AIIC discovers thailand

The purpose of an inter-regional meeting is discovery. AIIC funds are used to help members travel great distances in order to meet with colleagues they might not otherwise get to know. Examination of the usual list of pressing issues acquires greater depth of field with new participants from multiple cultures. You look around the room and you realize there is no majority, only various minorities contributing on an equal basis. It's a perfectly comfortable setting for an interpreter.

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The 2007 inter-regional [1] met in Bangkok with AIIC members from 17 countries present. The two regions featured were AIIC's newest - Turkey - and the vast Asia-Pacific, stretching from Australia to China. Myriad challenges facing interpreters working for private sector clients would be discussed over the weekend - newly developing markets in greater Asia, the role of professional conference organisers, new technologies and training, among others. But on the eve of these discussions, we got together with our partners from the larger meetings and conventions industry of Thailand to focus on the complementary roles we all play to keep the international conference sector purring. And with Bangkok intending to become a major convention hub, purr it must.

In fact, AIIC members in Thailand have been active for more than a decade promoting multilingualism and collaborating with Thai organisations, as Salma Tejpar-Dang, AIIC Vice-President and Council representative for Asia-Pacific pointed out in her welcoming address. And with Thailand right in the heart of our huge Asia-Pacific region, growth and an emphasis on quality in the Thai market will benefit all.

Minister of Tourism and Sports, H.E. Dr. Suvit Yodmani (right), was gracious in thanking AIIC for showcasing Thailand as a meeting venue. He reminded us that MICE (meetings, incentives, conventions & exhibitions) bring in more than $1 billion annually, and the government plans to raise that figure by lifting MICE visitors from 5% to 10% of all arrivals over the next 5 years. This goal is certainly feasible as the country has excellent infrastructure and human resources that have matured with the growth of tourism and an improving economy.

In the course of the session, we heard from all of the links in the MICE chain. Many of us sat back, amazed at not looking out at a meeting from inside a booth but sitting in the...

(from left) Salma Tejpar-Dang and Minister of Tourism and Sports, H.E. Dr. Suvit Yodmani
room as participants. Nonetheless, there was a booth in the room with our local colleagues providing ThaiEnglish interpreting in respect of our invitees' right to speak and listen to their own language - and in pro of mutual understanding.

The Thailand Convention & Exhibition Bureau (TCEB) and the Thailand Incentive & Convention Association (TICA) co-sponsored the session with AIIC. Suprabha Moleeratanond of TCEB offered an overview of the conference market in the country, pointing to TCEB as a one-stop shop as part of efforts to make Thailand a meetings hub. Vanida Tulalamba, Vice President of TICA, explained how her association helps its members (hotels, tour operators, PCOs, etc.) attract events to the country.

How a PCO operates to help a client plan, organise and successfully carry out its event was covered in detail by Joan Sarasin of Convention Organisers Co. Ltd. She stressed that a PCO needs to be an expert manager of a process that can extend over as many as three years.

The second session of the afternoon brought us insight into the work of other players in the expansive conference world. The essential part hotels play in the hospitality sector was brought home by Sukanya Janchoo of Dusit Thani Hotels & Resorts. Sumate Sudansa of Creative Destination Management spoke about the special world of incentive travel, emphasizing the need to understand the expectations and needs of clientele and to distinguish oneself from the competition, saying that it's a question of being "first class but different."

The role of the convention center was covered by Mike Kelly, Senior Vice President of Bangkok's Queen Sirikit National Convention Center. He shared the results of a study on conferences of international associations, a group likely to need interpretation services. While it is not surprising that 67% of all such meeting take place in Europe, Asia-Pacific's share is on the upswing. Thailand itself hosted 82 international associations in 2005, most of them in Bangkok, the fifth most popular venue in Asia after Singapore, Hong Kong, Seoul and Beijing. He closed by stressing how important having a community of qualified professional interpreters can be in attracting such meetings, and called on all to work together to move Bangkok up the list.

In the final session we heard from the interpreters themselves. Duangtip Surintatip gave a lively presentation on the history of interpreting in Thailand, and Damrongsak Bulyalert introduced the Thai Association of Conference Interpreters (TACI), founded in 2003 to promote quality interpreting in response to market demand. TACI will be cooperating with the new MA in Conference Interpreting, set to open in June 2007 at Chulalongkorn University, Thailand's most prestigious institute of higher education. Associate Professor Thanomnuan Ocharoen of Chulalongkorn's Chalermprakiat Center of Translation and Interpretation elaborated on the 2-year MA program, which has set stringent entry requirements and counted on Thailand's top professionals in establishing a curriculum and a faculty.

All of the presentations provoked questions and comments from the talkative group of interpreters and guests present. Microphones were passed quickly around the room, ensuring that everyone, including our colleagues in the booth, could hear. Communication was assured, and we all left feeling that we knew much more about the world of MICE.

But we didn't go far. The generous TCEB
and its Director General Kajit Habanananda (right) invited all to a reception where Thai hospitality brightened the evening and conversation continued among partners who now knew each other better than ever.

1. Previous inter-regional meetings have been held in Dakar (1993), Sydney (1999), Montevideo (2002) and Washington (2005).

**Recommended citation format:**