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South Korea's MICE industry adds a touch of "hallyu" to attract business visitors

When South Korea introduced the phenomenon known as "hallyu" back in 2000, it's doubtful that the world expected to be flooded by what has become known as the "Korean Wave". Yet that's exactly what has happened, with all things Korean – TV dramas, movies and K-pop – exerting a strong influence on global culture.



Now hallyu is being combined with the more sober meetings, incentives, conferences and exhibitions or MICE industry and Shinee, one of the country's most popular K-pop boy bands, has been appointed as the official ambassador of Korea MICE Tourism.



The recent Korea MICE Expo, which had as its theme "Hallyu-meets-MICE", offered participants new venues, activities and discussions related to popular Korean films, dramas and music. The aim, said the organisers, was to spread the Korean Wave throughout the industry and encourage more visitors to come.



SM Entertainment and Big Data experts are heading to the industry to find a new MICE business model that will serve as a qualitative growth model.

“When MICE events are held in Korea, foreign participants tell us that what’s most important to them is shopping. But they can do that anywhere so we need to find something more than shopping to have a competitive edge,” Ahn Suwook, managing director of SM Entertainment, a South Korean company, explained.



That led the company to develop more products for people to enjoy whenever it is convenient for them. SM has the culture and brand for tourism – shows, sightseeing, food, stays and shopping.”

The combination of the Korean Wave and MICE is expected to be successful and achieve its main goal – enhancing the value added and quality of Korea’s MICE industry while increasing the number of participants.



Back in 2000, hallyu's main component was K-pop, with its vibrant music scene, featuring bright, explosive colours, as well as bizarre fashion and exciting pyrotechnics. Hallyu later expanded to include Korean art, literature, movies and TV programmes, emphasising the contemporary and with a nod to the innovative. Today it also includes old Korean traditions and customs.



Organised at Songdo Convention in Incheon last week, the 2018 edition of the Expo drew 350 Asian companies and 250 non-Asian international firms, and introduced a wealth of new programmes, among them Destination Presentations, a Knowledge Cafe and a Young MICE Professionals booth, cultural performances and tours of popular destinations.



“Korea has become a favoured destination for incentive travel, especially for groups coming from Southeast Asia,” Baeho Kim, acting executive director of the Korea MICE Bureau told The Nation.

The purpose of MICE is to boost Korea's tourism and encourage countries to strengthen their infrastructure to accommodate large-scale international events. In Korea, both the government and private sectors are rolling up their sleeves to attract more events and group tours through MICE. The Korea Tourism Organisation has come up with various domestic and international programmes that promote the country as a MICE destination.

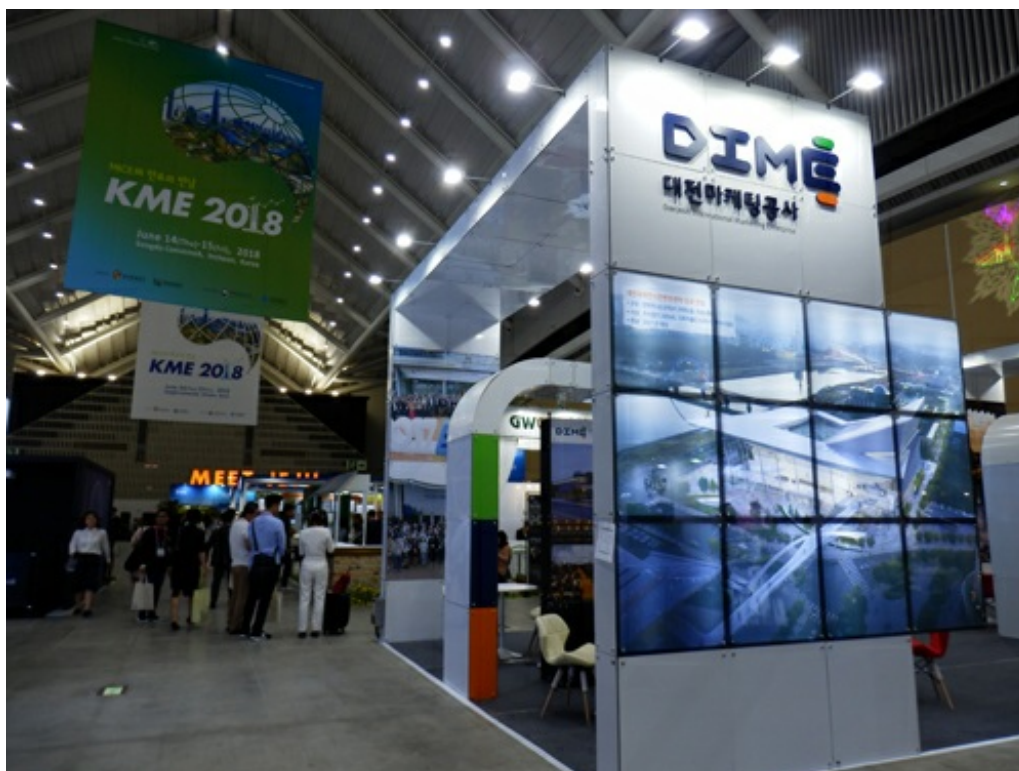


The convention itself brought together several booths manned by representatives of the

country's major cities, all of them promoting their tourist attractions. "Discover Incheon MICE" boasted a film location at Incheon Jemulpo Club while Gyeongsangbukdo offered such Unesco World Heritage Sites as Bulguksa Temple, Seokguram Grotto, Gyeongju Historic Areas, Andong Hahoe Folk Village and Yangdong Village (2010). Other booths were boldly headed "Meet Jeju", "I Seoul U", and "Brighter Busan".



"Incheon's Songdo city has many new hotels, most of them five-star, and great venues like the Gyeongwonjae Ambassador Incheon, a hanok-style hotel. Many major companies have also settled in Songdo City and they are meeting here," said Min Minhong, KTO's executive vice president for international tourism.



The industry is also tempting visitors with authentic Korean experiences such as visits to

traditional Korean markets, the National Museum of Korea and the National Museum of Korean Contemporary History; temple stays and temple food, Korean Buddhism and the multi-pronged programme “Korea, Beyond Meetings”, which offers Bikero, OME Cooking Lab, Campus Stay, DMZ Spy Tour, and Teamax Adventure, as well as a Makgeolli traditional liquor tasting experience.

Artsoombi, meanwhile, is an agency that connects artists, brand and consumers.



“More and more people are interested in cycling here in Korea because there are more and more cycling tracks over across the country,” enthused Minny Kim, who is in charge of overseas sales for Bikero, the only company in Korea allowed to rent touring bicycles and give course information.

“Actually, Korea has more than 5,000 kilometres of tracks to enjoy. I definitely recommend cyclists to ride the tracks on hills all over the country. There is also something called the grand slam, which is like a course with 85 stops and you can have a stamp for each of the special routes. If you get all the stamps, you win a medal.

“So you see, you really can experience more in Korea,” she added.