
APOT.Asia samples Shanghai

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Joanne Cook, Managing Director of SIAL Middle East, and APOT Founder Keerthi "Happy" Hapugasdeniya at an evening out in the amazing city of Shanghai

From June 16 to 18, an intimate, casual gathering of industry figures toured the teeming city of Shanghai as part of the [Asia Pacific Onboard Travel](#) (APOT.Asia) group, sampling cuisine, seeing the sights and pondering the future of one of the world's most important aviation centers.

A fast-moving three days unfolded, mostly on the busy streets and highways of the city amongst its population of more than 26 million. During the second day, the group took to the road, and attendees spoke about their company histories and plans for future business in China and beyond.



APOT CEO and *PAX International* contributor Jeremy Clark, *gategroup* Chief Commercial Officer for Asia Pacific Franck Bouat, and *Diskomat's* Area Sales Manager Sven Hedell at the Robot.He restaurant

At the close of last year's event in Perth, Australia, APOT founder Keerthi "Happy" Hapugasdeniya announced Shanghai as the next venue. Organizers were faced with the challenges of a totally new and different environment and host country from the usual APOT networking gatherings. The meeting drew delegates from Europe, Vietnam, Singapore, Malaysia, Hong Kong, the U.S. and China, and representatives from caterers in Asia and India, as well as the Chief Commercial Officer of [gategroup](#) Asia Pacific, Franck Bouat.

This year the concept was a "conference on-the-go" with a bus replacing the traditional conference venue and a moving scene outside to keep the interest alive. APOT is as much about understanding and learning about the location of the forum as it is an opportunity to converse with industry peers. The first evening rounded out with a wonderful dinner at a well-known Shanghai restaurant near The Bund section of the city, hosted by Tomoko Fujisaki, Director of Sales Asia at [WESSCO International](#).



Tomoko Fujisaki, Director of Sales Asia at WESSCO International, and Keerthi Hapugasdeniya (HappyK) welcome APOT delegates to an opening night dinner in Shanghai

On the second day of the gathering, after APOT CEO Jeremy Clark welcomed all aboard the mobile boardroom, *PAX International's* Editor-in-Chief Rick Lundstrom kicked off the on-the-go presentations with some insights into China's aviation growth and forecasts supported by some astounding figures.

The presentation revealed that twenty-nine airlines are in service in the country and 216 airports are currently under construction within its borders. While still not operating under an Open Skies agreement, air travel between the U.S. and China (the world's two largest economies) has grown considerably in the last five years. At the end of 2018 three U.S. airlines – Delta Air Lines, United Airlines and American Airlines – and six Chinese carriers – Air China, China Eastern, Hainan Airlines, Xiamen Airlines and Sichuan Airlines – operated between the two countries. The number of nonstop routes between the two countries increased from only 10 in 2006 to 28 five years ago. The International Air Transport Association estimates that by 2022 U.S.-China air traffic will carry nearly 10 million passengers.

However, after several booming years, the National Travel and Tourism office in the United States reported that for the first time since 2003 the number of tourists from China to U.S. dropped by 5.7% last year. A strong U.S. dollar and trade tensions have been some of the reasons cited for the reduction.

After the delegates gathered at the Intercontinental Shanghai Expo Hotel, the first stop on the day trip was the [Tender Plus](#) meat processing plant. Chief Operating Officer Antonio Mesiano talked about the company's imported meat products, which he said are favored by the Chinese, often over locally produced goods. In the past, Tender Plus has supplied meat products to Delta Air Lines and Virgin Australia.

Lunch was at the fascinating [Robot.He](#) restaurant, operated by the country's e-commerce, retail and tech retail giant [Alibaba](#) and where food is ordered and managed using an app. While the visit revealed that the future of robotized hospitality still has a ways to go, it was nonetheless an insight into the direction China is moving.



Tony Mesiano (center) gave APOT delegates a tour of the Tender Plus meat processing plant in Shanghai. The company has supplied meat products to Delta Air Lines and Virgin Australia

During an afternoon drive through the city, passengers heard from gategroup's Chief Commercial Officer for Asia Pacific, Franck Bouat, on the industry's ambitions and challenges in the region. [Vietnam Airlines Caterers'](#) Bert Dinkel talked about the growth and changes in Vietnam. (For instance, he revealed that one Chinese airline is now the caterer's second biggest customer after Vietnam Airlines.) The crowd also heard from IT specialist Mohan Mathew, Director of [AeroChef](#), on the advantages that the better use of data and information is making in an ever more competitive business.

Onboard amenity specialists Ansen Wang of WESSCO International and Vanessa Xu of [FORMIA](#) both talked about their challenges working in China compared to the rest of the APOT regions and how Chinese airlines compare to other well-established regional carriers around the world.

An evening cruise on the Huangpu River offered delegates a look at the skyline of Shanghai, with its massive skyscrapers bathed in ever-changing light. The group was joined by the Chairman of [Castello Monte Vibiano Vecchio](#), Lorenzo Fasola Bologna.

APOT organizers are busy at work and plan to host another event next year at a to-be-determined Asian destination.



One event not to be missed was an evening cruise on the Huangpu River to view the skyscrapers of Pudong in their fully lit glory