

## **Marina Bay beckons as Singapore gears up for 'Davos in Asia'**

**John Geddie & Joseph Campbell**

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Once part of daily life for Singapore, conferences in the era of COVID-19 are a meticulously planned operation in the global business hub, which is due to host "Davos in Asia" in May.

After safety marshals check masks are properly fitted and social distancing adhered to, registration is accompanied by a swab of both nostrils by medics in top-to-toe protective suits.

Guests then wait 10 to 15 minutes for a rapid antigen test result and can proceed after receiving a text message that reads: "You're Okay!", accompanied by a smiley face.

"Singapore is just gearing up," said Irene Lim of think-tank Institute of Policy Studies, which this week held an event for around 250 local delegates at the city state's Marina Bay Sands complex, which has facilities for more than 45,000 conference attendees, a hotel, casino and restaurants.

Organisers of the World Economic Forum's annual meeting are also targeting the venue, sources told Reuters, to host the 2021 event after the gathering normally held in the Swiss Alpine ski resort of Davos was cancelled due to the COVID-19 crisis.

The WEF is also holding a virtual event this week, the time when global political and business leaders would normally gather amid high security in the remote Swiss town.

With Singapore's borders largely closed, and the pandemic still raging across the world, there is still significant uncertainty over plans for the island nation's 2021 alternative.

But its tentative restart of smaller conferences offers a glimpse into what Davos attendees might expect if they are able to travel safely and to meet in person rather than remotely.

Guests arriving at the glitzy Singapore complex, which had a starring role in the 2018 movie "Crazy Rich Asians", first have their temperatures and contact tracing devices, either a bluetooth-powered app or a pocket-sized dongle, scanned.

Then in the resort's ballroom red ropes section participants into 40-50 person groups to limit mingling, while questions from the audience trigger a frenzy of microphone cleaning by glove-wearing stewards.

In a country that has helped bring the coronavirus under control through its strict rules, there is also a reminder to guests that any breaches will not go unheeded.

A menu placed at each seat advertising a lunch of kale salad and salmon, includes an advisory saying the government may request footage of the event "to conduct checks and investigations on adherence" to safety measures.

"It's been quite a surreal experience. Quite different from what it was before," conference participant Ian Mak said.