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Where the World Meets: Regionalism and Globalization in Singapore's Convention Industry

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Abstract:

Singapore's meetings, incentive, convention and exhibition industry (M.I.C.E.) attracts over 4,000 events and over 400,000 foreign participants every year. Since 1982, Singapore has been the top convention destination in Asia and today ranks among the top ten in the world. An assessment of Singapore MICE attractiveness shows that while the country has many strengths, particularly infrastructure and management, it has a number of weaknesses, as well, including limited entertainment and cultural attractions. Further analysis shows that much of Singapore's success has been based on regional meetings, rather than truly global events. As regional competition heats up, Singapore will need to better develop the global market. To do this Singapore is attempting to leverage its well developed transportation, hospitality and human resources, along with its role as a regional and global economic center.

Keywords: Singapore, MICE attractions, Market positioning

Singapore has been the leading meetings, incentives, conventions and exhibitions (MICE) city in Asia since at least 1983, despite being on the periphery in comparison to the major MICE cities of Europe and North America. The country's success in this area has been due to the rapid modernization of its infrastructure and economy after gaining independence from the United Kingdom in 1963 and from Malaysia in 1965. Being a small city-state, Singapore was able to survive and prosper through the careful and judicious development of its human and human-built resources. It was able to build on its colonial legacy to achieve this in a shorter time period than many other Asian countries. However, the 1990s have witnessed the rapid development of Singapore's neighbors to a point where the successful competition for Southeast Asian MICE events can no longer be taken for granted by any destination (Lye 1997). Malaysia, Thailand, Hong Kong and Australia have all developed major meeting centers, transportation networks and supporting hospitality facilities.

At the same time, Singapore faces a number of internal challenges, including its high costs and a dearth of scenic and cultural activities. These challenges are shared by the rest of Singapore's tourism as well, and were the bases upon which Singapore developed an aggressive program to regionalize and globalize its tourism investments and marketing efforts (Chang 1998). The goal is to make Singapore the global gateway/entry-point for people coming to Southeast Asia from other parts of the world (Low and Toh 1997). At the same time, Singapore would become a hub for tourism activities and tourism investments in the region (Regnier 1993). Multinational company investments would come from and through Singapore to fund development in other Asia-Pacific countries. By investing in the tourism development of its neighbors, Singaporeans would benefit both when visitors fly into its international airport, and when they travel further afield in the region. A new, more flexible and less limiting 'geography' is therefore created. This is officially referred to as 'Singapore Unlimited' as a guiding national development theme, and as 'Tourism Unlimited' as it applies to planning and development efforts by the Singapore Tourism Board (STPB 1996).

In The End of the Nation State, futurist Kenichi Ohmae noted that by going regional small countries like Singapore can use 'the global economy for solutions to their problems or for the resources to make these solutions work' (1995:81). The development of Singapore's MICE industry is a major part of the country's efforts to use and develop global trends in travel and tourism to its advantage. These actions are aimed not only at maintaining Singapore's dominance as Asia's leading regional MICE city, but growing it into a top global MICE destination, attracting large numbers of meetings and attendees from areas beyond Asia. Such a strategy will help secure the country's infrastructural investments in convention centers and supporting accommodations and transportation facility as regional competition heats up. Whether this strategy will be enough remains to be seen. Singapore may actually experience a 'de-hubbing' of its primacy at the regional level, at the same time that it becomes more of a global MICE hub.

This discussion will first focus on Singapore's role as a regional and global MICE hub by examining the country's ranking as a convention city compared to other global and regional cities, and characteristics of its conventions and meetings infrastructure. This is followed by a review of the challenges facing the city-state in holding and expanding its MICE primacy through a review of its attractiveness and the perceptions of MICE visitors. Although the MICE acronym is used throughout this discussion, the focus is primarily on conventions and meetings, with limited discussion of incentive travel.

Singapore as a MICE Hub

Singapore is a small (647.5 sq. km./250 sq. mi., and 3.04 million people) city-state situated between Malaysia and Indonesia within the center of Southeast Asia (MITA 1998). Its small size, however, belies its importance as a regional and global economic, tourism and convention center. According to the database maintained by the Union of International Associations (UIA), Singapore ranked sixth the world and first in Asia in the number of international meetings hosted by cities in 1996 (Table 1). At the country level, Singapore ranked 18th -- still well ahead of some very large countries, including Russia and China. However, statistics such as those presented by the UIA need to be taken with some caution. Like international tourism arrivals, they tend to overestimate European destinations where international cross-border traffic is far more common and easier than in many other parts of the world. Similarly, Singapore's ability to easily draw on participants from Malaysia and Indonesia, as well as other Southeast Asian countries, further contributes to its 'international' meeting ranking.

<Table 1 about here>

What is more important are long-term trends and regional patterns. In these areas, Singapore's situation was also stellar. Despite the fact that the UIA's city and country rankings can change considerably from year to year, Singapore's city ranking has consistently been from sixth to eighth in the 1990s and its potential international convention role is only likely to increase as Asia's proportion of international meetings grows. In 1996, Asia hosted 6.6 percent more international meetings than in 1995, resulting in the highest growth rate of any region (Table 2). This increase reflects Asia's economic success in recent years, which has been accompanied by a rapid increase in intra-regional business and leisure travel. The economic turmoil experienced by most Asian countries in 1997 and 1998 will likely result in a sharp decrease in international meetings for Singapore and the region for those years. However, as the Asian economies re-emerge, the pattern of the early to mid-1990s will again appear, with possibly stronger growth spurred by leaner and more competitive economies.

<Table 2 about here>

Within Asia, the city of Singapore has been the leading international meeting place, as mentioned above, while the country overall ranked third (Table 3). Singapore also ranked as the top city in exhibitions in Asia for 1996 (SECB 1997:i). Only Hong Kong has come close to competing with Singapore's dominance at the city level. However, Hong Kong's international meetings have consisted of a very high proportion of locally sponsored international events, reflected in the low number in the second column in Table 1. It has been less successful in attracting international organizations than its composite ranking indicates. Singapore is similarly less competitive with the major European cities in this category. While Singapore is likely to maintain its lead among Asian cities for many years to come, it will also be facing increased competition from the emerging urban centers of Southeast Asia. This seems to be the pattern that has also emerged in recent years in Europe where many of the major MICE cities are less dominant today than they were in the past (de Coninck 1998).

<Table 3 about here>

The Singapore Tourism Board (STB, which was formerly known as the Singapore Tourist Promotion Board, or STPB) annually gathers statistics on the country's MICE industry (STPB 1997b). The number of participants and expenditures which they tabulate are based on a variety of sources, including immigration disembarkation cards (completed by non-Singaporeans upon arrival in Singapore) and surveys sent to venue operators, professional MICE organizers, hotels, and STB sponsored surveys of meeting participants. These numbers vary from those of the UIA and are primarily useful for gauging changes within the country's MICE industry over time.

Conventions, exhibitions and incentive group travel to Singapore have all grown steadily and significantly in total number over the past ten years (Table 4). Even though the average size and length of each event has steadily decreased, the overall economic impact is significant, amounting to US\$520 million in foreign visitor expenditures in 1996.

<Table 4 about here>

Only in exhibitions has there been an overall decrease in the total expenditures (from S\$776.2 million in 1992 to S\$579.9 million in 1996), even though the number of events has increased. This reflects two aspects of Singapore's situation: (1) competition from other Asian centers, and (2)

Singapore's lack of a mega-exhibitions center. The first of these problems, competition, will not change and will likely become even more intense in years to come (Lye 1997). As mentioned above, while Singapore may be able to maintain its leading role, its lead over other Asian destinations is expected to decrease.

The problem of Singapore's lacking a mega-exhibition center will change in 1999 when the first 60,000 square meter phase of Singapore Expo opens (Clark 1997). This is the size of 96 basketball courts. By the time it is completed, Singapore Expo will have 100,000 square meters, making it Asia's largest exhibition center outside of Japan. Singapore Expo will replace the Changi International Convention and Exhibition Centre, which opened in 1988 with 23,250 square meters under cover and an additional 60,000 square meters outdoors. The Port of Singapore Authority (PSA) manages the site of these facilities, which is located adjacent to Changi International Airport and will be served directly by a Mass Rapid Transit (MRT) rail line by the year 2001.

While the older facility comes down and the new one is built, Singapore is experiencing a shortage of exhibition space. This has been further exacerbated by the loss of covered exhibition space at the World Trade Center, which is one of the largest exhibition centers in Asia, although it is divided into nine separate halls (PSA 1998). Construction began in late 1997 on a new underground MRT line and station at the World Trade Center which has resulted in the loss of two exhibition halls and a permanent reduction in its covered floor space from 39,100 sq meters to less than 29,000 sq meters. The site, however, should remain attractive for exhibitions as it is also the port facility for Singapore's active cruise industry, serves as a ferry terminal to islands in Indonesia, and has restaurants and shops that offer a popular destination for evening entertainment. The new MRT line and station will further enhance the features it provides.

Despite the World Trade Center's size, it is primarily an exhibition hall and is only marginally suitable for conventions. Most of the conventions in Singapore are located in the country's many international class hotels. There are 18 hotels in Singapore with ballroom seating capacities of over 400 persons, an additional 15 that can seat between 300 and 400 persons, and 29 more that can seat between 200 and 300 in a single meeting room (1996 figures). None of these, however, is capable of handling large scale conventions of several thousand participants entirely within their own properties. To enhance Singapore's convention capabilities, the Singapore International Convention and Exhibition Centre (SICEC), also known as Suntec Centre, was opened in a prime, city-center location in August 1995 (Kraal 1996).

Suntec Centre contains a 12,000 square metre conventional hall, plus 26 meeting rooms, an auditorium, ballroom and other meeting areas. It can handle a single meeting of 12,000 delegates in theater-style seating. Adjacent to the convention center and running through the middle of it is the Suntec City Mall, Singapore's largest shopping center, while in the immediate vicinity are the Westin Stamford and the adjacent Westin Plaza, the Pan Pacific, the Marina Mandarin and the Oriental – all first class hotels with major conventions facilities of their own.

The 3,000 rooms that these hotels conveniently provide are also a major draw for Suntec Centre conventions (Lye 1997). Suntec Centre, and most of its surrounding hotels, were built on a large area of reclaimed land on the coast of Singapore and enjoy magnificent views of the financial center and the surrounding area. The centre's importance to the image of Singapore as a global tourism center was even recognized by its being featured on a postage stamp in 1996.

To differentiate itself, and to not unduly compete with hotel-based conventions, Suntec Centre focuses on attracting large, international conventions and exhibitions, as well as large corporation and association meetings. These require several years of advanced reservation and planning, and as with other MICE areas, are much sought after by other convention destinations. Because of this, SICEC did not expect to break even on its balance sheets until 1998 and it has been partnering with Messe Dusseldorf organizers to help with its marketing efforts to achieve that goal

(Lye 1997). The Asian economic crisis will likely further delay SICEC's goal of economic self-sufficiency until at least the year 2000.

Despite Singapore's regional and global prominence as a convention destination, its biggest problem is that, so far, Singapore has been lacking a sufficient number of "owned" events – that is, events that are internationally recognized to exist each year in Singapore, such as the Berlin's Internationale Tourismus Börse (ITB travel faire) and New York's American International Toy Fair (aka, the New York Toy Fair). Starting in 1998, the Pacific Asia Travel Association (PATA) began holding its annual travel trade show in Singapore only for a ten year period. This was a major coup for the country, although the total number of delegates is not large and it is still a regionally-based event. The Asian economic downturn and bad publicity from the Indonesian forest fires, in particular, made the 1998 PATA event smaller than in previous years.

SICEC has also been working to develop some homegrown international conventions. The four largest of these events are ApplianceTech, Consumer Electronics Asia, Luminaire Asia, and Soft Furnishing Asia (Lye 1997). There are still significant gaps in Singapore's annual convention calendar, which need to be filled before the country's major convention facilities will be able to operate in the black (STPB 1997a). Singapore's overall convention center occupancy rate for 1998 was projected to be 30 percent, but will likely drop to 16 percent when the new mega-convention center opens in 1999 (Ang 1997). Despite the current and projected oversupply, the new facilities are considered essential in securing Singapore's international MICE position.

Singapore's MICE Challenges and Opportunities

Singapore benefits from two major attributes that contribute to its role as a leading meeting destination: its geographic location and its human resources. Located at the strategic tip of the Malay peninsula, Singapore has one of the world's busiest ports and serves as a major hub for transportation into and within Southeast Asia. Changi International Airport is often rated by travelers as the best and most efficient in the world and, along with the successful efforts of the Singapore Tourism Board, has helped to make Singapore one of the most visited places in Asia. Singapore is also the financial center of Southeast Asia, supported by an excellent telecommunications system.

In a comprehensive review of 64 sources on convention site assessment, Crouch and Ritchie (1998) identified the following factors as key in the site selection process:

- Accessibility
- Local Support
- Extra-Conference Opportunities
- Accommodation Facilities
- Meeting Facilities

A cursory assessment of these factors as they relate to Singapore provides some insight into its attraction, and problems, as a major MICE destination. In terms of accessibility, Singapore's geographic location has benefitted the country since its founding. It is near the geographic center of Southeast Asia, thus providing a convenient location for intra-regional travel. It is also on the major air route between Europe and Australia/New Zealand, making for convenient stop overs between these two regions. Singapore, however, is more peripheral in relation to the Americas, where travel costs and time are major barriers. As noted above, Changi International Airport is consistently rated the best and most efficient in the world, as is the country's flag carrier, Singapore Airlines (Dhaliwal 1997; Straits Times 1997).

Singapore is one of the more expensive cities in the world in which to live and entertain. For example, a survey by the United Bank of Switzerland rated Singapore the sixth most expensive city in

which to live, and the second most expensive in which to dine out 'at an exclusive restaurant' – Tokyo was first in both categories (Tan 1997). To overcome these types of barriers, many major convention cities offer subsidies and discounts to lure conventions. Singapore, however, had for a long time resisted these tactics and still uses them sparingly. Such an attitude may reflect the high concern that the government places on corrupt practices. Singapore's government is the least corrupt in Asia (Ngoo 1997), and even the tipping of taxi drivers and restaurants servers is widely discouraged. Considerable support for conference planning is provided by the Singapore Exhibition and Convention Bureau, which is part of the Singapore Tourism Board. Singapore has a less well developed network of private-sector professional conference organizers than is found in many other large convention destinations (STPB 1997a).

The range of extra-conference opportunities in Singapore is considerable and growing, although it has also been subject to criticism and debate. Despite growing shopping opportunities in other Southeast Asian countries, Singapore remains the single destination with the widest range of products in the most modern of shopping centers, and this is a major draw within the region. Food, as a form of entertainment, achieves considerable heights of quality, diversity and price, and is one of the country's lesser known strengths. Urban-related recreation opportunities, such a golf and tennis, are available, though costs and the humid equatorial climate can be a hindrance for some visitors.

The biggest complaint by visitors to Singapore is the lack of traditional ethnic cultural attractions, which seem to have been subsumed by the country's push toward modernization (Lew 1998). This is closely followed by criticisms of limited entertainment and nightlife, which largely reflects the government's overly cautious regulatory environment and its proactive approach to shaping social norms. The nightlife situation, however, has changed considerably in recent years, with the opening of new entertainment areas, especially along the Singapore River. Plans for the development of a 24-hour entertainment district in the vicinity of the former Bugis Street transvestite area (close to the Suntec Centre convention complex) will further liven up Singapore's night scene.

On the other hand, there is generally no interest in returning to the difficult lifestyles that are often associated with the more traditional cultures of Asia. Cooley workers, street hawkers and dilapidated ethnic quarters are rapidly disappearing from Singapore's landscape as older areas are razed or converted into gentrified historic districts. However, Singapore is positioning itself to serve as a hub for short trips to other Southeast Asian destinations, which can be offered as part of a pre- or post-conference experience (Lew and Ahmed 1999; STPB 1996). The role of the 'modern' city in the midst of Asia's exotic cultures is one that Singapore has played since its founding in the early 19th century. As competing urban centers in Southeast Asia also modernize, they too may soon come in for similar complaints about a lack of 'traditional culture'.

One other major extra-conference opportunity that Singapore excels in is that of making professional contacts. In recent years Singapore has ranked as one of the top two most competitive city in the world, in business terms; as the one of the freest economies in the world; and as the preferred business center for most multinational corporations in Asia (Oon 1996; Quak 1996; Teh 1997; Teo 1997). The efforts of Singapore's government to enhance its position as a business center are also mirrored in the professional fields, such as medicine and law. Opportunities to make connections in business and professional areas provide an added attraction in considering Singapore for a meeting venue.

Singapore excels in its accommodation facilities, offering a wide range of quality, from the most highly rated hotels in the world to more moderate facilities. Most have space to host small to moderate sized meetings in comfortable, attractive and very safe surroundings. Costs, however, are a major concern, as Singapore's quality hotels come with quality price tags. The 1997 currency turmoil in Asia only affected Singapore marginally, as its currency fell only about 15% compared to 30% to over 100% declines in neighboring countries. This has made Singapore's hotels and other costs less

competitively priced than its neighbors, as well as it making it very much more expensive for Asian visitors to the country.

Conventioneer Characteristics and Perceptions [note that this is a sub-sub heading]

Asian participants dominated Singapore's MICE events in 1996 (Table 5), but in an uneven way. Based on passenger disembarkation cards collected by the Singapore Immigration Department, the country's closest ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations) neighbors topped the convention and exhibitions arrivals, with Malaysia, Indonesia and Thailand together comprising 40.5 percent of all visitors in this category. These three were followed by the wealthier and larger of the developed countries around the Pacific Rim: Australia, Japan and the USA (19.0% combined). Other Asian countries were also common participants at Singapore's conventions, while the UK (3.0%) was the only European country with a significant presence. The disembarkation card total for convention and exhibition attendees was far smaller than the combined 300,000 in Table 4 due to the inclusion of accompanying persons in the Table 4 statistics and the possible incorrect self-designation by some participants on the disembarkation cards. The percentage distribution of country of residence, however, may have been more accurate than that provided by conference organizers, which formed the data for Table 4.

<Table 5 about here>

The ranking for international attendees at association meetings in Singapore closely reflected those of conventions and exhibitions overall, except that the more wealthy Pacific Rim countries were more highly represented, while Taiwan especially stood out. Attendance at corporate meetings even further accentuated the difference between distance and wealth. Corporate meeting attendees were dominated by the US, Japan and Hong Kong (31.2% combined), with only Malaysia (10.0%) joining this leading group. Residents of China, India, Taiwan and the UK (20.7% combined) were other major participants in this category, which most closely reflected Singapore's global business linkages. Incentive travel participants showed the greatest idiosyncracies, with Japan dominating the arrivals by a large margin (64.7% of all participants). Korea (5.9%) and China (6.6%) also showed up as secondary source countries for incentive travel, and France (3.0%) was the dominant long-distance incentive source country.

A survey conducted by the National University of Singapore in 1997 of 1000 business travelers to Singapore resulted in 180 useable questionnaires from respondents participating in meetings, conventions and exhibitions (Chang, et al. 1998). The results of that survey provide further insight into the Singapore MICE market.

As with most other business travelers, MICE travelers to Singapore were primarily male (83.2%) with a mean age of about 40 years old. Unlike the leisure tourist market, most had been to Singapore before, with only 21.7 percent being first time visitors and a full third having visited the country at least five times in the past. While most traveled alone (58.7%), 34.1 percent traveled with business colleagues. They stayed in hotels (82.5%) and while many stayed between three and five nights (41.0%), about the same number were there for a short one or two nights (42.8%).

The typical MICE visitor was well traveled, with 40.0 percent indicating that they made two to five business trips each year, and 50.6 percent travelling even more (Table 6). Singapore's importance as the leading Asian MICE destination, and as a major Asian center for corporate activity, is seen in the large proportion of MICE visitors who regularly travel in Asia for their business activities, including both the Asia and Worldwide categories in Table 6. Most of these Asian business travelers have been to Singapore before and will likely return again because of the country's pivotal

business role in the region. It is, however, these experienced Asian travelers in particular that other developing Asian destinations may have more success in drawing away from Singapore for future MICE events. It is also these travelers who are most likely to be among the large number (27.1%) of MICE visitors who traveled on to other business meetings after their trip to Singapore.

<Table 6 about here>

Singapore's global importance in the international MICE market is less clear. A small number of Singapore MICE attendees indicated that they mostly traveled only in Europe (10.1%) or North America (8.9%) for business. For them, this trip to Singapore was more likely to be motivated by a desire (or need) to attend a significant international meeting. These percentages need to be increased for Singapore to show evidence that it is expanding beyond its role as the Asia's most important convention center, to becoming one of the world's most important meeting centers.

Some of the potential confusion in assessing and ranking MICE conditions in Singapore, and elsewhere, is shown in Table 7 where more respondents to the survey indicated that the meeting they were attending was being held in an office or corporate headquarters rather than in a convention center. This shows the considerable importance of smaller corporate meetings that have minimal impact on the major convention centers, or even on hotel convention and conference facilities. The importance of this segment is also seen in Table 4 with two-thirds of all the conventions held in Singapore in 1996 consisting of corporate meetings with fewer than 20 participants. Note that such meetings are not included in the international meetings ranking system used by UIA in Table 1.

<Table 7 about here>

Most MICE travelers were well impressed by Singapore, as they planned to return either for business purposes (60.5%) or leisure purposes (61.0%). Because they were there for a specific business reason, many MICE visitors did not have enough time for sightseeing and leisure activities, and so desired to return for them (Table 7). Among the 35.0 percent who did participate in sightseeing activities, about half visited one or more of Singapore's gardens and about the same number went to an entertainment or food center. Smaller numbers went to the country's theme parks and historic and religious attractions.

When asked, nearly all of the MICE respondents (99.4%) agreed that Singapore was a conducive place to conduct business. Supporting the assessment made above of Singapore's attractiveness, they gave high marks to Singapore's airport, to its stable government and its safe environment, and to its lack of corruption and well organized working environment (Table 8). These were followed by Singapore's excellent telecommunications system, an area which the Singapore government has emphasized for its potential to globalize the country's economy in the face of limited natural resources. Today, Singapore's telecommunications are among the most modern, yet least expensive, in the world. Receiving far fewer accolades were Singapore's high costs, its scenery and tourist sites, and its shopping, food and entertainment. This supports similar low evaluations of these attractions made by tourists in general to Singapore (Chang 1998). As mentioned previously, the entertainment situation in Singapore is particularly lacking for a city of its international renown, although its costs are actually quite comparable to other leading global business centers.

<Table 8 about here>

Conclusions

Singapore faces the interesting position of being a major international MICE center that is also striving to become a major international MICE center. This seeming contradiction stems from the fact the most international MICE activities are centered in the developed countries of Europe and North America. That Singapore has been able to compete as well as it has in this largely 'developed-world' industry is a tribute to the country's capable and resourceful management. However, considerable more work needs to be done to secure Singapore's position in the future. The challenges that Singapore faces primarily focus on the ever increasing competition from within the Asia-Pacific region. Fortunately this is recognized and strategic planning and infrastructure development is continually underway to increase the country's competitiveness for MICE events.

There are probably more forces that are in the country's favor than against it, at least in the near term. Tourism is a transactive process involving both the endogenous efforts of local residents, government and entrepreneurs and exogenous forces of global markets, multinational corporations and inter-governmental relations (Milne 1998). Singapore's endogenous forces have been emphasized in this discussion. The most significant exogenous forces that will influence the country's future MICE activities is the increasing globalization of travel and tourism, accompanied by a trend towards increasing numbers of international meetings, conventions, exhibitions and incentive trips. International borders are becoming more transparent worldwide and, despite the 1997-8 economic problems in Asia, tourism and travel will continue to increase globally and especially within the Asia-Pacific region. This means more meetings for everyone, and for the near term Singapore should be better placed to catch a larger proportion of these than its neighbors, given its major role as a regional and global corporate and financial center. Singapore should do well in the longer term as well, although its MICE growth will likely occur at lower rates as the competition becomes better developed.

Singapore's situation points out the precarious position of being a successful tourism hub. Much is expected of the city-state due to its long-standing leadership role in tourism, in general, and in MICE activities, in particular. At the same time, numerous upstarts are constantly seeking ways to topple the leader. By all objective measures, Singapore has done well in developing its tourism and MICE activities. That is probably enough to ensure its continued leadership in these areas. However, as the economic and environmental disasters that struck Southeast Asia in 1997 revealed, few things come with absolute guarantees.

While the overall future for the country's MICE industry looks positive, it is possible that Singapore will experience a de-hubbing of its regional MICE primacy, at the same time that it experiences a hubbing of its global role. In other words, regional competition will make Singapore less dominant in the Asia-Pacific region (de-hubbed), while its enhanced convention and exhibition facilities will make Singapore more competitive with European and North American MICE destinations (global hubbing). In the longer term, there may be opportunities to 're-hub' the regional MICE industry.

These patterns apply not only to the MICE and tourism industries, but with some variation to all aspects of Singapore's economy as it moves from a regional to a global center (Regnier 1993). Singapore is aware of these evolving patterns and is as proactive as any small, but important, country in its position can be in attempting to secure a better environment for its future generations. The country's MICE industry will continue to benefit from these large social goals.

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Table 1. Leading Cities Hosting International Meetings in 1996.¹

City	% of all international meetings ²	% of international organization meetings ³
Paris	3.15	2.09
Wien (Vienna)	2.09	1.89
London	2.01	1.75
Brussels	2.00	1.90
Geneva	1.66	1.61
Kobenhavn	1.64	1.39
Singapore	1.53	1.09
Budapest	1.40	1.18
Washington	1.30	1.09
Amsterdam	1.29	1.06
Hong Kong	1.29	0.70
New York	1.29	1.04
Total meetings	9,000	n/a

Notes:

1 The Union of International Associations define an ‘international meeting’ as all those listed in its Yearbook of International Organizations and its International Congress Calendar, as well as any other meetings they know of which last at least three days and in which there are at least 300 participants, a minimum of 40% of whom are foreign from at least five nationalities. This includes national organizations that hold meetings of international stature. Excluded are purely national meetings, committee or expert group meetings, and corporate and incentive meetings (even if other criteria are met).

2 Only cities hosting more than 0.96% of the total international meetings worldwide are shown in this table.

3 The ‘International organizations’ listing excludes national organizations that hold meetings in their home countries with high international participation. This list, therefore, reflects city success in attracting organizations that seek out international venues for their meetings.

Source: de Coninck 1998b.

Table 2. International Meetings by Region, 1996.¹

Continent	% of Total	% 1995-6 Change In Number of Meetings ²
Europe	57.85	+ 0.78
North America	14.91	+ 2.70
Asia	14.32	+ 6.61
Africa	4.91	+ 0.46
South America	4.71	- 7.93
Australasia	3.30	+27.39
Total	9,000 meetings	

Notes:

1 See Table 1 for definition of 'international meeting'.

2 1995-1996 percentage change is based on growth or decline in the number of international meetings for each region, not on the region's global percentage share.

Source: de Coninck 1998b.

Table 3. International Meetings in Asia, by Country 1994 and 1996, and City 1996 ¹

Country	% of 1996	% of 1994	Leading City	% of 1996
Japan	18.13	19.30	Tokyo	5.02
Israel	10.75	8.04	Jerusalem	6.59
Singapore	10.67	9.99	Singapore	10.67
Hong Kong	9.02	7.70	Hong Kong	9.02
China	7.92	6.18	Beijing	5.57
India	6.82	8.29	New Delhi	2.82
S. Korea	6.59	5.50	Seoul	5.25
Thailand	6.59	6.60	Bangkok	4.23
Malaysia	5.72	4.65	Kuala Lumpur	4.39
Philippines	4.08	3.55	Manila	3.29
Total Meetings	1280	1190		1280

Notes:

1 See Table 1 for definition of 'international meeting'.

Sources: de Coninck 1998a, 1998b.

Table 4. M.I.C.E. Events, Participants and Expenditure in Singapore, 1987, 1992, 1996.

	1987	1992	1996	Mean Annual % Change
Conventions				
Events	421	582	996	10.0
Foreign Participants ¹	31,668	34,176	52,004	5.7
Total Expenditures	\$40.9m	\$72.5m	\$86.7m	
Mean Participants	75.2	58.7	52.2	
Mean Days	6.3	5.6	4.3	
Participant Expenditures ²	\$1292	\$2121	\$1668	
1996 Conventions consisted of: <u>Corporate Meetings</u> and <u>Association Meetings</u>				
Events		673	323	
Foreign Participants		12,889	39,115	
Mean Participants		19.2	121.1	
Exhibitions				
Events	49 ³	76	106	9.0
Foreign Participants	166,311	249,170	254,996	4.9
Total Expenditures	\$259.9m	\$776.2m	\$579.9m	
Mean Participants	3394.1	3278.6	2405.6	
Mean Days	7.3	7.4	5.0	
Participant Expenditures	\$1563	\$3115	\$2274	
Incentive Groups				
Events	1090	2548	3693	14.5
Foreign Participants	55,546	99,025	119,051	8.8
Total Expenditures	\$65.5m	\$113.9m	\$166.2m	
Mean Participants	51.0	38.9	32.2	
Mean Days	4.8	4.6	2.7	
Participant Expenditures	\$1180	\$1150	\$1396	

Notes:

- 1 Participants include foreign delegates and their accompanying persons, foreign exhibitors, and foreign visitors.
- 2 Expenditures are in Singapore dollars, which were equivalent to US\$ 0.63 in April 1998.
- 3 1987 exhibition data is estimated by STPB from 1991 percentages because the original 1987 data did not distinguish between local and foreign exhibitors.

Source: STPB 1997b.

Table 5. Foreign Participants at MICE Events in Singapore, 1996.

	Conventions Association and Exhibitions	Corporate Meetings	Incentive Meetings	Participants
Malaysia	18.6%	13.7	10.0	0.2
Indonesia	12.9	9.5	6.5	2.7
Thailand	9.0	6.7	7.1	3.6
Australia	7.3	7.7	6.3	0.8
Japan	6.3	7.6	9.8	64.7
USA	5.4	6.1	11.4	0.9
Philippines	4.3	4.6	4.9	0.3
Korea	4.0	3.6	3.0	5.9
Hong Kong	3.9	5.7	8.2	2.3
India	3.8	2.7	5.8	1.5
China	3.0	3.5	6.0	6.6
UK	3.0	3.6	4.4	0.3
Taiwan	2.8	8.1	4.5	2.9
Vietnam	1.2	0.8	1.4	0.3
France	1.1	0.9	0.5	3.0
Germany	1.0	1.3	0.8	1.3
Asia	74.1	70.5	71.0	91.2
-- ASEAN ¹	46.9	36.1	30.5	7.1
Americas	6.9	8.0	12.2	1.1
Europe	9.8	11.5	8.9	6.5
Oceania	8.3	8.7	7.7	0.9
Africa	0.9	1.2	0.2	0.2
Total	78,958 ²	21,666 ³	4,819 ³	118,777 ⁴

1 ASEAN is the Association of Southeast Asian Nations. The percentages for ASEAN are included in the Asia total.

2 The total in the first column does not reflect that in Table 4 because it is based on passenger disembarkation cards supplied by the Singapore Immigration Department.

3 Association and corporate meeting information in this table are provided by exhibition organizers and hotels.

4 Incentive travel participants information in this table provided by hotels and handling agents.

Source: STPB 1997b.

Table 6. Travel Characteristics of Singapore MICE Visitors.

Number of Business Trips a Year, N=180

One	9.4 %
Two to Five	40.0
Six to Ten	22.2
More than Ten	28.3

Regions of World Frequently Traveled in for Business Activities, N=179*

	Multiple Regions	One Region Only**
- Asia	59.8 %	45.8 %
- Europe	16.2	10.1
- North America (inc. Mexico)	15.1	8.9
- Oceania	2.8	1.7
- Africa	0.6	0
- South and Central America	0	0
- several Regions/Whole World	40.8	not applicable

*percentages total to more than 100% due to multiple responses

** 'one region only' refers to those respondents who only listed only one region in which the frequently traveled for business purposes.

Plans for Travel After Singapore, N=177

Go Home	72.9 %
Business Travel to Another Country	27.1
Holiday Travel to Another Country	1.7

Source: Chang, et al. 1998.

Table 7. Activities of MICE Visitors to Singapore.

Location Where Business/Meeting was Conducted, N=174	
Office or Firm Headquarters	36.8 %
Convention Center	36.2
Hotel	13.8
Factory or Industrial Center	4.6
University or Research Center	3.4
Home or Rental Office	1.7
Other	3.4

Activities Participated in while in Singapore, N=180	
Shopping	56.7 %
Sightseeing/Tourist Attractions	35.0
Leisure Activities (movies, exercise)	11.7
Visiting Friends or Relatives	11.1
Night Entertainment (nightclubs, discos)	9.4

Attraction Types Visited, N=180	
Garden Attractions	
- e.g., Botanic Garden, Bird Park	18.9 %
Food and Entertainment Centers	
- incl. hawker food centers	18.3
Theme Parks	
- e.g., Underwater World, Night Zoo	15.6
Historic Sites & Districts	
- incl. museums and temples	14.4

Reasons for Not Visiting Tourist Attractions, N=180	
Not enough time	31.7 %
Not a main concern	18.3
They do not interest me	7.2
Visited them on previous trip	8.3
Other	1.1

Source: Chang, et al. 1998.

Table 8. MICE Visitor Ratings of Singapore.

Business Facilities in Singapore	Mean Rating	Rating
Changi International Airport	8.98	180
Airport Immigration/Customs Clearance	8.79	179
Communication System (phone, fax, etc.)	8.19	155
Convention Facilities	8.14	117
Airport to Town Transportation	8.01	162
Transport System in Town	7.96	164
Efficiency of Business/Meeting Staff	7.94	160
Respondent's Hotel	7.85	151

Scale: 1-2 very poor, 2-3 poor, 5-6 average, 7-8 good, 9-10 excellent

Singapore's Strengths as a Business Center, N = 180

- Politically Stable and Safe City	60.6
- Excellent Airport Facilities	57.2
- Well Organized and Non-Corrupt Work Environment	54.4
- Good Communication System	47.8
- Minimal Language Problems	46.7
- Centrally Located; Easy Access to Other Countries	46.1
- Efficient Public Transport System	45.6
- High Quality Conventions Centers and Hotels	43.3
- Courteous and Reliable People	39.4
- Attractive Shopping, food & entertainment	27.2
- Attractive Scenery and Sites	20.6

Singapore's Weaknesses

- Expensive; High Cost in doing Business	57.2
- Too Restrictive/Too Many Rules and Regulations	27.8

Source: Chang, et al. 1998.