

Associations and tourism

Associations all over the world organize for their members meetings, incentives, conventions and exhibitions (collectively termed as MICE). The so-called MICE sector has given countries, as well as tourism industries, a much-needed boost economically in recent years, and the trend is going to continue according to reports.

With a high value-added component, MICE has spawned, among others, infrastructure and enterprise development (conference venues, hotels, resorts, malls, transport, telecom—you name it). This has created jobs, established small and medium enterprise linkages, and added taxes to the government. The role, therefore, of associations in tourism cannot be discounted.

According to the International Congress and Convention Association's (ICCA) Statistic Report 2015, the world association market covers a wide range of meeting types and categories, such as medical meetings (the largest segment), scientific, academic, trade organizations, professional bodies and other social groupings.

The ICCA association database now includes 20,000 regularly occurring meeting series, 220,000 meeting editions and 11,500 international associations. These numbers reconfirm the consistent growth pattern in the association meetings market, as identified in ICCA's 50-year report.

In the Philippines the Tourism Promotions Board (TPB), the marketing arm of the Department of Tourism mandated to promote the country as a major MICE destination in Asia, says the contribution of MICE to the national tourism industry is about 15 percent.

In 2016 there are more or less 200 MICE events that have been booked by the TPB, with the Philippines ranking sixth in Asean with the most number of MICE events.

The TPB realized early on the value of MICE in tourism promotion and foresaw this trend worldwide, particularly in relation with associations. So it was logical for TPB management to help in the founding of the Philippine Council of Associations and Association Executives (PCA AE) in November 2013.

The two other founding pillars of PCAAE include the Philippine International Convention Center (PICC), which also supports associations as powerful vehicles to help generate tourism receipts; and the Association of Development Financing Institutions in Asia and the Pacific (ADFIAP), which advocates sustainable industries, including tourism.

Since its inception, the PCAAE has helped advance the association management profession and make associations well-governed and sustainable. It believes that, by further professionalizing association governance and management, associations and other membership organizations will have the confidence and skill set to undertake more MICE events locally, as well as attract international ones into the country.

The PCAAE counts among its members 163 associations, professional societies, chambers, foundations and other membership organizations (cooperatives, LGU associations, student councils, etc.). As a three-year-old “association of associations,” and with initial focus on capacity building, the PCAAE has yet to do research and to determine statistically how many MICE events are held in the country. This research function could be the next opportunity for the PCAAE as an activity.

The growth potential of MICE tourism in the country is enormous. What is needed now is for all tourism stakeholders (government, the business sector and associations) to join hands to pursue this opportunity.