

The City of Kuala Lumpur has climbed up five notches, from 27th place in 2008 to its current 22nd position in the International Congress and Convention Association (ICCA) city rankings in 2009, making the city among the top five meetings destination in Asia Pacific, which includes Singapore, Beijing, Seoul and Bangkok.

Statistics released by ICCA shows that the number of meetings held in Kuala Lumpur in 2009 has increased to 72, compared to 61 in the previous year. These meetings attract a minimum of 50 attendees and rotate between a minimum of three countries, and are held on a regular basis.

As a country, Malaysia has also moved up one spot in the ICCA country rankings, from 32nd in 2008 (with 87 meetings) to 31st position in 2009, with a total of 96 meetings. Within that same year, the country recorded over 1.18 million international business event visitors. This is against a backdrop of a total of 23.5 million tourist arrivals in 2009, compared to 22 million in the previous year, making Malaysia one of the seven countries in the world which continued to see an increase in tourist arrivals in 2009, despite tough economic challenges worldwide.

On average, the estimated average spending for each international business event visitor is RM 7,418, which is three times more than the average leisure visitor spend. In 2009, the business events sector had contributed an estimated RM 9.9 billion in economic impact to the local economy.

This achievement in 2009, despite the global economic downturn, is, as pointed out by Zulkefli Sharif, CEO of the Malaysia Convention & Exhibition Bureau (MyCEB), a testimony to the growing popularity of the country as an international business events destination.

"It is also recognition of Malaysia's unique selling points by associations and meeting planners globally, which includes our strong track record for hosting successful meetings, excellent value for money proposition, world-class infrastructure and our warm Malaysian hospitality," he said.

As RAM Holdings Bhd chief economist, Dr Yeah Kim Leng pointed out in an interview with an English daily recently, the Meetings, Incentives, Conventions and Exhibitions (commonly known in Asia Pacific region as the MICE) sector is poised to be an important growth industry. With accumulated experience in hosting major events, more business events organisers are looking to Malaysia as the value-for-money proposition for their international events.

Some of the association meetings hosted in 2009 included the 6th World Chambers Congress (1,056 delegates), 14th International Conference on Thinking (1,500 delegates) and the 7th Congress of Asian Pacific Society of Hypertension (1,500 delegates), and in 2010, the Malaysia International Shoe Festival (45,000 delegates), which raked a total of RM5million in sales over three days.

There were also other business related events which were held in 2010. One of the more popular events is the recent Asian Attractions Expo organised by US-based International Association of Amusement Parks and Attractions (IAAPA) with the Malaysia Association of Amusement Theme Park & Family Attractions (MAATFA) and the Australian Amusement Leisure and Recreation Association (AALARA). The event broke all buyer and visitor records.

Table 1: City and Country Ranking by the International Congress and Convention Association (ICCA)

	2008	2009	Change
MALAYSIA			
World Ranking	32	31	+1
Asia Pacific Ranking	8	7	+1
No. International Conventions	87	96	+9
KUALA LUMPUR			
World Ranking	27	22	+5
Asia Pacific Ranking	8	5	+3

Doing Things Right by Doing the Right Things

To develop the business event industry in Malaysia, there is always a two-pronged strategy, which industry players and policymakers cannot afford to lose focus.

The first is strategic marketing of existing business event venues by individual operators and the continuous effort by MyCEB to position Malaysia as an attractive business event destination. The second is the availability of more convention spaces, especially those that can host larger business events.

Marketing, or the lack of it, is a major reason behind the success or the failure of the country to become a business events destination. As pointed out by Association of Valuers, Property Managers, Estate Agents and Property Consultants in the Private Sector, Malaysia (PEPS) president, James Wong, there is a need to further strengthen the marketing of existing convention centres which he feels are largely under-utilised. "The main challenge that we face is the lack of marketing," he surmised. "We do have good convention centres



but we are not doing enough to promote Malaysia as a MICE destination, and we are losing out to countries like Singapore, Thailand and Hong Kong.”

Another analyst, Dr Yeah Kim Leng concurs that having more space is not necessarily the way to go. “If the new Matrade Centre can create sustainable demand for niche (large-scale) exhibitions such as aerospace conventions, only then would it be viable,” he told a local English daily. “Places like the PICC is under-utilised. We need to beef up promotions and encourage regional and international conventions if we want to make Malaysia a business events hub for Asean and even Asia.”

While some business events organisers like the Malaysian Automotive Association may be satisfied with the multiple levels of convention space available at PWTC, which its President, Datuk Aishah Ahmad said was sufficient for the Kuala Lumpur International Motor Show held previously, others like Malaysian International Furniture Fair Sdn Bhd (MIFF) senior manager, Karen Goi claimed that Malaysia still lacks exhibition space. The company which organised the MIFF, she said, has been forced to hold its annual MIFF in multiple locations in recent years. “There’s just not enough space,” she said. “That’s why we are organising the MIFF 2010 in three locations simultaneously, namely Kuala Lumpur Convention Centre, Putra World Trade Centre and at the Matrade Centre.”

An analyst, speaking on condition of anonymity, said some of the iconic heritage buildings like the National Stadium and the Merdeka Stadium could well be refurbished with modern facilities to become important business events centres, instead of spending more money on building new convention and exhibition centres. “It is also an important effort to preserve a part of the country’s history,” he said. “These buildings bring back the nostalgia of the early years of nationhood for domestic visitors, while for the international delegates, it is a noble way of promoting the country’s heritage, especially when not many of these older buildings are left.” The close proximity of both stadiums should make an ideal venue with perhaps sufficient floor space for major international exhibitions.

For the business events industry to expand, there must therefore be strong marketing of the existing facilities and other supporting infrastructure; otherwise, the efforts to build and develop these buildings would eventually turn them into white elephants. In some ways, the creation of more convention spaces may well lead to a healthy competition, which ultimately helps to generate more sustainable growth within the sector.

Business events venue operators, which in the past faced fewer competitors, may now suddenly have to re-align their marketing efforts to attract more events, conventions and exhibitions.

Their efforts are being complemented by state tourism efforts and nationwide, with the help of MyCEB.

Table 2: New/Upcoming new meeting facilities/hotels in Malaysia by 2014 (Source: MyCEB)

NEW DEVELOPMENT	Hotel Rating	No of Rooms / Facilities	Location	Expected Completion Date
CONVENTION FACILITIES				
MATRADE Centre <i>(Proposed Development)</i>	n/a	93,000 sqm (1 million sq ft)	Kuala Lumpur	2014
HOTELS				
The Regent	5*	236 rooms	KLCC	2011
The Regent Residences	5*	115 units	KLCC	2011
Allson Capital Hotel	4*	198 rooms	Kuala Lumpur	2011
Pullman Kuala Lumpur Bangsar	5*	515 rooms	Kuala Lumpur	2011
Impiana Hotel (Extension)	4*	180 rooms (existing 335 rooms)	KLCC	2011
Grand Hyatt	5*	n/a	KLCC	2013
Fraser Residence (Serviced Apartment)	n/a	n/a	Kuala Lumpur	2012
Traders Hotel Puteri Harbour	4*	286 rooms	Johor	2012
St Regis	6*	200 rooms 3,000 sqm (32,300 sq ft) meeting space	Kuala Lumpur	2014
Total		1,615 rooms / 115 units		
OPENINGS IN 2010				
Banjaran Hot Springs	6*	25 units	Perak	January 2010
G City Club Hotel	5*	180 rooms	Kuala Lumpur	March 2010
Shah Alam Convention Centre	n/a	19,300 sqm (208,000 sq ft)	Selangor	April 2010
Fraser Place (Serviced Apartment)	5*	215 units	KLCC	June 2010
The Philea Resort & Spa	6*	201 units	Malacca	June 2010
Doubletree by Hilton	5*	540 rooms 1,858 sqm (20,000 sq ft) meeting space	Kuala Lumpur	August 2010
Total		720 rooms / 441 units		

**Information is subject to change*

Tourism Efforts at State Level

At State level, a number of initiatives have been introduced to boost the business events sector.

In the North, when the Penang Times Square, a project worth RM1.1 billion, is completed by 2015, Penang will have a worldclass business events centre, which is capable of offering a complete package for meetings, conferences and



exhibitions, apart from shopping and accommodation. The centre has the potential to be further expanded from 7,432 square metre (80,000 square feet) to 13,930 square metre (150,000 square feet).

The recent initiative by AirAsia to introduce direct flights from Penang to Singapore, Chennai, Hong Kong and Macau is also targeted at helping to bring in more business events delegates to the Northern region, including Langkawi. Within the first quarter of 2010, statistics released by the Malaysian Hotel Association showed the occupancy rate of hotels in Penang hit 56%, compared with 53% in the first quarter 2009. It is expected to register a higher occupancy rate of about 70% in the second half of 2010, compared with about 65% in the corresponding period of 2009. With the support from the low cost airline, business events organisers are looking set to use Penang and Langkawi as a platform for more of their events.

In Selangor, tourism, consumer and environment committee chairman, Elizabeth Wong said that Selangor, being one of the key destinations in Malaysia for local and international conferences, has benefited from an estimated expenditure of RM5.65 billion by tourists for the first eight months in 2009 alone. "One of the State's focuses in 2010," she said, "is the niche Meetings, Incentives, Conventions and Exhibition (MICE) activities."

Wong pointed out that, since December 2009, the State Tourism has carried out the Selangor Shines campaign, with the theme, "Selangor has More" in order to attract more tourist arrivals (see Table 3), especially to boost its business events sector, which the State has identified as one of its major sectors.

In recent years, a private medical centre in Selangor became the first in the country to operate its own convention centre (see accompanying story). Once fully operational, the Swan Convention Centre will help position the country as an important medical hub in the region (see accompanying story).

Table 3: Tourist Arrival in Selangor (Source: Tourism Selangor)

Year	Local Tourists	Foreign Tourists	Total
2005	2,372,027	1,586,772	3,958,799
2006	2,926,445	2,000,482	4,926,907
2007	3,060,651	2,254,679	5,315,330
2008	3,075,889	2,601,332	5,677,221
2009	3,248,961	2,398,680	5,647,641
2010 (Jan – May)	1,466,976	1,055,536	2,522,512
TOTAL (2005-May 2010)	16,150,949	11,897,461	28,048,410

Tourism Selangor has been promoting the business events facilities within its state in a number of exhibitions including MATTA Fair Selangor, ITHF Jakarta, ATM Dubai, Fascinating Malaysia in Singapore, Thailand Discover World, MITT Moscow and Indian Sales Mission. In March 2010, Tourism Selangor, led by Wong, was also involved in the Asia Pacific Incentive and Meetings Expo (AIME), in Melbourne, Australia, and in later part of the year, promoted business events in Selangor at various international exhibitions including JATA (Tokyo), Sanarata (Philippines), ITE (Vietnam) and WTM (London).

Because of its close proximity to Singapore, Johor has become an important gateway for the country and accounts for about half the total number of tourist arrivals into the country. Its state tourism chairman, Hoo Seong Chang, who has identified business events as one of the nine pillars of tourism, said the State of Johor is capable of offering value-for-money accommodation and a number of other attractions can potentially draw more business-related events and conferences to Johor. The State, which boasts the largest number of golf courses in Malaysia, can also attract both Singaporeans and other foreigners to play at some of the best golf courses in Johor.

Meanwhile, in Sabah, there are also plans to promote the state as a popular destination for corporate or business event getaways. In 2009 alone, there were 410 such events hosted in the state. Its Deputy Chief Minister, Tan Sri Joseph Pairin Kitingan envisages 'The Land Beneath the Winds' to be developed into an internationally recognised destination of choice in Asia for business and leisure by 2025, under the 18-years Sabah Development Corridor (SDC) Project.

The other Eastern state of Sarawak is also expecting to draw more tourists as it starts to aggressively promote the state as a business events destination, after its newly completed Borneo Convention Centre Kuching was launched in October 2009. One of its record-breaking feats, including serving 4,600 participants in a recently concluded Youth Assembly 2010 in just 35 minutes, or in 13 seconds per participant, is a testimony of its readiness to cater to big events. Sarawak's niche in eco-tourism is another plus point for the business events sector.

The Sarawak Convention Bureau has also been actively marketing and selling Sarawak as a business events destination regionally and internationally. Their support include providing Convention Bidding Support Package to meeting planners, which feature among others professional quality bid documents (official invitations) that are expertly researched, convincingly written and

custom designed for specific target audience. One of the major events held in Sarawak recently was the 15th ASEAN Congress of Plastic Surgery & 8th Asia Pacific Craniofacial Association Conference Aesthetic - ACPS & APCA 2010 Congress.

Back in the Federal Territory, the Kuala Lumpur City Hall (DBKL) is also providing a special incentive package to international business event organisers who bring in 500 or more foreign delegates to the city. The incentives include fee waivers for 100 units of streetlamp buntings and a temporary outdoor billboard, free cultural troupe performance for opening ceremony or gala dinner event, free promotion on Visit KL website and an official invitation letter from the Kuala Lumpur mayor to support the bidding process for the international event. This, along with the addition of new infrastructure in the city of Kuala Lumpur, along with the upgrading and refurbishment exercises of hotels, is set to help to grow the business events sector for Malaysia.

An important role by MyCEB

MyCEB was established in 2009 by Tourism Malaysia to further strengthen Malaysia’s business events brand and position for the international meetings, incentives, conventions and exhibitions (MICE) market. A not-for-profit company, MyCEB serves as a one-stop shop to assist meeting and event planners to bid for and plan regional and international business events and act as a conduit for national product development.

MyCEB is giving its full commitment to local industry partners in bid development, site inspections, joint promotional efforts and continuing education for professionals.

MyCEB provides the following support to meeting and event planners, depending on the economic benefits generated by the event, as well as agreed performance criteria:

- Technical advice on conference venues, accommodation, transportation, relevant local suppliers
- Provision of ideas on social programmes, accompanying persons programmes and pre/post touring options
- Assistance in promoting and publicity the event through listings in Tourism Malaysia’s official website - calendar of conferences and exhibitions in Malaysia;
- Set-up a hyperlink to the conference or exhibition web page;
- Use of MyCEB’s logo in the organiser’s conferences and exhibitions publicity materials
- Dissemination of conference and exhibition information to relevant organisations through Tourism Malaysia’s overseas offices
- Supply of souvenirs or give aways

- Organising of Kuala Lumpur or Putrajaya or Melaka city tour
- Hosting of cultural show or pocket shows at the opening ceremony or social evening

A number of cultural programmes have been developed as value-add packages for conference organisers. For example, the MyCEB offers the “1Malaysia Dance”, which represents dances from major races in Malaysia and a drum symphony to conference organisers as part of its efforts to acquaint delegates with local art and culture. A “Teh Tarik” demonstration, batik and henna painting sessions can also be arranged through MyCEB. These value-added demonstrations offered are subject to meeting planners fulfilling the criteria set.

With the active involvement of MyCEB, the collaboration and commitment between the government and local industry players to market and secure business events for Malaysia has been gaining momentum.

“Since January 2010, MyCEB has initiated a series of seminars to educate local industry professionals to improve their understanding of associations’ requirements and to enhance their industry knowledge and expertise to cater to the growing meetings market,” Zulkefli said. Seminars (which included topics such as “Selling to Associations”, “How to Work a Tradeshow” and “Industry Trends” have also been conducted to various government ministries and officials to enhance their awareness about MyCEB and to seek their support for event bids.”

Feedback from the Industry Players

With more than 15 years in organising business events, Yap Shook Fung, Director of Console Communications Sdn Bhd, said the company has been involved in organising conferences, targeting at medical and other professional associations. Among the meetings that they have organized include the 20th Video Urology World Congress, 11th Asia Pacific Congress of Nephrology, 14th ASEAN Federation of Endocrine Societies (14th AFES), 23rd Pacific Insurance Conference, 28th American Overseas Dietetic Association (AODA) Conference and the recently concluded Asian Breast Aesthetic Symposium. On average, each international delegate spends anything from USD 1,500 to USD2,000 per conference, depending on the conference registration fees, hotel they choose and number of days.

Among her favourite venues include the Kuala Lumpur Convention Centre, Shangri-La Hotel Kuala Lumpur, Mandarin Oriental Hotel Kuala Lumpur and Crowne Plaza Mutiara Kuala Lumpur. The reason for her preferences: “These venues have the capacity, variety of meeting rooms, level



A Convention Centre with a Difference

The Swan Convention Centre, recently completed, is more than just a convention centre. Located at Bandar Sunway, just next to Sunway Medical Centre, the first private hospital in Malaysia to have a Convention Centre as part of the hospital, the convention centre has an audiovisual linkage to its operation theatres.

“With this,” said its Chief Executive Officer, Dr. Chong Su Lin, “we are able to transmit live surgery from the Operating Theatre to the Convention Centre. “This is very good for medical conferences, where doctors can see how the surgery is performed.”

Despite being a new facility, it has hosted a number of medical conferences and workshops, including the Cartilage Repair Symposium 2009, Malaysian Society for Surgery of the Hand 2010, Minimally Invasive Intervertebral Disk Surgery Workshop 2009. “There are efforts to market our conferences to the medical profession overseas,” Dr. Chong said. “It is part of our commitment to continuous learning and thus we run many workshops and training programmes for our own people internally, besides going for the business events sector. Overall it is a lot cheaper running it in our own venue than having to pay external parties for venue and refreshments.”

As part of the Jeffrey Cheah School of Medicine and Health Sciences, the convention centre has a full-time staff that services pharmaceutical companies to pitch for medical related events.



of service, knowledge and experience with medical conferences and most importantly, the flexibility.”

For her, one reason that Malaysia can attract the medical professionals to this part of the world is because the country is capable of fulfilling almost all requirements of organising international medical congresses. “The more important factor,” she added, “is the strengths, experience and the good standing of our local professional and medical associations internationally.”

Based in Singapore, Manuel Ferrer, Regional General Manager for Pacific World Malaysia attributes the company’s success to its core values - adherence to high standards of ethics, operating with integrity, caring about their clients, and taking pride in delivering operational excellence with a passion for what they do.

The company serves a variety of markets, including the UK, Australia / New Zealand, Continental Europe, the USA, United Kingdom, Asia Pacific and the Middle East as well as other emerging markets. “We organise events on behalf of every kind of industry, working with event agency intermediaries, corporate end users, government organisations and association clients,” he said, adding that Malaysia is one of the top event destinations in Asia, offering world-class MICE facilities at superb value.

“In fact, it is one of the most affordable destinations in the world and in Asia, with five star hotel rates up to 40% less than some of its neighbouring countries,” he said. “In Kuala Lumpur, high quality meeting facilities are abundant and the infrastructure is highly sophisticated, making Kuala Lumpur an affordable yet very cosmopolitan meeting destination.”

His favourite venue is the Kuala Lumpur Convention Centre. “It is a multiple award winning convention centre located right in the heart of the city, complete with excellent four and five star accommodation, either attached to it or in close proximity, making it a truly world class option for large events,” he said. “Besides that, it is the Shangri-La Hotel and the Mandarin Oriental Hotel, which offer good facilities, service, and are always there to cater to your meeting, conference and event needs.”

On why international delegates choose Malaysia, Manuel has this to say: “Malaysia has some of the most stunning island destinations – Borneo, Langkawi and Penang offer beautiful beaches with excellent resorts for a pure incentive or a relaxed corporate meeting programme,” he said. “In Langkawi we love the ‘Cook with Shuk’ experience in a traditional Malay teak house. In Penang we have some wonderful traditional clan houses that we can use for special events and imperial banquets, and in Borneo our favourite activities revolve around adventure and wildlife, from exploring the local head hunting culture to Sepilok Orangutan Sanctuary, which is a must for incentive groups.”

Upcoming Conventions and Exhibitions

The following are some conferences that have recently been secured by Malaysia as a result of MyCEB’s collaborative efforts with industry partners:

- 7th Triennial Meeting of the Commonwealth Dental Association 2012 – 2,000 delegates (Borneo Convention Centre Kuching) (Nov 2012)
- 14th International Federation of Surveyors (FIG) Congress & General Assembly 2014 – 3,000 delegates (Kuala Lumpur Convention Centre) (May 2014) (see attached releases)
- A regional congress on medical sciences 2013 – 1,500 delegates (Kuala Lumpur Convention Centre) (Nov 2013)



Table 4: Upcoming Conventions and Exhibitions

Year	Conventions	Estimated Attendance
2010	Asian Pacific Digestive Week	2,000 delegates
	18 th World Congress of Accountants	6,000 delegates
	8 th Asian Congress of Neurological Surgeons	1,000 delegates
	14 th Asia Oceania Congress of Endocrinology 2010	3,000 delegates
2011	9 th (CPD) Diabetes Asia 2010 Conference	1,500 delegates
	KL VISION 2011 – 10 th International Conference on Low Vision	1,000 delegates
	18 th Asian Pacific Congress of Cardiology	3,000 delegates
	The IIA 2011 International Conference (Institute of Internal Auditors)	3,000 delegates
	ASEAN Australian Engineering Congress AAEC 2011	600 delegates
2012	25 th World Gas Conference	3,500 delegates
	Commonwealth Dental Association's 69th Malaysian Dental Association AGM International Scientific Convention and Trade Exhibition	2,000 delegates
	7 th Triennial Meeting of the Commonwealth Dental Association	2,000 delegates
	10 th International Scientific Conference of the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists	1,600 delegates
2013	4 th World Conference in Science and Technology Education	1,000 delegates
2014	14 th Western Pacific Congress on Chemotherapy and Infectious Diseases	3,000 delegates
	14 th International Federation of Surveyors (FIG) Congress & General Assembly	3,000 delegates
	Asia Pacific Orthodontic Conference	2,000 delegates
	Asia Pacific Regional Conference of the World Organization of Family Doctors (WONCA)	1,000 delegates
	9 th Asian Pacific Orthodontic Congress (APOC)	2,200 delegates

Bringing MICE to Greater Heights

Malaysia has a sound track record as a major events destination, having hosted events such as the PETRONAS Malaysian F1 Grand Prix, LIMA (Langkawi International Maritime and Aerospace Exhibition), NAM (Non-Aligned Movement), Commonwealth Games, and Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM), the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) Summit, World Health Organisation (WHO) Global Conference on the South African Revenue Service (SARS), the 50th Pacific Asia Travel Association (PATA) International Conference, Foodex Asia and even Bollywood's International Indian Film Academy (IIFA).

These events require top-notch state-of-the-art facilities, services and world-class hotels to accommodate their needs. It's easy to see why internationally-acclaimed corporations and bodies are making Malaysia their host of choice when it comes to business events. The country has an incredible diversity; there is something distinct and appealing about the landscape and the people in each of its state and city.

Realizing the importance of niche business events sector within the tourism industry, the Malaysian government has been investing in the development of new meeting facilities to further enhance the country's competitiveness in the global meetings industry. This includes the development of the purpose-built Borneo Convention Centre Kuching (opened October 2009), Shah Alam Convention

Centre (opened April 2010) and the proposed development of MATRADE Centre (93,000 sqm/ 1 million sq ft, estimated completion in 2014).

In addition, there has been investment in new infrastructure around convention precincts such as the Kuala Lumpur Convention Centre, thereby building Malaysia's capacity for large-scale meetings. For example:

- Development of new hotels near the Kuala Lumpur City Centre precinct – DoubleTree by Hilton (540 rooms, 1,823 sqm/19,622sq ft meeting space, August 2010), Grand Hyatt Hotel (2013), The Regent (236 rooms, 2011), The Regent Residences (115 units, 2011)
- Extension of the Impiana Hotel (opposite the Kuala Lumpur Convention Centre, adding 180 rooms to the existing 335 rooms, 2011)
- A pedestrian linkage and covered walkway in Bukit Bintang connecting Berjaya Hotel & Convention Centre (hotel/meeting facility/shopping centre), Pavilion KL (shopping centre) and the Kuala Lumpur Convention Centre will also be constructed (The elevated walkway connecting the Kuala Lumpur Convention Centre and Impiana Hotel will be completed by February/March 2011).

The development of new hotels/meetings facilities will increase Malaysia's capacity to host more events in the future, as most new and upcoming venues/hotels will offer extensive meeting facilities. In addition, investment in new meeting facilities will offer international and regional associations more options on venues to host their meetings and events in Malaysia in the future.

There will also possibly be an increase in frequency for Malaysia to host Asia Pacific meetings. Regional association meetings can now rotate to other parts of Malaysia e.g. Sarawak, Langkawi, as well as Kuala Lumpur.

The spillover effects of a developed business events industry are hard to quantify. It is not just about the tourism dollars but the overall positioning strategy of the country adopted by the Government. As Tourism Minister, Datuk Seri Dr. Ng Yen Yen pointed out during the launch of the International Shoe Festival, most people know about the world's most famous and talented shoe designer, Datuk Jimmy Choo but many are unaware that shoe-making in Malaysia is a century-old industry.

"We have 1,200 factories exporting US\$600million (RM1.93billion) worth of products and our local shoe market is worth RM500million. I think our recent shoe fest is the first of its kind in the world," she said. "We plan to make it an annual event and turn Kuala Lumpur into the regional shoe capital." The words of the Minister of Tourism reflects the aspirations of a nation which seeks to become regional hubs for some of its niches – and the promotion of its business-related conventions and exhibitions is the strategy to reach the goal.

