

Interview: Ong Wee Min Executive Director of Sales, Marina Bay Sands, Singapore

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Ong Wee Min, Executive Director of Sales, highlights why Marina Bay Sands is the venue of choice for many international and regional healthcare conferences, the importance of being a true partner in accommodating very diverse client needs, and how Marina Bay Sands has been able to significantly contribute to Singapore's

s economic development strategy.

How would you assess Singapore's positioning within the competitive global Meetings, Incentives, Conferences and Events (MICE) industry?

Singapore is a leading Asian city for all MICE events and we have been the number one meeting destination for many years, for numerous reasons. Singapore benefits from its strategic geographical location as well as being a hub for trade, outstanding hotels and world-class infrastructure right in the heart of town.

Today, people do not choose a MICE destination simply because it is a nice destination to visit, with wonderful hotels and fantastic convention centers – these are indeed part of the equation, but many other factors come into play as well. Given the needs of the modern traveler, accessibility is key and thus Singapore as a whole is well positioned and is being served by Changi Airport, which is voted as the best airport in the world in 2016. Moreover, event organizers want their attendees to be –wowed– and they want to co-create memorable experiences together with their stakeholders. Singapore and Marina Bay Sands are very good at doing exactly that; creating and co-creating memorable experiences for our clients, their stakeholders and their immediate community.

What is the role and importance of Marina Bay Sands in the development of Singapore?

Contextualizing this question, Singapore has been a MICE leader for many years. However, when Marina Bay Sands opened its doors in 2010, it changed the landscape entirely. We became the

poster child of Singapore and today the integrated resort is recognized by audiences around the world. From day one, Marina Bay Sands has put Singapore on the map and in the minds of event owners looking for a great destination offering innovative venues.

[Featured_in]

For example, since Marina Bay Sands opened in 2010, we hosted two editions of Sibos, the world's premier financial services event, in 2013 and 2015. The multi-dimensional offerings at Marina Bay Sands have definitely played an integral role in making Singapore a more attractive destination for events of this caliber.

From another perspective, Marina Bay Sands's diverse offerings can significantly add to the success of almost any event. Using an example from the healthcare industry, when we hosted Medical Fair Asia in 2016, the show floor grew by 30 percent compared to the previous edition in 2014, along with similar increases in other key performance indicators such as interest and stakeholder satisfaction. We like to say that this is a "win-win" situation for everyone, and given the success this year we are delighted to welcome Medical Fair Asia back to Marina Bay Sands for its 2018 edition as a multi-year show.

Singapore has a clear economic development strategy with objectives for strategic industries – how has Marina Bay Sands been able to support the growth of the wider Singapore economy?

We are very much a part of the Singapore success story. Since we opened in 2010 we have hosted events in every single strategic sector for Singapore, in both the traditional sectors like oil & gas, finance and architecture as well as newer, innovative cross-sector industries, such as FinTech, a mix of finance and technology, and of course the life sciences. We are seeing a trend where events of such nature, where two or three industries crossover, are becoming more prevalent in the future. The convergence between industries tends to drive innovation, and it is of great benefit to Singapore and Marina Bay Sands to be involved in such globally innovative discussions.

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What are some of the priority growth areas for MBS and where does healthcare fit into the picture?

Healthcare is an important sector for Marina Bay Sands, simply because more than 60 percent of the world's rotation meetings are related to the medical and pharmaceutical industry.

Looking specifically at the healthcare industry, it is clear that it is imperative for stakeholders to interact, network, and exchange knowledge and information on a regular basis. This need to interact is much broader and deeper than in many other industries, as it goes beyond networking between potential buyers and sellers, but also opens up possibilities for a wide range of basic scientific developments. We have also seen a shift towards greater co-creation of content between peers, such as more panel-type discussions and other modes of interaction instead of having a speaker deliver a lecture to a room of attendees. That is why we have created connection spots throughout our Sands Expo & Convention Center conducive for business discussions and transactions, networking as well as knowledge exchange in order to co-create content for the event to meet its overall community objectives.

From the perspective of an event planner, particularly in the healthcare industry, how will their event become better by hosting it at MBS versus other venues?

All hotels and convention centers in general are platforms that enable stakeholders, clients and partners to achieve their objectives. We are not just a mere supplier of tables, rooms or projectors; we are the platform that enables big companies like GSK or J&J to project their image, their brand and to tell their stories to their stakeholders in a setting and context that is both engaging and memorable.

To do this, we look at each individual stakeholder and try to understand their needs and define what will make an event successful for them, because ultimately, our partners' success is also our success. We then look at how we can set up a customized space and event plan for them, and then look at how we can help them and their stakeholders to make their event more innovative, more efficient, and ultimately create a unique and extremely memorable experience for all involved. We do not believe in a one-size-fits-all approach. Although we hosted over 3,000 events last year, each and every single event was unique to the community, the industry, to the planner and each delegate.

The pharma industry is particularly concerned about sustainability (given the chemical aspect of the business). Can you elaborate on MBS's services in terms of green meetings & sustainability practices?

Sustainability is deeply ingrained in our corporate culture and the way business is conducted at Marina Bay Sands. As an ISO-certified MICE facility, every single meeting at Marina Bay Sands follows a set of sustainability guidelines and they apply to our entire supply chain. For example, our default Green Meeting setting is to provide clients and delegates with reusable cups and water carafes to avoid creating plastic bottle waste. We also offer our clients the option of the Harvest Menu, which offers sustainably sourced food. Since Singapore is very small, we cannot provide a strict "Farm to Fork" catering experience. However, we are able to design menus that source all ingredients from within a specific radius of Singapore – often 500 km – such that the carbon footprint is minimized. Finally, the integrated resort is also equipped with five food digesters which are able to breakdown food waste into waste water and minimize our contribution of solid food waste to landfills.

Beyond our regular Green Meetings programme, Marina Bay Sands offers flexibility and customisation in its green meeting services. We are poised to deliver best-in-class sustainability initiatives, especially for clients looking to push the envelope of their green meetings. All these are done at no additional cost to organizers.

How will you define success for Marina Bay Sands and what are the next steps, how can you do what you do even better?

We continuously seek to innovate, to attract the most innovative events and offer the most innovative conference and meeting experiences to our partners. When Marina Bay Sands first opened, the infrastructure was amazing, and it still is amazing – you can find Marina Bay Sands hotel on most postcards of Singapore. Today, we look at how we can take this spirit of innovation embodied by Marina Bay Sands and translate it into our clients' events, as events are a core function for the integrated resort. We will continue to update our processes and refresh our products and services to best meet our clients' stringent requirements, and to provide them with new offerings that meet the needs they don't yet know they have.

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