

A lift to island life

Meet Taiwan's fun-filled 'High-Five' campaign has a serious message – with destinations beyond Taipei being thrust into the spotlight.
Martin Donovan reports



JIN PHOTOGRAPHY



From the southern reaches around Kaohsiung, to the capital Taipei in the north, then across to the rugged interior where Sun Moon Lake awaits, and to the eastern plains rolling down to the Pacific Ocean. More destinations in Taiwan are making their voices heard to attract inbound meetings, incentives and business events.

This has been crystallised in the latest campaign by Meet Taiwan, the agency under the island's overseas trade bureau, to promote Taiwan as a meetings and incentives destination.

Taiwan's High-Five campaign is raising the island's profile among planners and buyers at key international trade shows by emphasising the warmth, fun, scenery and cuisine combined with modern venues that visiting groups can expect.

High-Five Taiwan is an effort by the island's MICE promotion teams as it faces increasingly tough competition from other destinations in Asia Pacific.

The past year has seen Meet Taiwan coming up with fresh ideas. These include working with the Taiwan International Balloon Festival to create corporate travel activities based around the annual event in Taitung County, in the southeast. Meeting organisers were invited to the festival to learn how post-conference or incentive tours can be based around the festival's stunning east coast scenery such as Taroko Gorge and the East Rift Valley.

Taiwan's mix of city and country shows the immense potential underlining the High-Five campaign and what the island has to offer beyond

Taipei, the main location for business international events. Here is a further selection that planners can factor into itineraries.

Unique cultural influences

Multinationals with offices in Taiwan often send their executives to Taipei, so the high turnover in business travel and meetings means the island is familiar to many corporates.

Jason Yeh, chief executive of GIS Group, a leading organiser of conferences, incentives and business events in Taiwan, believes the island's chequered history is working in its favour in attracting Chinese and international groups.

"Taiwan is attractive for people with Chinese heritage: from Hong Kong, Macau, Singapore and other Chinese-speaking regions around Southeast Asia. The reason is that we kept the best of Chinese culture in our daily living," says Yeh.

"Taiwan never experienced the chaos of the Cultural Revolution [in mainland China, 1966-1976] so the best parts of Chinese culture have been maintained, alongside indigenous and Japanese influences. What is also fascinating for many people is that we're the only Chinese community to have witnessed democracy."

A new, five-star Taipei

Improved relations between Taiwan and mainland China resulted in a rapid rise in visitors from across the strait, which stimulated the island's economy.

One of the benefits of this was more international-standard hotels in Taipei. "All of this really helped lift the service game in Taiwan, which had been a traditional weakness here," says Cam McLean, owner and director of In Motion Asia, a Taipei-headquartered teambuilding and event management agency.

"So now Taipei and Taiwan offer genuine five-star hotels, fantastic restaurants with everything from high-end cuisines to night-market street food, culture and arts, and – similar to Hong Kong – the geographical positioning of the city with great rural scenery being in close proximity," says McLean.

After meetings in Taipei

In Motion Asia has introduced several new teambuilding programmes in the capital, such as a Night Market Challenge, in the Ximending area.

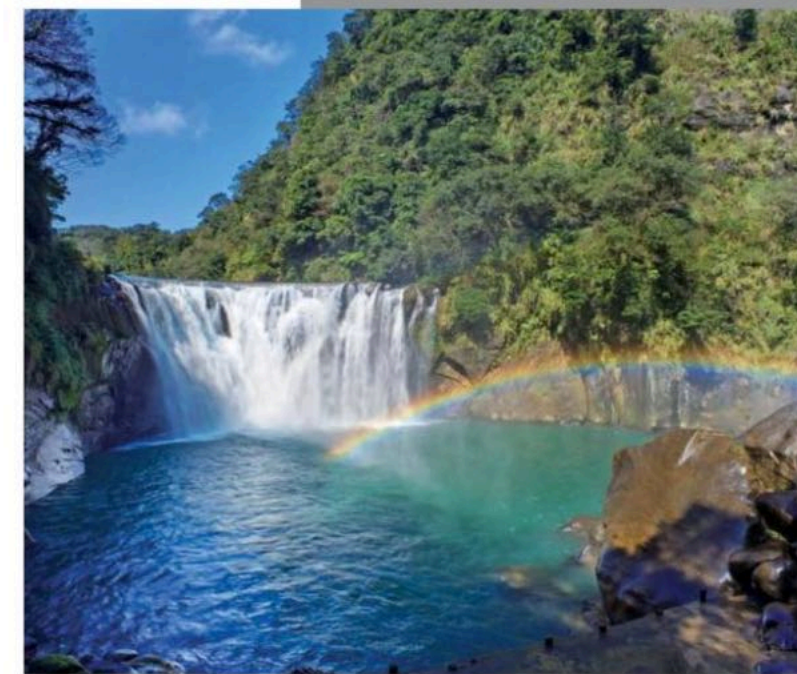
A lantern-flying workshop plus teambuilding and dinner for 130 participants from Citi Group during its annual retreat earlier this year has also joined the itinerary offerings.

Taipei City's efforts to renovate and offer Huashan 1914 Creative Park for corporate events proved more than validated when IMA organised teambuilding and a historically themed banquet for 120 lawyers from Jardines.

Excursions from Taipei

Shifen Waterfall – This misty and thundering sight in New Taipei City's Pingxi district is a popular visitor

NIGHT 'N' DAY
From left: Sun Moon Lake, one of Taipei's night markets and Shifen Waterfall



Q&A WITH CAM MCLEAN, IN MOTION ASIA

What are the standout locations in Taipei and other parts of Taiwan for you?

The central Taiwan region of Nantou is awesome with Sun Moon Lake, Cingjing, the Wuling Peak and many other natural attractions. I also really enjoy the south and Kenting area, which is a nice change from the cities.

The East Coast is still like visiting another country compared to Taipei. From a client perspective Taipei for sure is the leading destination in Taiwan and 85 per cent of our programmes and services are delivered in Taipei. Sun Moon Lake would be the next destination if a client wants a location outside Taipei and the short travel logistics works for them. The east coast, Taroko Gorge is great but accessibility and service issues for higher-end clients can make it less appealing.

Any recommendations if a group wants to relax after a day of meetings and team activities?

Taipei has an abundance of restaurants covering every food type, but if clients have been sitting in a hotel for a day or two it's always good to balance their programme with more local, real experiences. So, enjoy dinner near a night market or traditional low-table, local restaurant or head into the nearby mountains and take in the views. Getting into the mountains is great and Yangmingshan National Park with the lovely scenic hiking, hot springs overlooks Taipei. For further variety there's the northeast with Shifen, Jiufen and Fulong that have nice local venues. Better still, organise a teambuilding excursion to one of these beautiful locations.

spot, and corporate groups can experience the area too. In Motion Asia runs an "Amazing Race-style" event around Shifen that can be combined with a DIY lantern workshop.

GIS Group is well versed in showing the lesser known side of Taiwan as post-conference excursions. Rural locations near the centre of Taipei that have held groups in awe include:

Yangmingshan National Park – Located between Taipei's old and new cities, is a favourite mountain trekking site with a choice of trails to suit different levels of hikers, ranging from one-hour easy, short trails, to the more challenging eight-hour routes. GIS Group recently organised itineraries for meeting and incentive buyers from the Middle East, Thailand and mainland China, taking advantage of locations near Taipei City.

Beitou Thermal Valley – Around the foothills of Yangmingshan is a volcanic crater filled with steaming natural sulphur springwater. Along with Akita in Japan, Beitou is one of only two places in the world with the rare green sulphur that gives the springs a translucent, green colour.

Hot springs – Venues around Beitou providing hot-spring foot baths also make a soothing stopover point for delegates who have spent a day on the expo floor, networking or teambuilding in the hills.

Kaohsiung revival

Once a centre for ship repairing, Kaohsiung remains a vital port for Taiwan's trade and sees its fair share of industrial shipping. In recent years, however, Kaohsiung's waterfront has been rejuvenated to transform old warehouses into arts centres, restaurants and visitor centres, while a convention

and exhibition centre with a sleek, wave-like design and looking out onto a marina occupies pride of place.

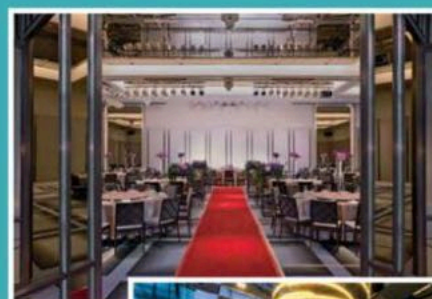
The new marina also reflects a newfound strength for the local economy: yacht building and renovation. For decades, the ownership of small, seafaring vessels was heavily restricted to trawlers and cargo handlers because of

tensions with mainland China. Thanks to agreements between the two governments, the tourism and leisure boat industries are benefiting from liberalised travel between both sides of the Taiwan Straits.

Kaohsiung's ambitions to attract more international meetings and events have been bolstered by the setting up of a MICE association by local businesses and the Meetings and Events Promotion Office by the city government. Kaohsiung is also among eight finalists bidding to host the ICCA Congress 2020, a gathering of between 800 and 1,000 international conference organisers and suppliers. ●



NEW SOUTH
A park along Kaohsiung's revitalised waterfront



Taipei Marriott



Aloft



Courtyard by Marriott

HOTEL UPDATES

TAIPEI MARRIOTT

Marriott International made its first step into Taiwan in September 2015 with Taipei Marriott. Located in central Dazhi district, just 10 minutes from Taipei Songshan Airport, the complex comprises a 320-room property, a shopping and dining arcade and a convention centre.

Billed as the largest convention centre in Taipei, the venue offers over 3,000 sqm of function space in the form of 13 meeting rooms, and boasts Taiwan's largest ballroom at 1,260 sqm.

ALOFT TAIPEI ZHONGSHAN

Debuting the Aloft brand in Taiwan, Aloft Taipei Zhongshan opened in the capital's northeast downtown area at the end of 2015. The innovatively designed hotel is intimate – with 88 keys and a single 11 sqm meeting room, but enjoys quick access to popular attractions, including Ching Gwang Market, Hsing Tian Temple, and Miramar Entertainment Park. Taipei Metro station is within walking distance, and Taipei Songshan Airport is 4km away.

COURTYARD BY MARRIOTT TAIPEI

The first international brand hotel to open near Nangang Exhibition Center, Courtyard by Marriott Taipei is owned and operated by Leofoo Tourism Group. The 465-room property is located above Nangang MRT, the High-Speed Rail station, and is a 15-minute drive from Taipei Songshan Airport.

Of the Courtyard's five meeting rooms, the largest accommodates 280 people.