

No one can deny there is an image prob-

Royal Cliff Beach Resort: upgrading to stay competitive.

