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## Hybrid to stay but event attendees want authenticity

Whether in person or hybrid, suppliers are being encouraged to deliver authentic experiences for delegates.

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by Brad Foster  
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Hybrid meetings are set to stay but suppliers are encouraged to deliver authentic experiences for in-person delegates. Photo Credit: Adobe Stock/Me studio

A panel of MICE experts predict that events in 2023 will be a blend of in-person and hybrid, with attendees demanding authenticity, sustainability, and wellness.

The Pacific Asia Travel Association's (PATA) recent webinar, "The Future of Events", generated lively discussion among tech providers, venue operators, suppliers, and bureaus, with a clear message: be authentic.

Presenters included Cvent regional sales director, Harsha Hariharan; Dusit Hotels & Resorts vice president of commercial, Nicholas Maratos; TCEB senior vice president of MICE capability and innovation, Supawan Teerarat; and president and CEO of Luxurique and president of the Japan MICE Association, Naomi Mano.

Cvent's Harihan stated that 48% of planners plan to host virtual meetings in Asia in 2023, with 44% offering hybrid events and 54% planning in-person events.

Despite the challenges of getting group travel to pre-Covid levels, 74% of travel managers expect corporate travel volumes at their organisation to rise in 2023 compared to 2019, with 81% believing business budgets will increase and 45% with international travel on the agenda for 2023.

The panel was in agreement that [high travel costs are hampering volume](#) and will continue to do so for the foreseeable future. But recognising this, operators are providing greater authenticity for in-person events that virtual meetings cannot match.

Luxurique's Mano said that while pre-Covid Japan used to be a lot more cookie cutter, in-person events now must be unique to justify bringing everyone together, and clients want to incorporate empowerment, sustainability, and wellness.

[The merger of social and business programmes](#), also known as the "bleisure" space, creates experiences that contribute to a conference's success, Mano further added.

"What you can do outside the meeting program seems to have a greater weight – the teambuilding, the activities, the experiences," she said. "What makes an experience for a conference or meeting or incentive is really the non-meeting components."

This was echoed by TCEB's Supawan who shared that Thailand is focusing on offering authentic experiences for in-person groups, citing one of the bureau's programmes, Creative Communities, that help establish deeper connections between delegates and the local communities.

Dusit's Maratos expects [meetings to remain hybrid for a while](#), with some in-person attendees and others dialling in remotely. Finance departments have recognised the cost savings of virtual events, but every meeting will look different as companies approach their events in various ways.

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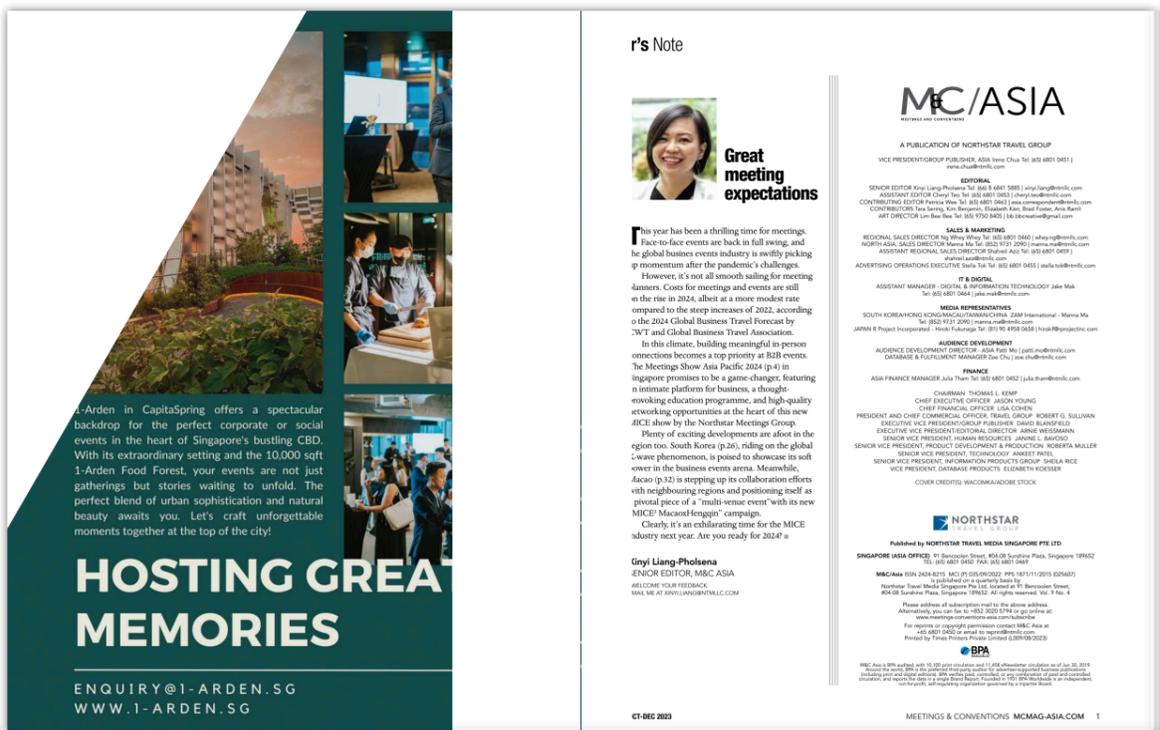
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