

Singapore sees boost in MICE arrivals

By Lauren Arena | Feb 15, 2017

Business events on the rise despite Zika outbreak and political instability in long-haul markets

Singapore's business events sector experienced impressive growth in 2016, according to preliminary estimates released this week by the Singapore Tourism Board (STB).

Business events in Singapore saw a 15 per cent year-on-year growth in 2016 with STB supporting more than 410 business events, including the [Singapore Fintech Festival](#), [ProWine Asia](#) and the Unicity 2016 Global Convention.

These events attracted close to 343,000 visitor arrivals, marking a 20 per cent increase on 2015, and generated approximately S\$611 million (US\$430 million) in tourism receipts, a 28 per cent increase year-on-year.

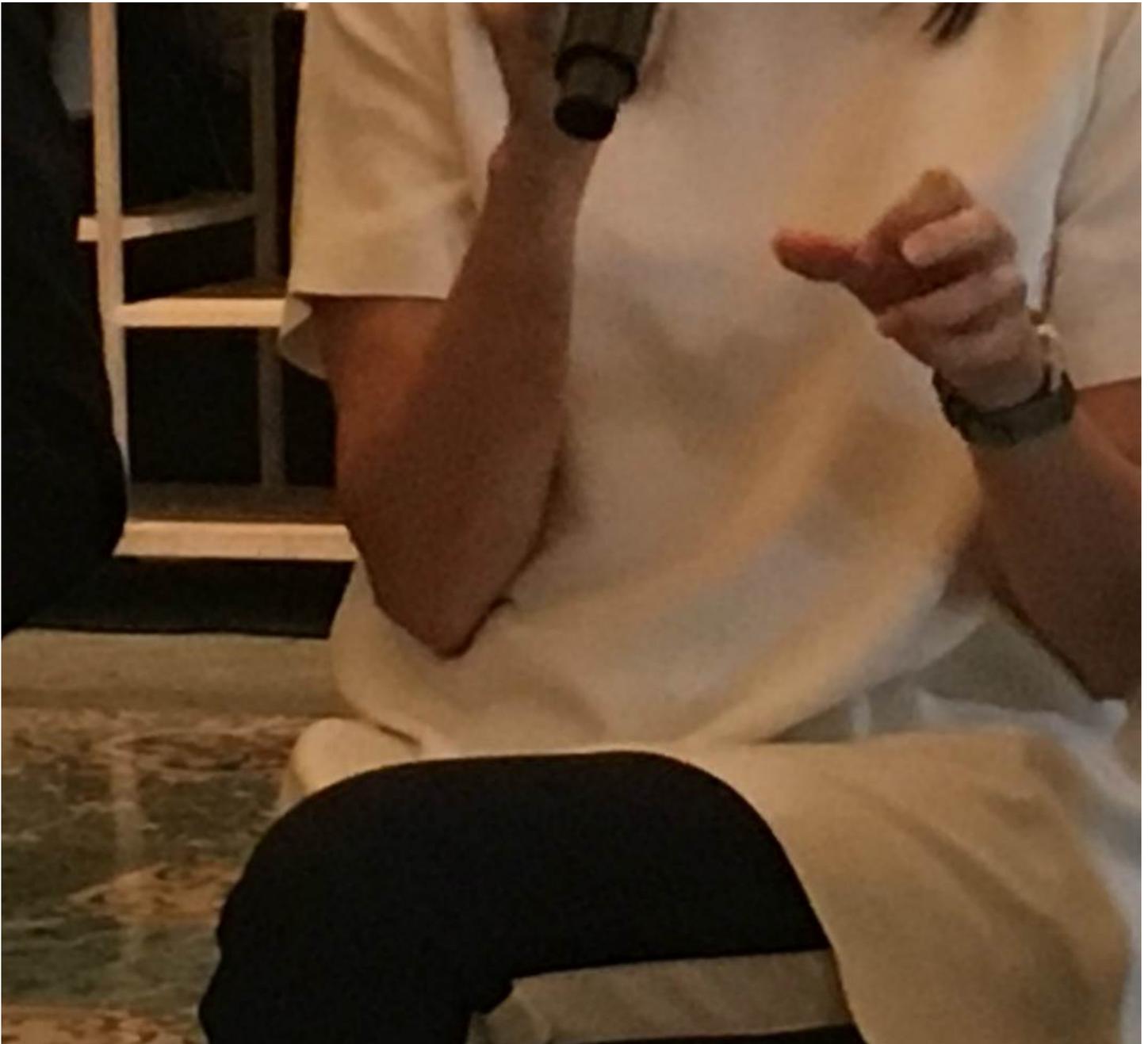
"We've seen good gains on the business visitor front in 2016, especially business events," says STB deputy chief executive, Melissa Ow. "The increase in both the number of events and the revenue generated speaks well to the fact that our MICE segment remains competitive and is holding strong.

"Looking forward in the pipeline we're seeing strong bookings in terms of meetings, conventions and trade shows that are making their debut in Singapore and also events that are recommitting to Singapore."

MICE arrival numbers remained strong even in the face of a Zika outbreak and terror threats from across the region.

"The brand 'Singapore' is a trusted brand and one that stands for stability, safety and efficiency," says Ow. "In a world that is increasingly uncertain these attributes help us achieve cut through and are no longer taken for granted."





STB's Melissa Ow and Lionel Yeo

Despite an upward trajectory, Ow says forecasts for 2017 remain cautious.

“All in all we're seeing good progress on the business visitor front, but we are more tempered in our market expectations... I don't think we can underestimate the political winds that are blowing in many of our markets with elections around the corner in France and Germany and the very interesting political situation in the U.S.”

Local markets in focus for 2017

With political and economic uncertainty set to plague long-haul markets, Ow says STB's business events strategy will need to sharpen its focus on local players within the Asia-Pacific region.

“India and China will continue to be important and are ripe for the picking, especially for incentives.”

Following the success of its INSPIRE programme for incentive planners in India and China, STB is also looking to extend the programme to planners in South East Asia.

“We've seen a lot of interest from planners and corporates in the region so we're designing a menu of experiences with a lifestyle focus and we hope to launch sometime in 2017,” she says.

Record tourism numbers

Along with business events growth, Singapore's tourism sector hit record highs in 2016. Visitor arrivals grew by 7.7 per cent to 16.4 million, while tourism receipts rose by 13.9 per cent to S\$24.8 billion – largely due to visitors spending more on food and beverage, shopping and accommodation.

STB chief executive Lionel Yeo, says: “We are heartened by the strong tourism sector performance in 2016. Despite challenges such as weaker economic performance in some of Singapore's top source markets and a Zika virus outbreak, Singapore has managed to attract more quality visitors to contribute to economic growth.”

Yeo attributed growth to a refined tourism marketing strategy that targeted second tier cities in China, India and Indonesia; the deployment of a tourism development fund to support industry innovators; and “relatively benign external factors” compared to previous years where aviation disasters like the disappearance of Malaysia Airlines Flight 370 and the 2015 Bangkok bombing hit closer to home.

Tourism growth estimates for 2017 remain positive, albeit conservative, with international visitor arrivals expected to increase by two per cent to 16.7 million and tourism receipts to increase by four per cent to S\$25.8 billion.

Main image: Singapore Tourism Board executive team