



# MICE MEANS BUSINESS

THE MEETINGS, INCENTIVES, CONFERENCES AND EXHIBITIONS TOURISM MARKET - ALSO KNOWN AS MICE - DEMANDS HIGH-LEVEL ACCOMMODATIONS, FACILITIES AND SERVICES. JAMES GOYDER REPORTS THAT PHUKET IS ALREADY SERVICING THIS LUCRATIVE SEGMENT THAT IS AND WILL CONTINUE TO BE A BOON TO THE ISLAND'S ECONOMY.



**MANY MICE**

**FROM LEFT**

Laguna Resorts and Hotels' dedicated MICE venue, Laguna Latitude; the modular marquee hosts an array of events



**T**HE MEETINGS, Incentives Conferences and Exhibitions (MICE) industry in Phuket is rapidly expanding. MICE is used to refer to a particular type of tourism in which large groups, usually planned well in advance, are brought together for some particular purpose. It is also sometimes referred to simply as the meetings industry to avoid potential confusion arising from the acronym.

A MICE event usually includes a well-planned agenda centered on a particular theme, such as a hobby, a profession or an educational topic. MICE tourism is a highly specialised segment of the tourism industry with its own trade shows and practices. These events are normally bid on by convention bureaus located in particular countries and cities that are established for the purpose of bidding on such activities. This process of marketing and bidding is normally conducted well in advance of the actual event, sometimes several years, meaning that MICE tourism is known for its extensive planning and demanding clientele. The standards that a top-end MICE destination must meet in order to survive in this competitive environment are rigorous. Organisers of large-scale events can choose venues from a diverse range of countries on

necessary credentials to be a globally renowned host of prestigious MICE events.

Proof of Phuket's global appeal as a MICE destination arrived quite definitively in 2009 when the ASEAN Ministerial Meeting was held at the Sheraton Grande in Laguna. This meeting, which was attended by dignitaries such as Thai prime minister Abhisit Vejjajiva and US secretary of state Hillary Clinton, had originally been scheduled to take place in Phuket in April. However, foreign minister Kasit Piromya made the decision to switch the venue to Pattaya citing concerns that hotels in Phuket would be fully booked for the holiday period. Even he could not have foreseen the catastrophic consequences that his decision to move the conference from Phuket to Pattaya would result in thousands of red-shirted political protestors descending on that city, causing the conference to be cancelled and forcing many of the visiting foreign dignitaries to flee by helicopter in fear for their own personal safety. Images of the protestors storming the Royal Cliff Beach Resort were beamed around the world and the abandonment of the meeting was a huge source of embarrassment to the Thai government and the majority of the Thai people.

The debacle made it absolutely imperative that, for the sake of Thailand's international reputation when the meeting was eventually

class MICE facilities and guaranteed security was Phuket and so the meeting was rescheduled for July 2009. The event occurred without incident. There was heightened security in Phuket, but no protests disrupted the delegates. Barry Fullerton of the US Embassy in Bangkok was sufficiently impressed by the competent manner in which Hillary Clinton's visit was handled that he felt compelled to write to Laguna thanking them for their professionalism and tireless service.

Were another conference to take place in Laguna it would probably be moved to the brand new, state-of-the-art MICE venue, Laguna Latitude. Latitude consists of a 1,000-square-metre marquee-style structure and is an all-weather, fully air-conditioned stand-alone facility capable of accommodating up to 1,000 guests theatre style, 800 for cocktails or 600 for a banquet. Its modular design enables versatile configurations to suit large or small meetings and incentive groups. The entire facility will occupy 1,500 square metres of concrete surface to allow for further expansion. An additional 450-square-metre pre-function area will also be available. Michael Ayling, managing director of Laguna Resorts & Hotels says, "Latitude will provide a significant enhancement to Laguna Phuket's established MICE capabilities, as well as providing a high-quality facility for hosting new and exciting events such as exhibitions and concerts. The possibilities to stage unique MICE events at Latitude will be endless – from memorable delegate arrivals using the network of waterways from our hotels, to incorporating spectacular Phuket sunsets as backdrops to various activities."

Laguna Resort will offer environmentally responsible conferences for those who are concerned their events may have a negative impact on the environment. There are also a number of lavish alternatives that include Thai cultural evenings and a variety of themes that can be tailored to individual client specifications. Laguna

#### SHOW AND SELL

**BELOW FROM RIGHT** A booth at PIMEX, Phuket's highly successful marine industry exposition at Royal Phuket Marina International Exhibition & Conference Centre; PIMEX is one of Phuket's major MICE events

Latitude will also benefit from a partnership with Quest Adventure, a company based in the Laguna complex that offers work-related performance enhancement programmes in a range of outdoor facilities designed to challenge participants mentally and physically. Its management and organisational development programmes are designed to excite and challenge participants and provide instructive and inspiring analogies for the business environment. Facilities include high and low-challenge rope courses, a 15-metre climbing tower and several portable activities.

Indeed, work-related performance enhancement, or team building, programmes are becoming increasingly recognised as a significant tool to improve employee morale and enhance relationships between workplace colleagues. While team building can take place within the confines of a traditional MICE event there is a growing trend towards removing people from their conventional working environment for team-building exercises. Companies wishing to incorporate

*There is a trend towards removing people from conventional environments for team-building*



such a programme into a traditional MICE event will be able to take advantage of the link between Laguna Latitude and Quest Adventure.

While Laguna Latitude may be the latest player to arrive on the Phuket MICE scene it is by no means the first. The RPM International Exhibition & Conference Centre, based in the Royal Phuket Marina, was launched in October 2008. Overlooking the marina it boasts 2,500 square metres of space and hopes to pave the way for a new era in large-scale conferences, expos and private events on the island. The RPM Exhibition & Conference Centre is a joint venture between Royal Phuket Marina and Informa, the largest publicly owned organiser of conferences and courses in the world that stages over 10,000 events annually. It will be hosting one or two high profile events every month.

The Phuket governor at the time of the launch, Preecha Ruanchun, said, "Phuket is one of the world's premier tourist destinations, and I am confident that with the opening of such facilities as the RPM International Exhibition and Conference Centre, our island paradise has the potential to become a leading international venue for conventions, expos and large-scale private events."

One major exhibition that has already made the RPM Exhibition & Conference Centre its

## *The MICE industry could be a key component in strengthening Phuket's tourist-based economy*

### **SAILING AND CELEBS**

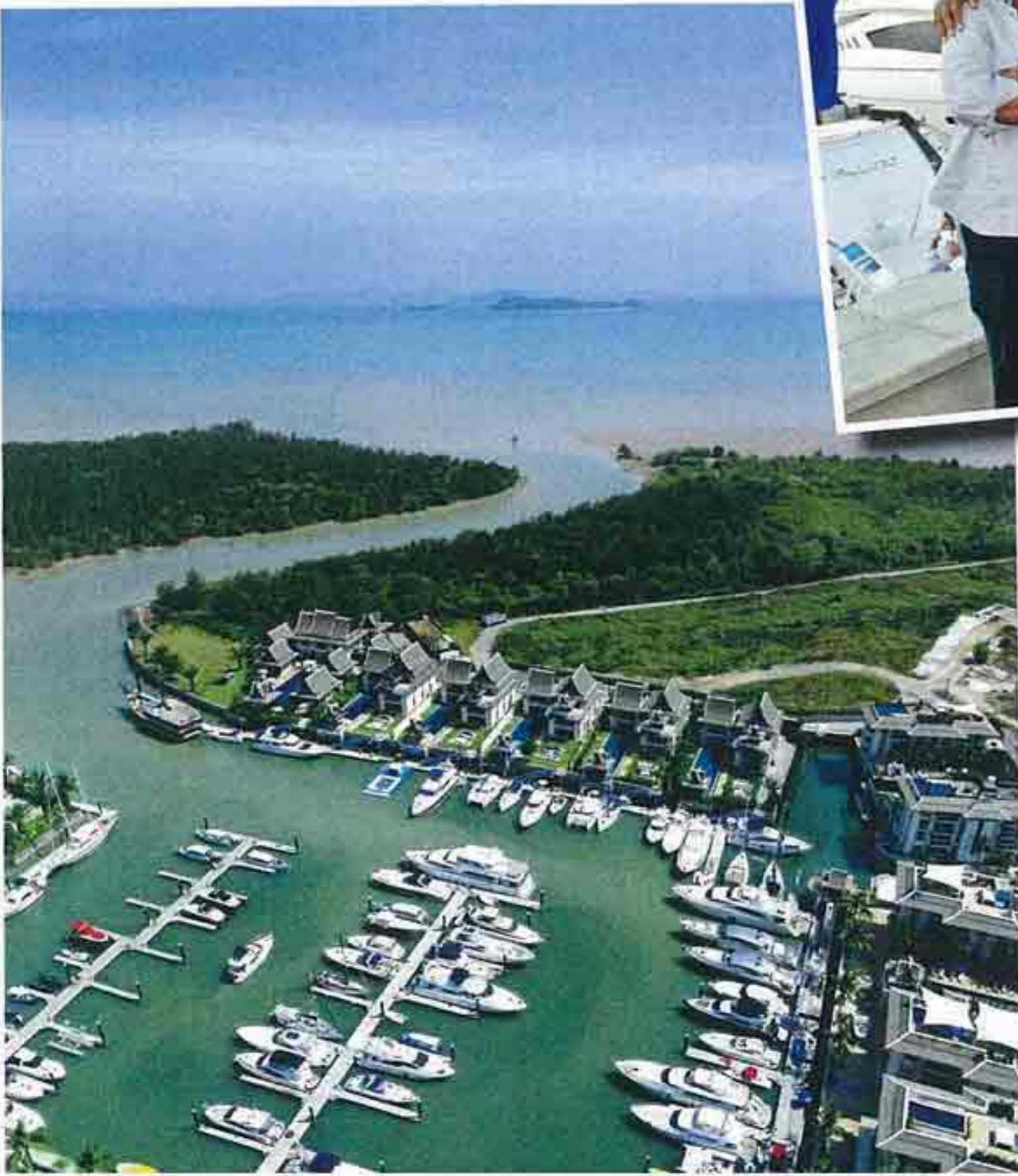
**FROM LEFT** Royal Phuket Marina allows for in-water boat displays at PIMEX; super model Naomi Campbell with her Russian billionaire boyfriend, Vladislav Doronin (to her left) at PIMEX

home is International Marine Expo (PIMEX). PIMEX 2010, held in January, attracted in excess of 6,000 potential buyers to the delight of organiser Andy Dowden. "We are pleased that PIMEX 2010 saw a good flow of local and international visitors, including many serious buyers," Dowden says. "Each year the show continues to drive the marine business in Phuket and the rest of Thailand's marine tourism sector. And this year saw much more regional interest. We will build on this and make PIMEX even more successful next year. It looks like the global economic woes of 2009 have passed over the marine industry here in Phuket and the future looks bright."



Among the most recent of PIMEX's guests were super model Naomi Campbell and her boyfriend, Russian billionaire Vladislav Doronin. Unsurprisingly, given the calibre of potential buyers PIMEX attracted, sales figures were impressive. Brokers at PIMEX 2010 announced that eight to 10 boats were sold over the four days at an estimated value of around US\$10 million.

Many exhibitors felt that PIMEX's location, and in particular its proximity to the Royal Phuket Marina, were key to their sales success. There were a number of representatives of senior management present at the event. Amongst them was Alessandro Diomedi who is the new market development manager of Italian yacht builders Ferretti Group, who own several highly prestigious luxury motor yacht brands including Riva, Pershing, Ferretti, Bertram and Custom Line.



is particularly valuable to be able to take our serious prospects – and we have had several in the last few days – out for a trial run in the middle of the show. This event has the potential to become the most important boat show in the region.”

For Dowden, Phuket is peerless in its appeal for marine exhibition and conference organisers, saying, “A boat show needs to have in-water displays and Royal Phuket Marina is ideal. Also, yachting is still largely an expat market and Phuket is a firm favourite for expats to retire to or own second homes in.” Other major events that the RPM Exhibition & Conference Centre has hosted include the Phuket International Hospitality Show, Jaguar Asia-Pacific Test Drive and a Coca Cola product launch.

Piyawan Songsawas is the project manager at the Royal Phuket Marina Exhibition & Conference Centre and she thinks that Phuket’s appeal as a MICE destination has been a major factor in the project’s initial success, saying, “With its natural resources such as the rocky peninsula, limestone cliffs, white sand beaches, tranquil bays and tropical forests, Phuket has become Thailand’s paradise island and a favourite destination for tourists around the globe. Apart from its natural heritage the island also has a rich infrastructure, specialised services and diversity of activities that can serve all the needs of business and leisure within easy reach.” She feels that the advent of major conference and exhibition centres such as the one at RPM have permanently changed the landscape of the MICE industry in Phuket. “Until recently most MICE activity has

## REGATTA RECREATION

**BELOW** King’s Cup Regatta is Phuket’s premiere sporting event that highlights the island’s appeal to sports enthusiasts, yet another reason it makes for a great MICE destination

been confined to conferences taking place at the major hotels on the island,” she notes. “Other prime spots, in particular Bangkok, Chang Mai and Pattaya, also have their own unique attractions to draw visitors, but Phuket will always have huge appeal as a MICE destination.”

Meeting and Convention Planner (M&CP) is a Thai-based company that provides one-stop, full-service destination management and event organisation. It specialises in planning and executing meetings, incentives, conferences and events inside and outside of Thailand. Its clients include Microsoft, Nokia, Mercedes Benz and DHL. M&CP feels that Thailand is the perfect MICE destination because it offers a wealth of cultural and natural treasures providing all the right ingredients for spectacular events. The company promotes Thailand’s attractions to prospective MICE organisers as providing the perfect ambience for meeting new contacts, networking or renewing business relationships. Its varied natural landscape provides interesting options for team building and soft adventure. Also, the tropical climate, which is relatively calm and pleasant in all seasons and, crucially, the comparative value for money that the kingdom offers add to the appeal. M&CP organises MICE events all over Thailand, but recommends Phuket in particular, saying, “As well as being a truly idyllic tropical island, Phuket is well-served by a superior service infrastructure and is Thailand’s most popular destination all year round principally because it offers the best of all worlds in one convenient location.”

Phuket’s recreational appeal is well established with the island playing host to such international sporting events as the Laguna Triathlon, FIVB Women’s Volleyball World Tour and King’s Cup Regatta. The latter in particular demonstrates Phuket’s capability to host high-end events that attract wealthy individuals. Inaugurated in 1987 to celebrate the 60th birthday of His Majesty the King of Thailand, the King’s Cup Regatta has been held annually ever since and has become Asia’s biggest and most popular regatta. Every year in the first week of December the cream of the yachting fraternity from Asia and beyond descend on Phuket and they don’t go home disappointed. The expectations of the participants at prestigious international sailing events such as these are extremely high and Phuket, with its high concentration of top-end hotels and outstanding restaurants, has proved itself consistently able to meet them.

The tourist industry in Phuket is showing cautious signs of recovery after political and economic circumstances conspired to cause a recent downturn. With the infrastructure already in place and the advent of world-class venues such as Laguna Latitude and the Royal Phuket Marina





ROYAL PHUKET MARINA  
Waterfront Living at its Finest



**“Anyone can park a car in front of their villa...”**

There are investments that enrich your lifestyle and those that define it. The unique Villas at RPM are an elite collection of waterfront residences with sweeping marine vistas and private yacht berths; exclusive estates that indulge your wish for a gracious tropical lifestyle of ease, freedom and luxury.

To discover more benefits of RPM ownership, please contact Mr. Lyndon Phillips (Director of Sales)  
Email: [villas@royalphuketmarina.com](mailto:villas@royalphuketmarina.com), mobile: +66 (0)81 375 6280

Royal Phuket Marina - Waterfront living at its finest.