

Dateline: Hong Kong

By Matt Alderton

Hong Kong Further Expanding Hotel, Meeting Inventory

Armed with at least 16 new hotels by year-end and 24 more by the end of 2011, following a year with several new full-service hotel openings and a major expansion to one of its largest convention centers, Hong Kong is ready for a planned increase of as many as 150,000 meeting attendees by 2013.

Although Hong Kong is small, and a long haul from the United States, its geography is actually its greatest strength, according to Hong Kong Commissioner for Economic and Trade Affairs Donald Tong. Because it's compact, he said, the city offers meeting attendees easy and convenient access to transportation, dining, shopping and tourist attractions.

"Despite that it's been a very difficult year, we continue to have a large number of overseas companies going to Hong Kong to establish and expand their presence in China," Tong said, stressing that many U.S. companies are meeting in Hong Kong today in order to establish roots that will serve them well tomorrow. "In 2009, over 260 overseas companies did that in Hong Kong—a number of them from the United States. With an expanded presence of U.S. companies, I expect that more U.S. travelers will visit Hong Kong. There's a very good reason for that: We are right next door to mainland China."

Its popularity has persisted during the economic downturn. In 2009, Hong Kong welcomed nearly 1.2 million meeting and incentive visitors, a 0.2 percent drop

from 2008. "The MICE market for Hong Kong was essentially flat for the year, a significant achievement considering the economic environment," said James LaValle, the Hong Kong Tourism Board's U.S. manager of conventions, exhibitions and corporate events. "We don't have any official forecasts, but it is reasonable to assume, given our good performance in 2009, that in 2010 we will start to see a re-growth of important seg-



More than three dozen new hotels will join Hong Kong's skyline.

ments from the United States and globally."

To fuel that growth, Hong Kong has continued to invest in its meetings infrastructure. "Hong Kong has not stopped identifying new conventions and exhibitions," he said. "We believe that between this year and 2013 we will be able to attract as many as 150 new MICE activities to Hong Kong that will bring a potential 150,000 new MICE visitors to Hong Kong—on top of what we already have."

In order to accommodate those

new meeting and incentive visitors, Tong said Hong Kong expects to welcome 40 more hotels than it had at the end of 2009, which itself saw several new hotel openings, including the 567-room Hyatt Regency Hong Kong, Sha Tin; the 381-room Hyatt Regency Hong Kong, Tsim Sha Tsui; the 263-room Crowne Plaza Causeway Bay Hong Kong—Hong Kong's first Crowne Plaza hotel—and the 828-room Har-

ton, Hong Kong, closed in 2008, the new version is expected to be bigger and better. Located on floors 102 through 118 of the ICC, the 300-room property would be the world's tallest hotel and home to one of Hong Kong's largest hotel ballrooms.

Hong Kong also is enjoying new meeting space, thanks to a \$180 million expansion of the Hong Kong Convention & Exhibition Centre. Completed in spring 2009, the expansion added 42 percent more exhibition space—enough to accommodate 1,000 additional trade show booths—to the facility, which now totals 984,540 square feet. Combined with the city's second convention center, Asia World Expo, which also totals approximately 1 million square feet, that gives Hong Kong roughly 2 million square feet of convention-center meeting space.

"Hong Kong's strategic location has more than 60 airlines flying to over 155 destinations worldwide every week," said Peggy Lau, regional managing director of Pacific World, a Hong Kong-based destination management company. "It's a multicultural hub of international business and finance. Its 'East-meets-West' culture ensures a visitor-friendly travel destination."

That will be especially true in the post-recession economy, said Tong. "Obviously, the last year has been difficult," he said, "but with the global economic recovery, and the continuous positive growth in Asia, we're optimistic." ○