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# Tourism Awards 2006

## 'Little red dot' gets hotter and more vibrant

New finalists and new categories at the STB's Awards 2006 celebrate a record year for the industry in tourist arrivals and tourism receipts

By AHMAD OSMAN

NEW stars brightened up Singapore's status as a premier tourist destination with sparkling results last year.

Heading the list of winners of the Singapore Tourism Board's (STB) annual awards for 2006 is Mr Philip Ng. As chairman of Sentosa Development Corporation from March 2001 to February this year, he spearheaded Sentosa's transformation into an Asian tourist hotspot.

Mr Michael Ma, founder and group chief executive officer of IndoChine group, is the Tourism Entrepreneur Of The Year.

The group's bars, restaurants and clubs are renowned for their Asian-inspired interior designs and cuisine.

Mr Alexander Hascher, managing director of Venue (Asia), is the New Tourism Entrepreneur Of The Year.

The firm imports and retails Belgian menswear Raf Simons and Puma Black Station designer collaborations here and in other parts of South-east Asia.

Aramsa — The Garden Spa, infusing

natural remedies with botanical extracts from the earth and sea, is a first-time finalist and winner of the STB's best spa experience award.

Immersed in the greenery of Bishan Park, the spa has 11 blocks with contemporary designs and seamless spaces in harmony with the garden ambience.

Its guests enjoy outdoor garden baths and the feel of open spaces in a sanative retreat setting based on the belief that nature is the greatest healer.

Rasa Sentosa Singapore, the premium beachfront resort, wins for the first time the award for the best accommodation experience in the superior hotel category.

Its service philosophy, Happiness Is Our Business, is reflected in the breezy service-oriented attitude of the friendly staff.

Senior management executives lead by example. They serve breakfasts to guests in an effort to get to know them personally.

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Get a taste of different cultures at the Asian Civilisation Museum.

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Chingay Parade of Dreams 2006 is also a first-time finalist and winner of the accolade for the best leisure event experience.

Performers from Singapore and other countries put on the multi-cultural show along Orchard Road and in the HDB heartlands.

There were pre-parade programmes showcasing the best of Singapore's talents in the arts. A street party for everyone was the finale of the parade.

Asian Civilisations Museum and Metro are first-time finalists in the categories for the best leisure attraction and department store shopping experiences. The museum along Singapore River has innovative exhibits and award-winning exhibition designs tracing the roots of modern Singaporeans. It is the first and only one in the region focusing on Asian cultures and a diverse collection from South-east Asia, South Asia, China and the Islamic world of West Asia.

Metro's staff go through rigorous training programmes to get the knowledge and skills to provide a high level of customer satisfaction.

There are 28 categories of awards for 2006, including three new categories for the Top 10 best family experiences; best tourism host for nightspots and the Uniquely Singapore award.

The STB launched the annual awards in 1985 to strengthen Singapore's

competitiveness and raise service standards here.

The aim is to encourage tourism and related industries to innovate and produce unique experiences with distinctive service elements.

Winners of the awards, the STB says, can be role models to inspire others to improve the service culture here and offer more innovative tourism products and services.

The awards were presented yesterday at Esplanade Theatre after a record year in 2006 for the tourism industry.

Tourist arrivals and tourism receipts rose to new highs of 9.7 million and \$12.4 billion respectively last year.

The board's targets for 2007: a 5 per cent jump in tourist arrivals to 10.2 million and an increase of about 10 per cent in tourism receipts to \$13.6 billion.

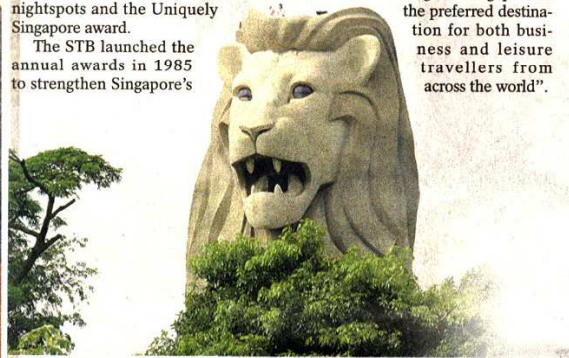
Projects in the pipeline to sustain the strong tourism performance include the Marina Bay and Sentosa integrated resorts.

STB chairman Simon Israel appreciates the contributions by the stars.

He applauds their tireless commitment and efforts in his message in the souvenir programme for the gala presentation ceremony.

He also urges everyone in the industry to continue to work together to develop a distinctive brand of quality service.

That brand, Mr Israel adds, "will distinguish Singapore as the preferred destination for both business and leisure travellers from across the world".



Chingay Parade of Dreams 2006.

# History with a 'theatrical' touch

Dark corners, mood lighting, ancient treasures... there is magic in the air at the Asian Civilisations Museum, discovers Andrew Duffy

STEPPING into the exhibition rooms at the Asian Civilisations Museum (ACM) is like discovering Aladdin's Cave. It is full of treasures; there is a hint of magic, and it is dark.

Dr Kenson Kwok, director of the ACM, prefers the word "theatrical". Certainly the dark corners and the mood lighting that pick out the exhibits are a long way from the white walls of many museums.

"The theatrical style came from local feedback," he says. "One conclusion we drew was that people would like their visits to be more 'experiential'. We had to interpret what they meant by that, so we used sound and light and interactive displays."

He accepts that "some may find it too... atmospheric. They might say it's not theatrical, it's creepy. But then, you can't please everybody".

Thanks to two windows looking out over the colonial core, Dr Kwok's own office is airy and bright. An immense but plain wooden table serves as a desk, with a motley collection of old-ish chairs for visitors.

From this office he masterminds a stream of new exhibitions such as the new Mystery Men bronzes from Sichuan and explores new partnerships.

Dr Kwok, 57, is a busy man, too busy to have caught the recent Ben Stiller movie *Night At The Museum* where the exhibits come alive after sunset, and he is not around to see if things get even more theatrical when the doors are locked at 11pm.

But he has a clear idea of what pulls in visitors during the day, and is delighted that the ACM is among the five finalists in the Best Leisure Attraction Experience category in the Singapore Tourism Board (STB) Tourism Awards 2006, which recognise excellence in service, innovation and a contribution to the tourism scene.

The ACM has a double brief: first, for the Singapore community; and second as a window on Asia for visitors. "This STB Award addresses the visitor mission," says Dr Kwok, who joined the ACM 14 years ago.

"But visitors and tourists are a small group, about one-third of the half-a-million people who visit us each year," he adds. "We could take more, maybe a million, but we do have limitations because we are an internal attraction, unlike the zoo where people can spread out."

He has seen the visitor profile change, with more Koreans among those visiting the museum. So far, mainland Chinese have not been significant visitors, but he hopes that will change when the new Peranakan Museum opens next year. "They are starting to take an interest in the Chinese outside China," he says. One reason is that "Peranakan culture isn't just interesting as a hybrid culture; you can also find some archaic Chinese customs preserved in it, such as some wedding traditions".

Dr Kwok's own favourite item on display is small and discreet, a white porcelain figurine barely 6cm high, from Dehua in southern China.

It has a special place in his heart because it came from the collection of old friends Frank and Pamela Hickley. It is a figure of a drunken scholar-official, leaning against a wine pot with a look of contented bliss on his tiny face.

"I just love it," he says. "It perfectly captures someone who is woozy, leaning backwards after just a little too much wine."

The towering artefact of a military official in the Ming period (1368-1644) stands outside the museum.



The theatrical style was chosen because of its interactive element, says Dr Kwok.

PHOTO: ANDREW DUFFY