

Weighing Up Brand Malaysia

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Global brand consultancy FutureBrand recently released its Country Brand Index for 2009 which saw Malaysia perform considerably poorer than Singapore in key MICE and tourism categories.

Although the study did rank Malaysia ninth best country brand in Asia Pacific, classifying it as a "second-tier nation in the region developing into a strong brand", it was clearly behind fourth ranked Singapore.

Malaysia does not make the top ten country brands list in being an "Easiest place to do business", 'Ideal for business' and 'Conferences' while neighbour Singapore ranked first, second and third in the respective categories.

Given Malaysia's recent investments in positioning itself as a business and investment destination, the global results do not make for pretty reading.

However, the lukewarm performance of Malaysia in the survey as a place for conferences is unlikely to bother the Kuala Lumpur Convention Centre's general manager Peter Brokenshire.

He said the Centre, which five business segments are exhibitions, conventions, banquets, meetings and entertainment events, has seen a "remarkable" 46% increase in the number of events for the corresponding period in January to September in 2009 over 2008.

This 46% increase is a jump from 397 events to 579.

"This is partially contributed by the strong response from the market for TenOnCall which was launched in November 2008," Brokenshire said.

TenOnCall comprises of ten meeting rooms on level 4 of the Centre and was created for short-lead meetings from 2 to 150 delegates.

"The concept of TenOnCall presented a paradigm shift in the manner in which short lead small meetings could be delivered," he said.

Since its launch TenOnCall has been the preferred venue for 328 events, with 9,082 delegates and contributes an additional 4% to our total revenue.

An individual MICE tourist is estimated to generate 30% more income for the country it visits but Malaysia's failure to rank in the top 10 in other survey categories associated with tourism dollars is a worry too.

Malaysia did not make an impression as a 'Shopping', 'Fine dining' and 'Nightlife' brand and equally disappointed in the 'Resorts and lodging options' category. Crucially, it also failed to make it as a top ten country brand for 'Extending a business trip'.

It's not all doom gloom though. Tourist arrivals for the third quarter 2009 are up 12.4% to 6,031,596 compared to the same period last year.

And recently, Malaysia swept seven Asian awards at the prestigious World Travel Awards 2009, dubbed the "Oscars" of the global tourism industry.

Malaysia Airlines, Resorts World Genting and even Tourism Malaysia's "Malaysia: Truly Asia" tagline all won.

However, next year the Singapore Tourism Board (STB) can look forward to the opening of its two casino resorts to bring even more heat to Tourism Malaysia.

2009 has been a big marketing year for STB; it appointed new creative, media and digital agencies in April, and has shown a willingness to try out new ideas to grow the sector - it recognises the importance of connecting with social media and even came up with a novel way to sponsor Nuffnang's Asia Pacific blog awards.

FutureBrand's Country Brand Index report said as a communications channel, social media has undergone such dramatic growth that its increasingly important role in tourism marketing was inevitable.

Malaysia has always had a friendly rivalry with Singapore. Perhaps a clever marketing campaign in the same league as

Tourism Queensland's "Best Job in the World" campaign will tip the scales in Malaysia's favour for next year's Country Brand Index.

FutureBrand developed a three-tiered system for examining and ranking country brands.

The Country Brand Index incorporates global quantitative research, expert opinions, and relevant secondary sources for statistics that link brand equity to assets, growth and expansion.

The 2009 survey tracks the perceptions of approximately 3,000 international business and leisure travelers from nine countries - the US, the UK, China, Australia, Japan, Brazil, the UAE, Germany and Russia.

Survey results were aggregated and weighted in proportion to regional volume of travel consumption.

Malaysia - 12th November 2009