



personalised precinct tours, photo walks, alleyway barber and shoe-shining services among lures that capture the neighbourhood's charm.

RAFFLES REFRESHED

After shuttering for almost two years, Raffles Hotel reopened in September with updated rooms, gleaming interiors, and upgraded meetings facilities. Sister Accor property Fairmont Singapore, adjoining Raffles Convention Centre, is also entering a new era after an 18-month transformation of 403 rooms in its south tower.

A new 338-room resort to open in 2023 in Mandai, in the north of the island near Singapore Zoo, will see buildings integrated into the surrounding nature. The Banyan Tree-branded property will feature function spaces and facilities for meetings and events, while specially curated activities will promote environmental awareness.

The city's two integrated resorts – Resorts World Sentosa and Marina Bay Sands – announced S\$9 billion of new infrastructure and attractions that will include a fourth tower at Marina Bay Sands, new hotels at Resorts World, a 15,000-seat entertainment arena and new areas at Universal Studios Singapore, and more dedicated spaces for conference and event groups. ●



INSPIRING EXPERIENCES

For all the great hardware and developments, the business events realm here is shaped as much by experiences and people. At Xperience Singapore, a DMC in the Lion City, Xperience director Jane Goh (*above*) sees a growth in the number of visitors asking for authentic experiences.

"It is a trend not just in Singapore, but everywhere," says Goh. "When we are asked for 'authentic experiences', it is important to understand from the client what their perception of authentic experiences are. Are they traditional, cultural, dining? Do they want to understand how Singaporeans live and interact or how it has developed to be the amazing blend of cultures, modernity and tradition it is today. Often there is a gulf between the clients perception and the reality."

Among the tours the DMC offers are understanding the development of Singapore's housing policy, enjoying hawker food at Lau Pa Sat or Newton Food Centre, and learning the finer points of Teochew Chinese opera.

"The tours can be delivered in a very exclusive way, such as private home dining or by involving guests in much more public venues where they mingle with locals and are often surprised by the similarities that bind us rather than the differences that separate us. The growth in authentic experiences comes down, as always, to understanding what our guests are looking for and educating and guiding them to the many areas and levels on which those experiences can be delivered."

This year Singapore Tourism Board rolled out its Incentives & Rewards (INSPIRE) to visitors from all over the globe (it was previously targeted at corporate groups from Southeast Asia and specific regions). In partnership with 29 Singapore businesses, INSPIRE offers more than 60 complimentary experiences for qualified MICE groups visiting Singapore, such as creating their own bespoke cocktail using herbs and spices found in the Unesco World Heritage site Botanic Gardens.

The Huone meetings and events venue near Singapore River likens itself to a hotel without rooms (it has 11 boutique meeting rooms in various themes and sizes).

"It isn't actually a hotel, not in the traditional sense," CEO Ian Wu says. "What guests will get is the same kind of welcome you might receive in a five-star hotel, an extremely personalised experience. You set the agenda, we arrange every chair and table, the food and beverages, and any activities."

"All is done deliberately so the room and our service match the people attending and the purpose of the meeting"

The venue, whose name means room in Finnish, offers a fresh, fun take on meetings, with novel spaces like the Sandbox, Runway, and Igloo.