

Singapore's multibillion-dollar events industry has a hidden cost

The Republic's Mice sector has mastered the art of spectacle. Its next challenge is measuring the invisible cost behind it.

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Just weeks ago, the Formula One Singapore Grand Prix drew a sold-out crowd of over 300,000 attendees, adding to more than \$2 billion in tourism receipts since its debut.

Beyond the roaring engines and packed grandstands, the race exemplifies Singapore's prowess as a world-class host for large-scale events.

Almost 30 meetings, incentives, conventions and exhibitions (Mice) were held alongside it – including the Forbes Global CEO Conference, the Milken Institute's Asia Summit and Token2049.

But as Singapore celebrates its success as a global host, a harder question looms: Can this growth remain sustainable?

BALANCING GROWTH WITH GREEN GOALS

Behind every glittering summit or sold-out convention lies an environmental impact that often goes unnoticed. Every flight taken, meal served and light switched on adds to the carbon footprint.

Emissions from Singapore's multibillion-dollar Mice sector may be invisible to the naked eye, but they are far from negligible.

A Singapore Tourism Board (STB) study found that the average Mice attendee generates about 14kg of carbon emissions a day at a venue. However, this figure may count the emissions from only energy, water and waste, excluding major sources such as travel and accommodation.

In reality, the total footprint can be much higher. The Acumatica Summit 2025's sustainability report found that a four-day event with over 2,800 participants produced about 3,200 tonnes of carbon dioxide when travel, catering, freight and



Mercedes driver George Russell in action at the Singapore Grand Prix on Oct 5. If Singapore is serious about becoming Asia's most sustainable Mice destination, measuring emissions must become standard practice, say the writers. This will require both motivation and mandate. ST PHOTO: KEVIN LIM

other activities were included – roughly 12 times the average Singaporean's daily carbon footprint at 24kg of carbon dioxide. The figures underscore the heavy environmental toll of large-scale events.

Singapore faces a balancing act: maintaining its status as a leading global event hub, while aligning with its "City in Nature" identity under the Singapore Green Plan 2030.

The goal, set out by STB and the Singapore Association of Convention and Exhibition Organisers and Suppliers, is ambitious: to make Singapore the most sustainable Mice destination.

This requires accurate data to develop the right strategies. Recognising this, a carbon emissions calculator tailored for the Mice industry has been developed by the National University of Singapore's Sustainable and Green Finance

Institute (SGFIN). With just a few inputs – event duration, venue type and number of attendees – organisers can generate a detailed emissions breakdown and benchmark their results against comparable events worldwide.

When SGFIN tested the calculator at its Sustainability Summit 2025, the results were eye-opening. Participants were asked to guess the carbon footprint per attendee before seeing the actual data. Only 45 per cent guessed correctly – and some were off by as much as tenfold. Even sustainability professionals can underestimate the impact of events.

COUNTING WHAT MATTERS

With clear data, organisers can identify their biggest emission sources and act. For instance, a performer who flies commercial instead of by private jet can cut

transport-related emissions by up to 80 per cent.

Choosing venues powered by renewable energy or serving locally sourced food can also significantly shrink an event's footprint. Once numbers are on the table, decisions become deliberate rather than symbolic. Despite the tool's accessibility, promoting the calculator within the industry revealed several challenges. Many organisers told us that tight event timelines, limited manpower and fragmented data remain key obstacles. Some also expressed concern that disclosing emissions could invite public scrutiny or lead to higher operating costs.

If Singapore is serious about becoming Asia's most sustainable Mice destination, measuring emissions must become standard practice. This will require both motivation and mandate. Without monetary

rewards or mandatory regulation, the sustainability metrics related to the event often fall off the radar compared with other key performance indicators, such as the number of attendees and revenue.

One option is to link incentives to accountability. STB could require application for grants, like those given for Taylor Swift's concerts, to report event emissions using approved tools such as SGFIN's free calculator, which was developed as a public good. Those that do qualify for a "Sustainable Event" certification – akin to the Green Mark scheme for buildings.

Venues and hotels can help by automating energy data collection and sharing standardised reports, making it easier for organisers to track emissions. To encourage this effort, government agencies and independent non-governmental organisations and associations

can establish credible green schemes and promote venues with stronger environmental performance, raising industry standards and consumer awareness.

Training and industry support are also vital. Many organisers want to go green but lack the know-how. Regular workshops and best-practice guides could help integrate carbon tracking into planning, while showing that efficiency can cut both emissions and costs.

Flagship events like the Singapore FinTech Festival and the Singapore Grand Prix, as well as events supported or sponsored by the Government, could also lead by example by publishing their carbon footprints and reduction strategies. Transparency from high-profile organisers would set a new benchmark for the industry.

STAYING GLOBALLY COMPETITIVE

Greening the Mice sector is not about optics. Corporate clients and international organisers are increasingly demanding measurable proof of environmental responsibility. To stay competitive, Singapore's Mice industry must show that it can host big events smoothly and sustainably.

A recent Nature study estimates that each additional tonne of carbon emitted causes about US\$185 (S\$242) in societal damage. That number gives new weight to the invisible costs behind every high-wattage event.

Singapore has shown it already excels at other aspects of the Mice industry, such as infrastructure and logistics, to become a world-class host for large-scale events.

With Changi Airport's unmatched connectivity, venues such as Marina Bay Sands and Suntec Singapore, and a reputation for safety and efficiency, the Republic has become Asia's preferred host for major international gatherings.

Much is now at stake, considering that Singapore's tourism industry contributed nearly 10 per cent to gross domestic product, supports a workforce of 75,000, and that Singapore aims to triple Mice receipts by 2040.

With carbon footprint calculators readily available, Singapore already has the tools it needs to measure, compare and improve the emissions from Mice events. What is needed now is a collective will from policymakers, venue operators and organisers to make sustainability a part of how success is defined.

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