

*Industry Paper*

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# **Hosting Business Events in Time of Crisis - A Brief Overview of the Interview with an Event Practitioner**

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DOI: <https://doi.org/xx.xxxxx/xxx.xxxx.xxxxxx>

## Hosting Business Events in Times of Crisis - A Brief Overview of the Interview with an Event Practitioner

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### Industry Viewpoints

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#### How to cite this article:

Jie Min Ho, Chee Vui Ang and Shirley Yi Wen Yong, (2022), Hosting Business Events in Times of Crisis - A Brief Overview of the Interview with An Event Practitioner. *International Journal of Business Events and Legacies*, 1(1), 90-91.

#### DOI:

<https://doi.org/xx.xxxxx/xxxx.xxxx.xxxxxx>

**Date of Submission :** 2022-06-20

**Date of Acceptance :** 2022-08-23

**ABSTRACT:** The views of Mr Geoffrey Lee, Head of CRM and Market Intelligence with Business Events Sarawak (BESarawak), on Sarawak's current business event landscape are discussed. Notably, this industry perspective paper described the action taken by the business event industry to tackle the challenges in times of COVID-19 as well as the observed obstacles in positioning Sarawak as a leading business event destination.

### View Points

The views of Mr Geoffrey Lee, Head of CRM and Market Intelligence with Business Events Sarawak (BESarawak), on Sarawak's current business event landscape are discussed.

The business event industry in Sarawak is promising and it is confident that business events play a role in driving Malaysia's economic transformation post the pandemic. Importantly, business events are also significant to improve the state's legacy impact. To illustrate, the Minister of Tourism, Arts and Culture Sarawak, Datuk Haji Abdul Karim Rahman Hamzah said the events would rake in an estimated RM293.27 million in total economic impact, as well as RM159.38 million in expected direct delegate expenditure. Of the figure, over 17 million of total tax revenue would create over 27,000 job placements for Sarawakians in the years that the respective events are to be held (Chiam 2021).

In the year of 2021, Sarawak was seemingly doing well despite the COVID-19 impacts. The state managed to secure a total of 109 business events with an estimated RM365 million in total economic

impact, with RM21.4 million of it being tax revenue and 28,289 new job opportunities from 2020 to 2021 (Borneo Talk 2021).

“It hasn’t been easy”, claimed Mr Geoffrey Lee. “All of us from the tourism industry have to keep the business going and at the same time, stay relevant.” What eventually proved to work was the initiative to get the stakeholders from the local tourism industry to actively support one another from time to time. There’s a multiplier effect. If event organisers choose to host their local event at local hotels, the owner may hire local people, while the local employees may go to other nearby local stores.

Above all, Mr Geoffrey Lee does also notice a few long-term challenges on the road to marketing Sarawak as a leading business event destination. “People are confused with the term of business event,” said Mr Geoffrey Lee. Especially the youths, they do not have a specific idea in mind about the potential of working in the business event industry. It is a concern of BESarawak that they may not be getting enough youngsters in the future workforce. “Joining the business event industry has never been a mainstream career option. Youngsters, as well as their parents are more into jobs such as accountants and engineers,” illustrated Mr Geoffrey Lee. “That’s why we hope that through the introduction of International Journal of Business Events and Legacies (IJBEL), we can help creating awareness in the academia and among the university students.” The educational institutions are also encouraged to introduce relevant topics into their learning modules to build awareness.

An interesting quote by Mr Geoffrey Lee can be used to illustrate the importance of business events to Sarawak, as well as conclude this paper – to the state, “bread and butter is tourism, the spices are business events.”

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