

# Korea turns on the tech turbo as CVBs step up their support

KOREA OFFERS MORE SUBVENTION FUNDING AND TECHNOLOGY SUPPORT AS IT EYES NEW NORMAL FOR MICE. CMW REPORTS

**S**outh Korea has won many plaudits for its response to the global Covid-19 crisis. One of the first countries outside of China to report cases of the disease, South Korea has been more active than most in harnessing its high technology capabilities to track the spread of the virus and its reported cases have been relatively low – around 250 deaths on just over 10,000 cases by the end of April.

It is not surprising that the country is also in the vanguard of planning for the economic re-emergence post-Covid-19 and rallying its destinations to work with government closely in offering some additional subvention enhancements for meeting planners.

The country has pivoted to virtual/digital/video methods of destination marketing quickly (it has the fastest average Internet speeds in the world) and its hotels have generally remained open albeit with some reduction to service/entrances for public access.

International events were run as recently as late February, and in Seoul, the Coex convention centre is an example to

follow for best practice in cleaning processes - twice-a-day in exhibition halls and meeting spaces, with extra medical and security staff drafted on site, thermal cameras installed and air purification carried out every 15 minutes. Hand sanitisers have been placed at all entrances to each room.

Of course, Koreans have lived through the difficult times of SARS and MERS since 2000. Those episodes mean there is a deep level of experience for local professionals to draw on.

Mr Sangmin Lee, Director of the London Office of the Korea Tourism Organisation comments:

“Korea has demonstrated that it was not only prepared, we also took the lead to reduce the impact on its citizens, and share important information with the world, during the Covid-19 outbreak. KTO and the KMB have worked hard to support the MICE industry.

“We have, as a national industry, joined forces to think about how we can support visitors and the MICE industry when we have a chance to move again, and worked as a nation to provide new initiatives based on popular past requests, thus



**Above:** Sangmin Lee, Director of the London Office of the Korea Tourism Organisation

offering more reasons to come to Korea.”

Once international travel restrictions can be lifted Korea should be able to get back to a near/new normal quicker than most.

Neither have the country's property developers and hospitality leaders been sitting on their hands: a slew of new hotels are coming online.

In the port city of Busan, the New Lotte Signiel will add 260 rooms and a Grand Ballroom able to host 990 guests, while the Novotel Ambassador Busan, converted into a five-star, is reopening with 300 rooms later this year.

And, although Finnair has had to delay the opening of its new direct route to Busan, it is still hoping to get clearance for take off later in the year.

Over at Kintex, the country's largest exhibition and convention centre is being extended and once the express train line opens from 2023 it will offer journey times to Seoul in just 20 minutes.

So, what of the new support initiatives available for international planners considering Korea for their conferences?

The KoreaMICE Bureau, which sits under the Korean Tourism Organisation (KTO), has broadened its support programmes for qualifying events, as have regional CVBs.

Planners are urged to take advantage of the additional subvention and special services.

In the capital, Seoul CVB has reduced the initial number of conference and event delegate pax required to qualify for support, while Busan is offering funds to help with cancellation fees as well as support for digital/virtual meetings, and offering 'hygiene packs' for delegates.

KTO has also increased the available subsidy by 1.5 times for small groups



**Left:** Gamcheon Culture Village, Busan

(under 500 foreign delegates) and is offering an additional subsidy of 10m won (US\$8,162) for medium-sized groups (500 to 1,000 foreign delegates).

The figure available rises to 25m won for large groups (1,000 to 2,000 foreign delegates) and to 40m won for extra-large groups (over 2,000 foreign delegates).

Groups yet to consider Korea as a corporate meetings/incentive destination will receive support for site inspections.

## PLUS SEOUL

The existing PLUS SEOUL programme has eased some conditions for planners applying for assistance, with the minimum number of international delegates required for an event to qualify now lowered from 500 to 200.

Conferences postponed and hosted within the year are to be offered 10% more of the pre-approved financial support.

The qualifying numbers have also been lowered from 50 to 20 for corporate meetings and incentive tours.

New support options also include Seoul Customised Welcome Drinks, On-Spot Photo-booth, Food Trucks, AI Robot Rental and Event App Development services.

## Incheon

Incheon City is supporting tourism-related companies affected by Covid-19 with the expansion of its management stability fund for small businesses from 65bn won to 150bn won.

## Busan

The port city of Busan now provides support of up to 1.5m won for groups that have had to cancel their events due to Covid-19. The support applies to penalty fees for cancellation and service fees for prepaid insurance fees.

The city will also provide up to 2m won for safety equipment relating to Covid-19 (masks, hand sanitiser, etc) for events held in Busan.

And corporate organisers can get help on costs involving new conference technology, such as a VR conference, with



up to 5m won for each conference.

## Gangwon

Gangwon CVB's special support programme in response to Covid-19 is open to applications until 31 July, 2020 and, again, has a scale of support with qualification delegate numbers lowered for international conferences, incentives and corporate meetings.

## Jeju

Jeju, Korea's sub-tropical island, popular with Koreans for weekend breaks, is offering a number of video/drone footage tours of some of the extinct volcanic islets and landscape via its [www.visitjeju.net/en](http://www.visitjeju.net/en) site.

Jeju CVB is accelerating its plan of support for new Unique Venues, as well as offering new support, at least in the short term, by way of contributions towards venue rental fees, dinner fees and souvenirs for international conventions, incentive tours and corporate meetings held in Jeju.

Korea MICE Bureau is also coordinating with regional CVBs during this time to see how they can be supported and helped to prepare new programmes for when the situation settles.

## Taking a digital lead

The Covid-19 outbreak has helped spark an interest in digital solutions

**Above:** Seoul, Korea

for meetings. A KTO programme to support and increase the use of Meeting Technology is making available to qualifying organisations a further 1.4bn won.

Seoul recently delivered an interesting virtual meeting with delegates as Avatars, a step up from a standard Zoom meeting. (<http://me2.do/5XkNOuQN>)

Virtual destination and venue tours have been available for a while, but KTO and their MICE partners have been stepping up the pace with these now including ideas of what to do when delegates arrive as well as new virtual 'fly throughs' of facilities like Coex.

There is a new virtual Vibrant Seoul City Tour available via YouTube and also a Coex 360 Tour at [k-mice.visitkorea.or](http://k-mice.visitkorea.or)

## Wellness

Korea's 'healthy' tradition of developing alternative medicines such as Ginseng, and hot spring spa and forest bathing offers are also worth checking out: <http://wellnessvr.visitmedicalkorea.com/en/main>.

Times for contemplation, too, and maybe you will be ready to appreciate a visit in person to one of the many the Buddhist temples across Korea which offer activities starting from one hour to 24-hour temple stays for groups of up to 60. Full details via the Temple Stay programme: [www.eng.templestay.com](http://www.eng.templestay.com) ■

*More details on MICE options in Korea are available at [www.korea.convention.org](http://www.korea.convention.org)*