

## Editor's comment from *City Profiles* Issue No. 22

### **What's in a name?**

When the name of the new world trade body intended to supersede the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) was first made public in 1994, few people in the travel and tourism industry understood the implications of calling it the World Trade Organisation – or WTO for short.

Of course, its name neatly expresses the function of the new organisation. The trouble is, there was already a WTO. Could this duplication of names be an oversight on the part of the GATT authorities? Or might it be due to lack of co-ordination between the relevant government administrations of member states? Not at all, it turned out. A spokesman for GATT went as far as to admit that the possible confusion with the other WTO, the World Tourism Organization, had been weighed, but was then dismissed – because it was deemed irrelevant.

So much for governments' recognition of tourism's importance to national economies. And, as the first WTO – or OMT, to use its French and Spanish acronym – pointed out, it was a double blow to the industry given that, in some countries, the national tourism administration comes within the ministry of trade.

### **Yet another WTO takes its place on the world stage**

But enough is enough. Now WTO/OMT has yet another WTO with which to compete for government recognition. Although it has kept a low profile until now, the Singapore-based World Toilet Organization has been in existence since 2001. Last month, it organised the first ever World Toilet Summit (not to be confused with the World Tourism Summit held this month in Brazil) – a "gathering of the key decision-makers, key officials and the movers and shakers" of the international toilet industry.

Flushed with the success of this event, the 20-member, non-profit organisation is now planning another major event – the first World Toilet Expo & Forum in Shanghai in May 2005. Among the issues to be discussed are the societal impacts of toilets and toilets as a tourism attraction.

Unsurprisingly, WTO/OMT has not made a stink about the emergence of another namesake. Perhaps it should learn to live with it – as it has with the world trade body. There are possible areas of co-operation, after all. The World Toilet Expo & Forum, for example, is being strongly supported by the Shanghai Tourism Board, which acknowledges that destinations and attractions with good toilet facilities will be the preferred holiday choice for tourists of the future.

So far, however, there are no signs of WTO/OMT's participation in the event, but collaboration may be around the bend. After all, tourism is very much on the minds of China's tourism authorities at the moment. Shanghai will face a real challenge in 2010 in terms of the level of facilities and services of its public and privately run toilets, since 140 million visitors are expected to visit the city during World Expo that year.

Even before that, in 2008, Beijing will be hosting the Summer Olympics. The city has reportedly upgraded many of its public toilets in recent years, and the authorities have announced they will spend Rmb400 million (US\$48 million) to renovate another 2,800 in the lead-up to the 2008 Games. This should help ensure that visitors and local residents alike enjoy the Games to the full.