

HIGH ALTITUDE BIKING

QUEENSTOWN This New Zealand lake and alpine resort town is making itself felt as a world-class mountain biking destination.

Groups out for an exhilarating adventure can find it in the backcountry trails, serious downhill rides, a jump park and heli-biking. What's more, Queenstown offers a gondola-assisted bike lift to Bob's Peak where the trails and views are worth the extra effort.

Organisers can add a bungy jumping session to the programme for those seeking more thrills.

Or, they can theme the activity around wine trails and coffee tours.

www.queenstown-nz.co.nz

Gigi Onag



Buddhist icons in Pak Ou Caves

BLAST FROM THE PAST DISCOVERING LAOS' SOUL

LUANG PRABANG Two-hours north of the former royal capital is Kamu Lodge, a unique base camp, which specialises in low-impact cultural programmes in the area.

The Lodge recently launched a two-day itinerary that takes participants on a long-boat ride on the Mekong River to visit Buddhist sites and local communities, whose daily routine hasn't changed for centuries.

Not to be missed are Doun Khoune, a private shrine of King Sisavangwatana – the last sovereign of Laos – as well as the Pak Ou Caves, where thousands of Buddhist icons were left by devotees over the years.

"Buddhism is as much a part of Lao history and tradition as sticky rice and fish sauce," said Kurt Walter, group general manager of Apple Tree Group Hospitality.

He added: "Seeing these shrines and holy places up close is as near as you can get to

the soul of this country, to what makes the people tick. It's not just a religion, it's a way of life."

Stopovers at the Hmong and Kamu villages let participants to visit local homes and schools while interacting with locals.

They can try their hand at planting rice, fishing and archery.

In the evening, they dock at Kamu Lodge and sleep in safari tents that come with an en suite bathrooms, balconies, hot water and electricity from a solar panel.

"We are fully committed to a low-impact experience, but does not mean we skimp on comfort, whether with our mattresses, fully stocked bar, or the fixtures that we added to the long boat so that we can travel the Mekong in style," Walter said.

www.appletree-asia.com

Gigi Onag

ON-THE-DOT TIMING

TAIPEI A 5,200-strong group from the mainland's direct sales giant Perfect China took over Taipei World Trade Center (TWTC) Nangang Exhibition Hall in July for a gala dinner, which was one of the key highlights of the company's seven-day offsite convention.

It was an exercise in precision timing



to coordinate the smooth arrival of 132 shuttle buses and the massive catering job to ensure a hassle-free gala dinner.

"The service was outstanding," said Kim Chen of Bobby Travel.

Calvin Lew, group leader at Perfect China, added: "The facilities were brand new and the showground was versatile. It was a good venue for our event."

www.twtcnangang.com

Andrea Zavadszky

TAILOR-MADE EXPERIENCES

HONG KONG Companies planning a high-end event for small groups have another option for expert advice besides their trusted destination management companies (DMCs).

Private concierge Quintessentially Group is a well-kept secret among organisers of premium out-of-the-box events.

In Hong Kong, for example, the company staged an intimate tea party at City Links, the city's only indoor golf lounge, in Central. Guests munched on canapes while being entertained by a singing waitress. Afterwards, they were invited to tee off on the golf simulator, sip cocktails specially concocted for the event and enjoy a hand spa by a therapist from Spa L'Occitane.

"We secure access for our members to top restaurants, nightclubs, concerts and more around the world," said Emma Sherrard, chief executive of Quintessentially Asia-Pacific. "We help save members on average HK\$48,000 (US\$6,157) per year."

The company has a presence in 60 cities.

www.quintessentially.com

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Seoul hosted first FCCI Action Forum



SEOUL The city recently hosted the successful first action forum of the Future Convention Cities Initiative (FCCI).

The forum agreed on a

program of exchanging knowledge around key priorities among member cities.

The FCCI counts seven leading cities in the global conventions industry – Abu Dhabi, Durban KwaZulu Natal, London, Seoul, San Francisco, Sydney and Toronto.

"We made tremendous progress in sharing practical insights, and initiating a research agenda for studies that will provide genuine competitive advantage to FCCI members and benefit the meetings industry as a whole," said Samuel Koo, president and chief executive of the Seoul Tourism Organization (STO).

www.miceseoul.com

AMWAY INDIA TO HOST FIRST EVENT IN AUSTRALIA

MELBOURNE Amway India has chosen the Australian city as the destination for its leadership seminar, scheduled for 2012.

This will be the company's first offsite event in the country, and it plans to bring a group of more than 4,000 participants.

"The delegates will be accommodated in one wave, which speaks volumes for our city's superior infrastructure," said Sandra Chipchase, chief executive of the Melbourne Exhibition and Convention Centre.

It is estimated that the event will contribute about A\$20.98 million (US\$21.16 million) to the economy of the state of Victoria.

"The benefits of hosting delegates from India's leading direct-selling consumer-goods company are extremely important in both cultural and economic sense," she added.

Melbourne is an old hand in handling big groups from Amway. The city had previously hosted the company's top performers based in China, South Korea, Indonesia and the Philippines.

www.mcec.com.au

Gigi Onag

