



CDCGamingReports.com



Focus on Asia: G2E Asia's tentative restart

By Andrew Klebanow | Co-Founder of C3 Gaming

September 1, 2022

G2E Asia reconvened last week in Singapore at Marina Bay Sands rather than its traditional venue at the Venetian Macau, and it was a decidedly muted event compared to its pre-pandemic forerunner. Singapore was the logical alternative for event organizers, as Macau remains under strict travel restrictions due to the government's continued embrace of the People's Republic of China's Zero-COVID policy.

While Macau residents have experienced a modest easing of quarantine restrictions after July's total lockdown, inbound and outbound travel remains curtailed. Even prior to the most recent shutdown, international travelers entering Macau and returning residents were subject to week-long quarantines followed by additional days of self-isolation, making it impossible to conduct an international trade show. Macau's casino industry has been posting gaming revenues of late near twenty percent of 2019 levels, and the start of even a modest recovery still appears months away.

Event organizers were wise to choose Singapore. The city-state was one of the first Asian business centers to adopt a "living with COVID" policy. The result is that today Singapore is as vibrant a business and tourism destination as it was in 2019. Flights into and out of Changi International Airport are full. The shopping malls and transit hubs are packed with people, and life appears to have returned to normal. The only trace of the pandemic was evidenced by the mask mandate. Even that policy is expected to expire in the next few days.

It also was important for event organizers to keep the G2E Asia brand alive. Having been postponed since the onset of the pandemic, it was time for Asia's casino community to

reconvene. Even the best of social and business networks can grow brittle with the passing of too much time. Holding the conference was a necessary step and sent an important message across the region that the gaming industry is on a path to recovery.

The Trade Show

The trade show portion of the conference was small compared to those held in Macau, and tiny compared to G2E Las Vegas. While G2E Asia was always more about networking than the promotion of new gaming products, all of the major slot manufacturers had traditionally displayed their newest products. That was not the case in Singapore. While representatives from most manufacturers were in attendance, they wisely forewent the expense of shipping and staging their products at this year's event. Jumbo, Interblock, Weike Gaming, and Angel Group were examples of the few companies that brought products to the trade show, yet even their displays were small compared to what they normally bring to Macau.

In the defense of those companies that did not display, there was a great degree of uncertainty in the months leading up to the conference, with some doubting that it would actually take place. It was evident that gaming executives from Macau would be unable to attend given their travel restrictions. There was also some doubt that executives from Cambodia, Korea and the Philippines would show up, with inter-Asia travel only now returning to normal. It was prudent that most manufacturers chose not to display, and simply network with those executives that did show up.

The Conference

Organizers were also wise to downsize the educational program to better match forecasted attendance. Rather than offer multiple tracks over the course of the three-day conference, the program featured a single track of lectures and workshops. Peak attendance at any one session numbered around 200 delegates. Needless to say, the possibility of casino development in Thailand was one of the top areas of discussion. Japan was also discussed although that topic had long ago lost its luster.

The Unexpected Surprise

Without question, the single biggest news item to come out of G2E Asia arrived on the last day of the conference with the announcement that Andrew MacDonald, former Senior Vice President and Chief Casino Officer for Las Vegas Sands (LVS) and the man considered most responsible for the operational success of the Marina Bay Sands Casino, will be returning to Singapore gaming, this time to oversee gaming operations and casino marketing for Resorts World Sentosa.

Mr. MacDonald first joined Marina Bay Sands (MBS) in January of 2010 as Senior Vice President and rose to the rank of Chief Casino Officer of Las Vegas Sands, MBS's parent company. His unexpected departure in 2021 coincided with the sale of LVS's Las Vegas gaming and hospitality assets.

Even prior to the conference, there was a considerable amount of speculation where and when Andrew would re-emerge. The fact that he assumed a role at MBS's cross-town rival, a mammoth integrated resort that is part of one of the world's most powerful gaming brands, has already fueled a great deal of speculation as to the future of Resorts World Sentosa.

Both Resorts World Sentosa and Marina Bay Sands are finalizing their multi-billion expansion projects. Collectively, they will add thousands of hotel rooms, MICE space, arenas, entertainment venues, more retail and additional gaming space to the Singapore market. While MBS has historically garnered the majority of Singapore's gaming revenue, new amenities at both resorts coupled with the return of one of the world's most knowledgeable and respected casino executives may cause a shift in market share.

Whether G2E Asia returns to Singapore next year or resumes its place in Macau remains an open question, and is wholly dependent on Macau's and the PRC's future commitment to their Zero-COVID policy. While Singapore is one of the world's great international cities, Macau is Asia's gaming capital. G2E Asia rightfully belongs there. Let's hope it returns home next year.

Andrew Klebanow is co-founder and senior advisor at C3 Gaming (Casino Consultants Consortium), the largest and most diverse group of independent gaming consultants. He can be reached at Andrew@C3GamingGroup.com.
