



MEET HALLYU

Korea raises the roof to charm conference and incentive groups with its K-wave phenomenon, writes **Vicki Williams**



HALLYU is Korea's youthful cultural wave that has swept across the world's popular culture outlets. Now the K-wave is being used to make South Korea stand out in the competitive meetings and incentives market after having already projected the country as a leisure destination.

The hallyu-meets-business events direction was introduced as Korea MICE Expo 2018 opened in June with Shinee, an internationally popular K-Pop group, unveiled as official MICE tourism ambassadors.

Hallyu includes K-pop, Korean TV dramas and movies, with local experiences, destinations and cuisine as offshoots. This leverage of a cultural wave or strengths to attract groups also extends to diverse and unique venues with activities for groups in the three key destinations of Seoul, Incheon and Busan.

BUSAN WITH ATTITUDE

With an 80 ranking globally for ICCA-recognised congresses and 18 in Asia Pacific, the southern coastal city of Busan is booming, with construction of mixed-use towers, more hotels set to open and a new airport in the works. There is a dynamic approach to life with touches of a holiday atmosphere that makes Busan a seaside city with attitude.

COILING F1963

A unique venue typifying that attitude is F1963, a former wire factory that dates back to 1963. The interior of this structurally striking building was transformed in 2016 through a joint development between local authorities and the building's owners to create a "cultural factory" with entertainment sites for movies, concerts, performances, exhibitions and events. F1963's building and surrounds offer planners 22,000 sqm in total.

Groups enter F1963 through a meandering garden of bamboo that resembles straight lines of wire. The industrial-chic interior is increasingly popular with groups and has several options for meetings or presentations, including a gallery space with a capacity for 700. There is a large outdoor area with staging and seating, which is ideal for cocktail receptions for up to 300, with F1963's permanent tenants also able to make smaller event space available.

The gallery also hosts exhibitions by international artists and the creative tenant list is another reason that F1963 attracts visitors. Korea's most famous coffee roasters, Terarosa, has a large and funky cafe, there is also a micro brewery producing Czech-style beer and an artisanal makgeolli (fermented rice wine) business – both serving delicious food – and with facilities that can be booked for events. F1963



Also boasting dramatic water and city views is The Bay 101, which has its own marina, and houses vibrant eateries, alfresco dining and cocktails, art installations and a gift store. Meeting and event spaces are also available to host rooftop cocktails, group dining and provide flexible networking options.

KOREA HOUSE, SEOUL

Mixed-use venues that appeal to groups are a signature of Korea. The charming Korea House in Seoul is another example. Dating back to 1957, this replica of a traditional hall of a palace consists of several buildings, a central courtyard and surrounding gardens. It is a cultural space, home to performances, exhibitions and a restaurant, but also

also features a large bookstore, a nursery and farm kitchen cafe. The project is ongoing and many new elements are in the pipeline including an art school, a library containing over 200,000 books on art sourced from all over the world, and more event space in the form of a rooftop wine bar.

FERMENTING BEAUTIES

Fermentation is integral to Korean F&B, whether it's beer, kimchi or makgeolli. For smaller groups, the Cultural School for Fermentation offers makgeolli tasting accompanied by a simple traditional lunch with delegates getting the chance to make their own beauty mask using the rice wine.

Rumour has it that a leading Japanese cosmetics company uses an extract from the rice wine in its facemasks.

Busan's natural beauty is also appealing and groups can enjoy sunset cruises on a yacht, or bond over volleyball on one of its seven beaches.

NURIMARU APEC HOUSE

The city's coastline is also home to Nurimaru Apec House. Built on the shore to host the 2005 Apec summit, the rotund building has indoor and outdoor meeting and banqueting options. Nurimaru has also become a favoured nighttime choice for alfresco dinner and cocktails. ►

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CULTURAL INGREDIENTS
Opposite: F1963;
This page from
top: Korea House;
Nurimaru APEC
House and OME
cooking Lab



CREATIVE CAVERN

GWANGMYEONG Cave is both a unique venue and a fascinating experience. The former silver and gold mine is extensive, and has been turned into a cultural site of interest with more than 20 attractions. Its vast art centre – set within rock walls – can seat up to 360 people and has been used for a diverse selection of events ranging from boxing matches to a fashion parade and concerts. The cave also puts on an impressive light and media show.

There is also a wine cave and restaurant, highlighting Korean wines and western cuisine. Other highlights include Lord of the Cave, featuring a 41-metre dragon built by the Lord of the Rings creative team, and a golden light waterfall.

Unique experiences for groups also include the option to feel like a celebrity with individual or team photos projected onto a 22-metre high LED outdoor screen. The cave is easily accessible from Seoul and Incheon.



GOLDEN OPPORTUNITIES
From top left: Gwangmyeong Cave; Artee Riders Club; Hanbok experience

◀ appeals as a venue for meetings, cocktails, product launches, teambuilding and more.

Korea House feels a world apart from the busy street outside. Its authentic design means demand from film producers to use the space for period dramas and to juxtapose the setting with modern K-pop videos and publicity shots.

The venue is also an ideal space for groups to sample appetizing royal Korean cuisine, featuring a tailored menu of dishes once only enjoyed by nobility in an ambience of times past.



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OME COOKING LAB

Thanks to Korean dramas, documentaries, and movies, the country's cuisine has also seen its appeal grow. Visiting groups can gain a hands-on experience and small groups can enjoy the welcoming environment of OME Cooking Lab, the first cooking school to open in the city's largest traditional market, Gyeongdong.

Classes begin with a tour of the vast array of fascinating produce that can be found in the market and ends with groups enjoying the dishes learned and prepared using ingredients from the stalls.

ARTEE RIDERS CLUB

Seoul is also home to Artee Riders Club, the city's first and only rickshaw sightseeing company of its type, and owered by young guides who have an intimate knowledge of the old town area, including personal favourites, ancient sites, and quirky stores and cafes.

The majority of passengers are Koreans seeking a glimpse of the past and to experience a different side to modern Seoul, but Artee also appeals to overseas visitors. Groups of up to 40 can be catered to in hour-long tours that offer a fun and an insightful view of the city from a perspective that cannot be stumbled upon.

HANBOK EXPERIENCE

Relive a favourite Korean soap opera or drama, or imagine times past by hiring your choice of hanbok, the traditional dress. Friendly staff at specialists Hanboknam help groups select the appropriate combinations, assist with dressing, and complete looks with hairstyling and accessory suggestions.

Even the most cynical will feel grand when fully

BONDING WITH 3D

I AM holding on tightly as I see the front of my raft approaching the edge, with what appears to be a sheer drop beyond. There is no turning back. Over I go, thankfully landing in a tranquil pool as water splashes on my face. Wait, what's that ahead? It's a massive dinosaur heading straight for me!

Delegates can be thrilled when teambuilding at Monster VR, a virtual-reality arcade with solo and group experiences and games. The technology is at the cutting edge and the 3D visuals with big-screen movie theatrics.

Monster VR is part of the new attraction in Songdo, Incheon, called Triple Street, which also features K-Live with holograms of K-pop concerts and other popular Korean music. There are also shopping options, from a collection of on-trend Korean fashion stores, to outlets offering impressive discounts on international brands.



attired. For the added engagement factor, groups are encouraged to stride, or glide, around the grounds of Gyeongbukgung Palace in an activity becoming more popular with younger Koreans. Visits can be timed with the colourful changing of the guards ceremony at the palace gates.

SONGDO CITY

Incheon is putting a lot of resources into attracting groups with a thoroughly modern perspective, while also paying homage to its culture. A lot to see, do and experience for groups is situated in Songdo, which is part of the vast Incheon Free Economic Zone. More about IFEZ, including a visual perspective via a viewing platform, can be found in the 33-storey G-Tower.

For an immersive cultural stay for groups with the budget there is the hanok-styled Gyeongwonjae Ambassador Hotel. The work of master-craftsmen, it has only 30 guest rooms, all featuring traditional architecture and design with modern comforts, and has been used as the setting for Korean dramas.

Working with a local event management company and the hotel and its Korean restaurant, it is also possible to hold impressive outdoor dinners and cocktails, complete with cultural performances, that further add to the hallyu experience. ●