

THE STAGE



The capital of Malaysia offers an array of unique venues offering a different side of the city, but will bureaucratic guidelines hinder companies from putting on a great show?

Kuala Lumpur (KL), the capital of Malaysia, has seen a transformation over the past few decades. Now a thriving metropolis boasting spectacular architecture such as the Menara Kuala Lumpur and the Petronas Twin Towers, it contains some of Southeast Asia's largest shopping malls and an endless variety of street markets.

Unlike many Asian cities where modernisation has taken a heavy toll, KL has retained most of its colonial heritage.

"The city's landscape is a blend of modernity and traditional charm, with hawker stalls and pre-war shop houses, alongside skyscrapers and sophisticated buildings," says Cynthia Martin, managing director of Crystal Edge.

KL naturally attracts world-class sporting events and cultural performances because of its vibrancy. According to Ho Yoke Ping, general manager for sales and marketing at the Malaysia Convention & Exhibition Bureau (MyCEB), most of Malaysia's international conferences are held in KL because of the convenient air accessibility



and world-class infrastructure. "It is estimated more than 60% of events are held in Kuala Lumpur, with an average of 700 participants at each event," she says.

The capital city jumped two places in world convention city rankings and three places in Asia Pacific, based on the number of international association meetings held last year. According to the International Conference and Convention Association, KL staged 78 international association meetings and advanced two ranks on the ladder to 21st place globally

and reached the top five in Asia Pacific. KL is also undergoing an economic transformation programme to enhance its standard of living. The Greater Kuala Lumpur or Klang Valley Plan includes a high-speed rail system connecting to Singapore; an integrated urban Mass Rapid Transit System; and an extension of the Light Rapid Transit.

A series of walkways totalling 42 kilometres will also link the retail and tourism trail between Bukit Bintang and KL City Centre, where the first phase involving a

142-metre air-conditioned walkway linking Kuala Lumpur Convention Centre (KLCC) to Impiana Hotel has been completed. The initiative, which is expected to be completed by 2020, includes finding ways to inject sufficient greenery in the landscape and creating more iconic attractions for tourists.

Developments for the Kuala Lumpur International Airport 2 are underway, slated to replace the current temporary Low-Cost Carrier Terminal by April 2013. Poised to be Malaysia's next generation hub, the new terminal is

expected to be at least 242,000 square metres (sq m), accompanied by parking bays and departure gates for 68 aircraft and space to accommodate 225 retail outlets.

It will feature a multi-modal transportation hub for buses, taxis and the Express Rail Link train, a semi-automated baggage handling system, support zones, cargo and in-flight complex, a 6,000-car parking complex, two to three hotels, and AirAsia's future headquarters.

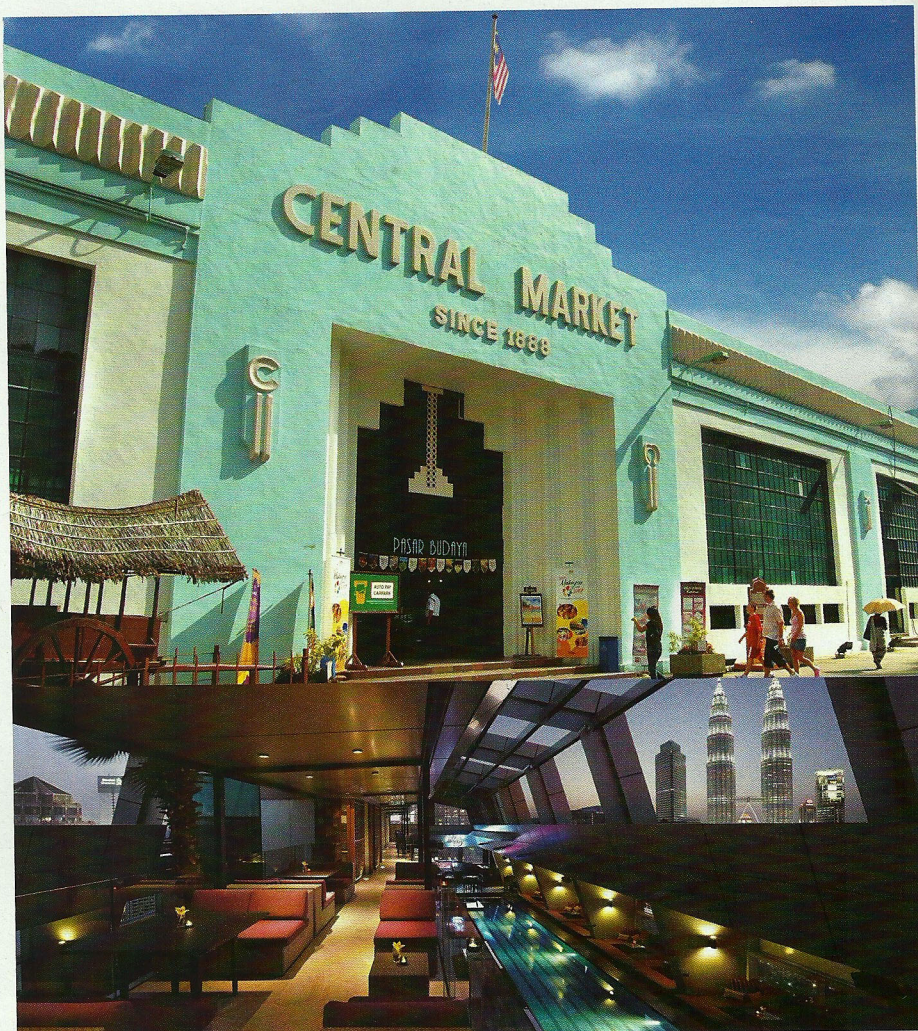
The city will also see a new commercial business district comprising an exhibition space, office buildings, condominiums, boutique hotels, a museum, art complexes and a specialist healthcare precinct.

The development will be home to Malaysia's largest exhibition centre, the new MATRADE Centre, offering 92,903 sq m of space by 2014.

WORLD CONVENTION CITY RANKINGS 2011				
Malaysia	2010	2011	Change	
World ranking	28	29	-1	
Asia Pacific ranking	7	7	-	
International association meetings	119	126	+7	

Kuala Lumpur	2010	2011	Change	
World ranking	23	21	+2	
Asia Pacific ranking	8	5	+3	
International Association Meetings	79	78	-1	

Source: International Congress and Convention Association (ICCA) Rankings 2011



Room for the unconventional: Unique venues such as the Central Market (top) and Petronas Twin Towers' rooftop destinations (bottom) offer spaces for events.

PLENTY TO CHOOSE FROM

"Nowadays, event organisers can easily have good venue options in KL that cater to 50 to 10,000 attendees. This ranges from stadiums and convention centres to hotels and even privately owned villas and resorts," says Loh Tjun Hong, director at Events Wizard.

There is a wide range of international hotel brands in KL, accompanied by local brands such as Mutiara, Sunway, Royale Chulan, Pangkor Laut, Tanjong Jara, and Impiana.

The Grand Hyatt Kuala Lumpur is one of the latest properties to be launched, located in the city centre adjacent to the KLCC and boasting 3,000 sq m of events space. The Le Meridien Kuala Lumpur located within the KL Sentral precinct has just undergone a transformative project to its events floor and hotel lobby, emerging with more than 1,300 sq m of refurbished space.

New hotels are also in the pipeline. The Hilton Garden Inn Hotel and Ascott Sentral Kuala Lumpur are expected to launch next year, while hotels St Regis Kuala Lumpur and W Hotel are slated to launch by 2014 and 2016, respectively, with large events spaces.

"KL is home to several modern convention and exhibition centres which cater to a wide range of budgets and requirements," Martin says.

One such centre is the KLCC, located next to the iconic Petronas Twin Towers, with more than 12,000 hotel rooms and shopping and entertainment facilities. The Nicole Scherzinger Formula One Rocks concert was recently held at the venue, with the Twin Towers serving as the backdrop.

The 22,659 sq m events venue is undergoing a retrofitting exercise, which will see a RM2 million (US\$656,000) investment to improve the lighting efficiency of five exhibition halls totalling 10,000 sq m with light-emitting diodes bulbs.

It is also in the middle of an expansion project, with a 10,000 sq m space boost expected to generate a 40% increase in revenue when renovations are completed by mid-2013.

Apart from run-of-the-mill hotel function spaces and convention venues, companies looking for more unconventional spaces have a selection of unique venues to run their events in KL.

The KL Performing Arts Centre is mainly used for art performances, but it also doubles as a unique venue for events, offering a mixed retention of colonial and contemporary structures within its vast compound.

"KL is home to several modern convention and exhibition centres which cater to a wide range of budgets and requirements."

Cynthia Martin – managing director of Crystal Edge



More than the arts: The KL Performing Arts Centre is another unique venue for event marketers to leverage.



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THE FACTS

Access to KL: KL International Airport at Sepang in the state of Selangor is also the main gateway into KL and Malaysia. It is a four-runway airport facility located 50 kilometres from KL, capable of handling an initial 25 million passengers per annum (prior to expansion). KL city centre is 28 minutes from the airport via the KLIA Ekspres high-speed rail service.

Currency: Malaysian Ringgit (RM).

Visas: Visitors to Malaysia must hold a valid passport or travel document with a minimum validity of six months beyond the intended visiting period.

No. of tourists in 2011: 24.7 million (in Malaysia).

Upcoming conferences in KL: AEROTECH IV – 2012 – November 2012; Asia Insurance & Technology Summit 2013 – February 2013; Cyber Intelligence Asia 2013 – March 2013; MTB Marine Asia – April 2013; The 3rd Global Conference, Women Deliver 2013 – May 2013.



The 88-storey Petronas Twin Towers, known as KL's crown jewel, contains an array of options for event marketers.

A fashion show was once held at its Skybridge, which is the world's highest double-decked bridge linking the towers at the 41st and 42nd storeys.

Martin says the retail space below the Twin Towers contains a multitude of restaurants that make great venues for events, while the rooftop restaurant and bar Marini's on 57 is also an ideal space for cocktail parties and launches.

The Central Market is an unconventional space for events. Once known as a wet market, the building has been preserved, and through

an allocation of RM9 million, was transformed into a centre for Malaysian culture, arts and handicraft. The space has since been opened for events, having hosted foreign trade shows and exhibitions.

The Carcosa Seri Negara, a historical heritage mansion that was once the official residence of the highest British representative to the Malay States, is now a unique venue that provides a hilltop backdrop ideal for posh garden parties and gala dinners.

Lake Gardens, a large recreational park adjacent to it, also offers an attractive lush green setting for events.

"Infrastructure will be needed when running

events at the Lake Gardens and it can be costly, but the greenery makes up for it," Martin says.

It is relatively easy to gain permission to use unique venues, according to Loh.

Venues owned by private companies or people are easy to rent depending on their availability.

"For venues which come under the purview of the local councils or state government, rentals are regulated with certain restrictions," Martin says.

It is best to engage with MyCEB to assist with the regulations associated with the unique venues.

"As long as you have a good idea and you work with the government agencies, there shouldn't be an issue," she says.

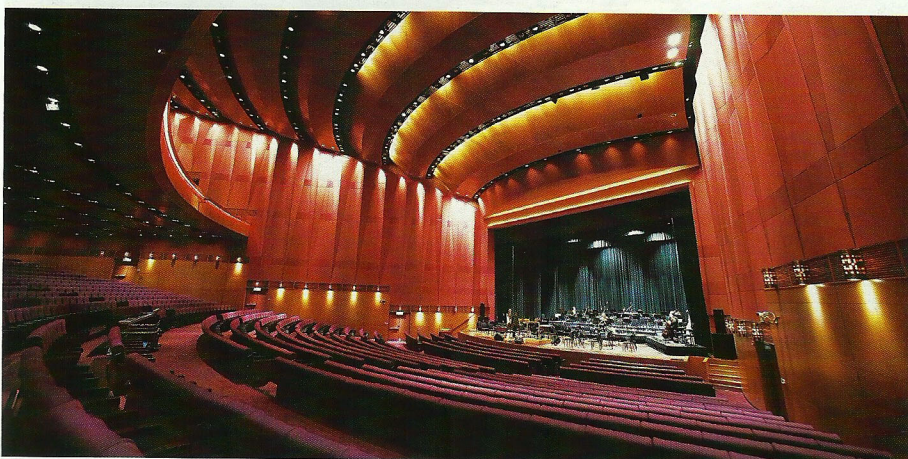
SET THE STAGE

Event marketers looking to run events in KL will benefit from the Industry Partner Programme, which aims to create co-operative sales and marketing platforms in the industry.

Working as a one-stop hub for international business clients, it combines products, services and providers across various industries and professionals to help take events to the next level.

The biggest challenge faced when working with locals is the language, says Loh, but most of them speak English.

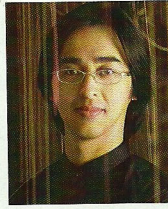
"For instances where language is problematic, I recommend getting an interpreter



Beefing up: The Kuala Lumpur Convention Centre is undergoing an expansion project to add 10,000 sq m of events space.

"While the KL city centre is most ideal for events as it offers the best infrastructure and connectivity, the more suburban areas in the capital offer a different side."

Loh Tjun Hong – director at Events Wizard



for fuss-free communication," he says.

Loh also recommends event marketers enquire about the work progress whenever required to ensure a timely delivery.

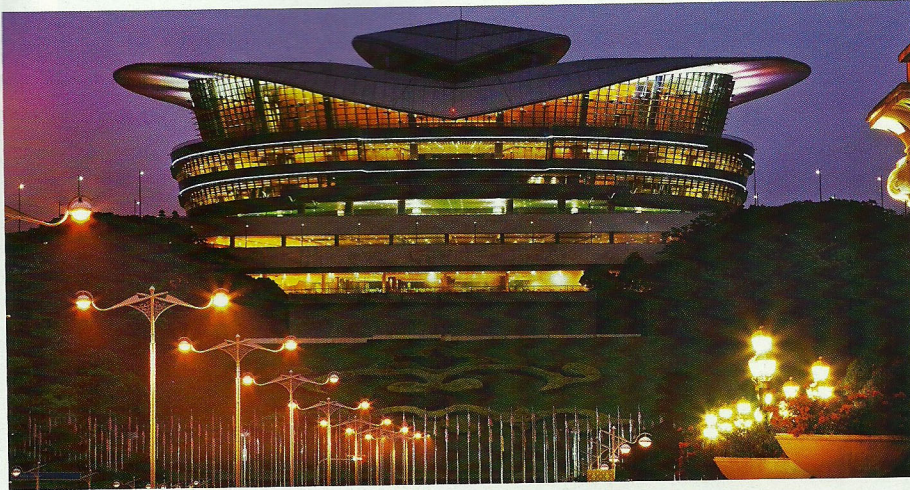
Bureaucracy is a potential barrier, often because local authorities take time to make approvals that also come with unexpected surcharges.

"Should the event require approval from local authorities, be mindful to compile and submit all relevant and supporting documents with proper acknowledgement, at least one month in advance," Loh says. It is also wise to have a contingency plan when it comes to the date and venue, and also to have a back-up team of vendors and on-site talent.

"While the KL city centre is most ideal for events as it offers the best infrastructure and connectivity, the more suburban areas in the capital offer a different side," Loh says.

KL is now increasingly becoming a quality choice for events because of its strategic location and metropolitan infrastructure offering event marketers the best of both worlds.

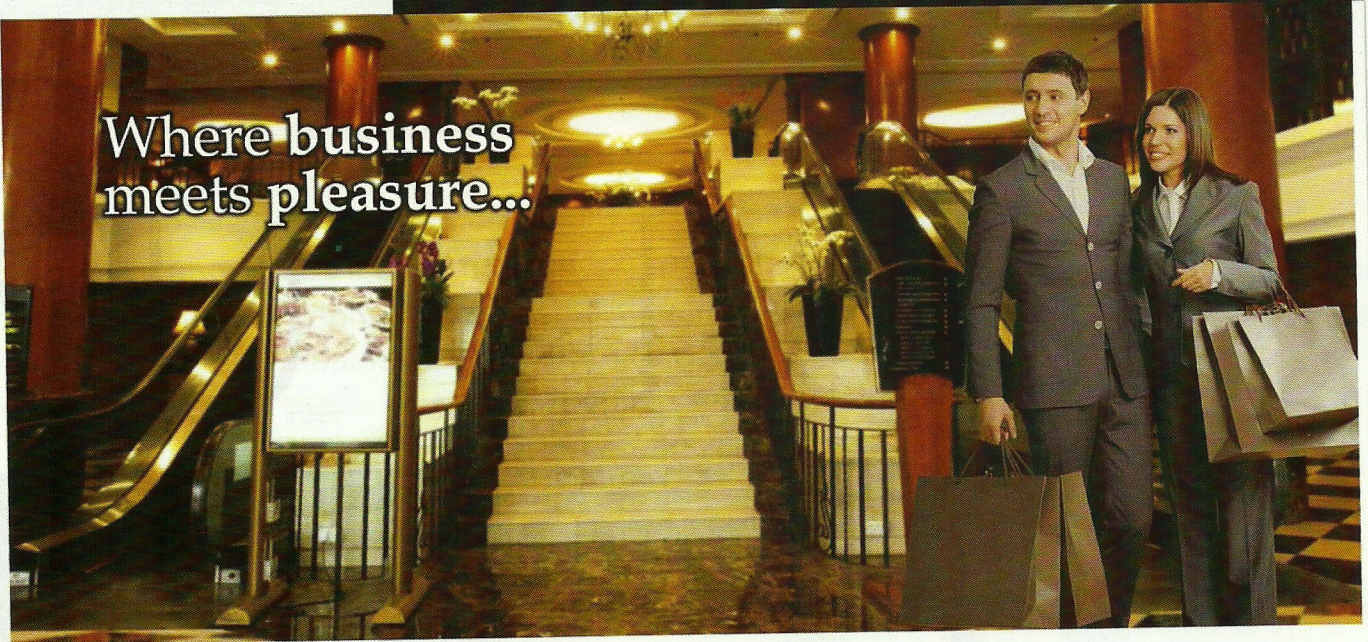
"It is the perfect stage for any event to be successful," Martin says. 



Land of giants: The Putrajaya International Convention Centre is Malaysia's largest convention space that can accommodate up to 10,000 people.

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