

India 'Mice' go Down Under

Destination Gains In Profile As Regulars Begin To Tire Of Southeast Asia

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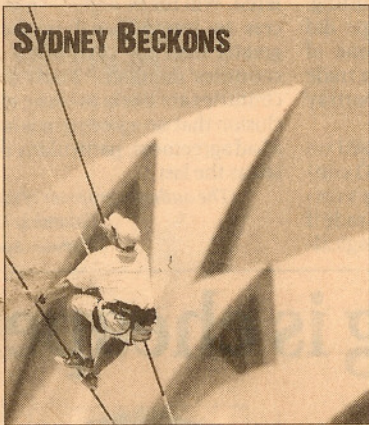
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THE Meetings, Incentives, Conventions and Exhibition (Mice) market, traditionally the most popular incentive for dealers, sellers, agents and workers, is undergoing a facelift. With Indian firms expanding their bottomlines on the back of sound economics, incentive travel budgets are also expanding and Indian Mice operators are looking at new destinations. Singapore, Malaysia, Thailand, Sri Lanka are boring. Australia is in.

Over 30,000 Mice travellers have headed across the seas this year and the number is expected to grow 20% every year. "The average spend per person going abroad is Rs 25,000 and the average time spent at these destinations is three nights," says International Travel House Executive Vice-President Kamal Hingorani. The current market for organised incentive travel abroad is Rs 300 crore. The potential market size has been estimated to be much higher in the range of Rs 1,000 crore a year.

"Indian companies have been sending their sales agents and employees abroad for over a decade now," says

SYDNEY BECKONS



FCM Travel Solutions CEO Rahul Nath. Bangkok, Singapore, Sri Lanka and Kuala Lumpur were traditionally the destinations of first choice. While hosts of incentive travellers continue to be drawn to these foreign locales, there is a definite shift in taste towards newer destinations. While Europe is still the most preferred destination, organising travel is problematic. For one, visas are difficult to get and the cost of the trip itself would balloon to unmanageable

proportions, given the size of the incentive travel contingent. As a result, incentives are structured and performers get ranked on performance, with only the top 15-20 people making it to Europe. The remaining have to settle for trips to the East and now, Australia.

"Most people who get chosen for Mice travel are repeat travellers in the sense that the same people perform well year on year and win trips abroad. And they are starting to get bored," says Get Lionel CEO Gaurav Sundaram. South Africa and Australia were in the fray as alternates, but Australia won on cost. Australia is a good destination as it provides what Indian travellers look for, he said. Nightlife is good and there are enough traditional tourist destinations to keep a person busy for a week at least. Also, there is a huge Indian population in Australia. So food isn't a problem either, adds Mr Sundaram. While the price value proposition Down Under is definitely better than Europe or the US, it's still a good 30% costlier than southeast Asia. As a result, only second tier performers make the cut to Australia, the best heading West and lower ranks running the regular circuit in southeast Asia.