

Chapter 1

FUNDAMENTALS OF MEETINGS, CONVENTIONS, AND EXHIBITIONS

A community is like a ship; everyone ought to be prepared to take the helm.

—Henrik Ibsen

IN THIS CHAPTER

We will explore:

- The generally accepted definitions of meetings, conventions, and exhibitions.
 - The vocabulary and key phrases commonly used in this industry.
 - The differences and similarities between a domestic meeting and an international meeting.
 - Identifying the purpose for an event.
 - Determining event frequency and duration.
 - Developing an organizational timetable.
 - Developing and implementing effective communications.
 - Managing program dynamics.
 - The role of the organizer/planner.
 - Networking effectively throughout the world.
 - Guidelines for selecting the best site.
 - Interfacing with destination marketers, hotels, and other venues.
 - Selecting and working with destination management companies (DMCs) and Professional Congress Organizers (PCOs).
 - Understanding the role of a DMC and a PCO.
 - Assessing and planning entertainment.
 - Guidelines for producing a safe and secure meeting, convention, or exhibition.
 - New technology and its role in managing events.
 - Understanding international currencies.
 - Developing budget procedures to produce the greatest return on investment (ROI).
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A global meeting, convention, or exhibition forms a temporal community. This temporary society has all the challenges and opportunities of more permanent societies. However, because it is temporary, it is different, and when a meeting, convention, or exhibition takes place in a foreign land, it can be very different indeed. This is the first book to provide the knowledge necessary to plan temporary global communities and/or societies that produce consistently successful, sustainable outcomes for the participants.

For the student or for the professional new to this type of event, it will be comforting to know that most of the planning parameters and operations methods that characterize domestic events also apply to those held in other countries. Meeting rooms and exhibit halls in most of the world are much like those at home. Menus and venues in Salzburg are not much different from those in Salt Lake City, and motorcoaches are pretty much the same the world over. After all, a meeting is a meeting whether it is held in Alexandria, Virginia, or Alexandria, Egypt, though some facets vary significantly according to venue. It is in the cultural variations, values, and customs that the main differences lie, and identifying those variants and learning how to manage them is the main purpose of this book.

This chapter is devoted to basics; it is written for meeting organizers who are planning a transnational or multinational meeting for the first time as well as for students enrolled in a hospitality/meetings curriculum. It is designed to serve as an overview of the basic elements that characterize international events.

There is no denying that a meeting convened in another country demands specialized knowledge on the part of the organizer. However, like any skill, this can be learned readily if one is given the necessary facts. A large proportion of the discipline in planning and staging the event applies, regardless of the site. It is the remaining specialized knowledge that pertains specifically to international events that needs to be learned. What follows is an overview of the fundamentals that characterize meetings, conventions, and exhibitions that are global in scope.

Before addressing those elements, it is important that there be consensus on the semantics. Terms such as *domestic*, *foreign*, *overseas*, *international*, *offshore*, and *multicultural* are used extensively and often erroneously. For the purpose of this book, they are defined as follows.

Overseas generally is used in North America to describe an event in which participants from, say, Canada or the United States travel offshore to another country. A more apt term would be *transnational*. Thus, a Canadian group meeting in Belize or Italian delegates convening a conference in Copenhagen would be deemed to be attending a transnational conference. In both instances, citizens of one country meet in another country.

International applies to events in which participants from two or more countries meet in a specific destination. Thus, a meeting of delegates from Canada, Mexico, and the United States held in Los Angeles would be an international event. However, because in common usage *international* applies to all these situations, this text will use the term *multinational* or *multicultural* to describe such meetings.

To distinguish the nature of the event further, the authors have limited the scope of this book to international events that meet the following criteria:

- Involves crossing national borders
- At least two days' duration in addition to travel days
- Fifty or more attendees
- A business agenda utilizing presenters

SHARPENING YOUR MEETING VOCABULARY

Understanding the meaning and proper use of terminology in one's own native tongue is difficult enough. Arriving at a consensus on the connotation of terms in a multinational context demands even greater accuracy on the part of organizers managing international events. For instance, a common misuse occurs even among experienced meeting professionals with respect to *podium*. That word has its roots in the Latin *pod*, referring to the foot. Hence the podium is what one stands on (also called a rostrum); one stands *behind* a lectern.

The term *congress* often is applied to international meetings in general, leading to confusion and misinterpretation. It is not a generic word like *meeting*, though it sometimes is substituted for it erroneously even by professionals who should know better. A congress is a scheduled, periodic meeting of delegates or representatives of interested groups to discuss a subject. Outside the United States, it is substituted for *convention*. The administrative staff of the organization sponsoring an international congress is the *secretariat*.

The *Manual of Congress Terminology*, published by the International Association of Professional Congress Organizers (IAPCO), tries to clear up some of the confusion, although this respected work uses *congress* in a generic sense. The manual's definitions encompass *assembly*, *colloquium*, *conference*, *congress*, *convention*, *exhibition*, *forum*, *seminar*, *symposium*, and other meeting formats in seven languages.

Other common terms evolve from usage. A *kick-off* or *launch*, for instance, generally describes a meeting organized to introduce a product and its marketing plan. Such an event is also motivational. In the United States, the term *convention* usually implies a meeting combined with an exhibition. Large conventions whose housing needs require several hotels in a location often are referred to as "citywides." Are those distinctions only a matter of terminology? Not really. Every type of meeting has its own purpose, format, requirements, timetables, and characteristics.

TYPES OF MEETINGS

Rodolfo Musco, CMP, CMM, founder of the Italian Association of Meeting Planners, analyzes several meeting types according to their objectives and parameters.

1. *Purpose.* A meeting may be held to inform, organize, debate, motivate, educate, communicate, or reach a decision. There is a similarity of purpose among a congress, a forum, and a symposium, which seeks to inform, communicate, and provide opportunities to debate issues. A conference is useful to inform and reach decisions, whereas a convention may be called to organize, inform, motivate, communicate, debate, and vote. The purpose of a seminar is to inform and educate. These distinctions are important because they influence timetables, room setups, speaker selection, and many other program decisions.
2. *Number of Participants.* Conferences, forums, and seminars usually are attended by a few dozen, whereas congresses and conventions have a large number of delegates. A symposium may have a large or relatively small attendance. Though these are subjective terms, one would not refer to a meeting of fewer than 100 persons as a congress.
3. *Frequency.* A convention usually is held annually, whereas a congress may be held annually, biannually, or on an ad hoc basis. A symposium also is held periodically, but conferences, forums, and seminars have no established frequency. They are called as needed or when deemed advisable.
4. *Duration.* Conferences normally last one day or more. Seminars can cover anywhere from one to six days. Symposia and conventions tend to last three to four days, and congresses may be three to five days, depending on the location and the topics to be covered.
5. *Organization Timetable.* There is no consensus on the time required to organize an event. A conference could be planned in as little as a few weeks. A forum or seminar requires two to six months. At least one year is needed for a symposium, and from one to four years for a congress or convention.
6. *Communications before the Event.* Premeeting communication for forums and conferences is minimal: Location, date and time, topics, speakers, and registration data are usually adequate. Conventions use a dedicated Web site and/or a series of mailings because program details are not included in the early information. Communications for symposia, seminars, and congresses must be very detailed because they influence the recipient's decision to attend.
7. *Program Dynamics.* There is an essential relationship between speakers and attendees that, if overlooked, could result in a failure. Delegates attend a seminar, symposium, or congress because they are interested in the subject and the speakers. Speakers are perceived as authorities. In most cases, a participant at such events has chosen to attend and has paid a registration fee. Interest in the issues, a need to form one's own opinion, and a desire to contribute to the ultimate decision move people to attend a conference or forum. Convention delegates, in contrast, have been called on to participate, with little or no opportunity to influence the dates, location, duration, or program content. Consequently, they tend to be more critical and analytical in their relationship to speakers.

It is important to understand the characteristics of various kinds of meetings and identify them correctly in communications, in promotional materials, and at industry educational events. For that matter, even journalists and authors of event-related texts should demonstrate a knowledge of the terminology in order to contribute to a better understanding of the profession.

GOING GLOBAL

A growing number of organizations convene meetings in other countries or organize in their own nations' events that are attended by people of diverse cultures. Corporations with global markets or affiliates, international associations, and professional societies and government entities involved in world affairs have an ongoing need to interact with a worldwide audience. The nature of those entities imposes on them an obligation to convene events in other countries or host multinational attendees in their own homelands. Thus, the meetings industry finds a British government agency exhibiting at a trade show in Japan; a Latin American pharmaceutical firm attending a medical congress in Zurich; a trade association based in Washington, DC, hosting its international membership at the Denver Convention Center; and a Taiwanese auto manufacturer convening its dealer network in Vancouver.

Aside from the usual matters applicable to choosing a destination, international events may be influenced by a variety of factors that may not apply to domestic meetings, such as the following:

- Visa and passport requirements
- Shipping and customs regulations
- Currency exchange fluctuations
- Host country political and threat issues
- Government-imposed travel restrictions
- Language considerations
- Cultural differences and taboos
- International protocol

NETWORKING

Nowhere is a network more valuable than in researching international meetings. Admittedly, one's most objective source of information is colleagues who have been there.

Meeting professionals begin with their personal database of acquaintances in industry organizations such as Meeting Professionals International (MPI), the Professional Convention Management Association (PCMA), and the American Society of Association Executives (ASAE) (see Appendix 1 for Web sites). They seek out fellow members who have planned events abroad or represent international hotels and destinations. They assess their experience and attendance at meetings industry educational events. Who were the presenters who spoke at international meetings? This is where the network begins.

Meetings industry publications periodically run updated destination features that offer helpful information, from cultural differences and travel tips to hotel and convention facility construction. Most of these magazines also publish annual directories as well as an annual index to articles. By the same token, attendance at industry expositions can be a valuable research tool if they happen to fall during the research phase. Annual tradeshow such as the Motivation Show (formerly IT&ME, the International Travel and Meetings Exposition) held in Chicago, IMEX in Frankfurt, EIBTM in Barcelona, LACIME in South America, and AIME in rotating cities in Asia are well attended by international exhibitors representing destinations, airlines, congress centers, hotels, and support services.

SITE SELECTION

Researching, studying, and evaluating a variety of destinations and venues within those destinations can seem an awesome task when the entire world is under consideration. However, there are a limited number of cities or regions that have the facilities and services needed to sustain the average international meeting.

The selection process begins with focusing on a particular region such as the Asia-Pacific region, Europe, or Latin America. Often the demographics or distribution of attendees will influence that choice. Time of year and climate also may influence the choice. Within the chosen region, several sites are selected for research.

Research starts with defining the event's parameters. The meeting's objectives and proposed dates, along with the number of attendees, their geographical distribution, and their profile, influence destination and venue choices. Other factors to be considered at this point are the following:

- *Requirements.* Estimated initial room block: the number of guest rooms, meeting rooms, exhibit space, food and beverage functions (F&B), support services, and special requirements.
- *Meeting history.* This is based on research and documentation of previous meetings of similar design, including date, site, room block and pickup (rooms actually occupied), room rates, and F&B expenditures. This information also allows prospective venues to estimate the meeting's value and provides negotiating leverage. Armed with these data, the meeting organizer narrows the scope of study by focusing on a specific region and country. Within each destination, research is concentrated on two or three sites or cities. It is those cities which will be the subject of further exploration.

The old burden of digging through voluminous files or thick directories has been lightened by the nearly universal accessibility of Web sites that feature comprehensive details, function space floor plans, pictures, and even virtual tours. Using the resources of the Internet, a meeting planner usually selects three or four hotels in each venue that have the required room capac-

ity and meeting space and are within the budget parameters. This research customarily is followed by a Request for Proposal. The RFP usually is e-mailed (occasionally faxed) to select venues, to DMCs, or to convention and visitors bureaus (CVBs). If international chain hotels are in the select list, their regional sales representatives often are contacted for rates and available dates.

Venues that have the necessary dates, space, and rates specified in the RFP respond with a detailed proposal. Upon reviewing these documents, most meeting organizers narrow the choices to those they feel best fit their needs. At that point a physical inspection of the destination and candidate venues is arranged, usually through an intermediary such as a convention bureau, a DMC, or a particular hotel property.

SCHEDULING SITE INSPECTIONS

As choices are refined further on the basis of responses, a site visit is scheduled to the city and the properties that best meet the organization's needs. Hotel and CVB representatives are advised and are given meeting histories in advance. The meeting organizer contacts support services on site to ascertain reputation, fees, and capabilities.

DESTINATION MARKETERS

To aid event planners, most meeting destinations have an active tourist office and/or convention bureau staffed by competent, multilingual professionals. They also tend to staff offices in major cities, and most attend and exhibit at industry trade shows. These organizations assist planners with detailed information on their city or region and arrange for site inspection visits. Destination marketers also assist with promotional support: shells (four-color printed destination flyers or brochures with blank spaces for imprinting sponsor's logo or text), brochures, maps, CDs, and DVDs as well as mailing services.

Federations of convention bureaus such as the Asian Association of Convention and Visitors Bureaus (AACVB) and the European Federation of Conference Towns (EFCT) serve their members by focusing their marketing efforts. They sponsor comprehensive databases on their member cities' resources for events. Similarly, independent marketing entities that represent various destination resources, such as hotels and DMCs, are a valuable source of general information.

PROGRAM PLANNING

As a rule, the meeting program for an association is a joint effort of a program committee, which is designated for each event, and the meeting planner. Corporate meeting programs usually are developed by the sponsoring department or division in conjunction with a meeting planner who is an employee of the company or an independent professional who provides planning services on a contract basis. The program is the rationale for the meeting and its most

important element. After all, people attend because they are interested in hearing what the meeting sponsor has to communicate.

In multicultural events, language is a key consideration. English has become the universal language of business and communications; however, the organizers must take into consideration the audience demographics and comprehension levels of the attendees. If the official language of the conference is not the native language of the majority of the attendees, it is advisable to arrange for professional translation of conference materials and provide simultaneous interpretation of select presentations, if not the entire program.

PROGRAM ELEMENTS

Following is a basic overview of program elements as they pertain specifically to international events:

Scheduling flexibility. Because attendees may have traveled long distances over several time zones, it is customary for the first day to be free of any demanding social or educational programming, although a welcome reception is in order. The same principle applies to presenters. Unless they are local, they should plan to arrive a full day before their presentations. The subsequent business agenda should be flexible, and its content should provide added value for delegates whose costs are substantially higher at transnational events. It is important to avoid overprogramming so that attendees can interact with one another and so that they and their companions can shop, sightsee, and enjoy the attractions of an international venue.

By the same token, it is customary at international association events to offer delegates the option of pre- and postconference travel opportunities. It would be counterproductive to assemble a large number of travelers in another country and deny them the opportunity to see some of its primary attractions. Unfortunately, this is often the case with corporate meetings.

Session formats. At international congresses the emphasis is on plenary sessions, although some small group conferences may be scheduled as well. Corporate meetings run the gamut from general session presentations to numerous small breakout group workshops and often combine the two.

Program materials. To avoid or minimize shipping costs, meeting professionals find it cost-effective to have program materials such as attendance rosters, programs, handouts, and evaluation forms printed on-site. They verify during the site inspection that competent printing services are available. Masters and camera-ready graphics or discs containing those elements are mailed or downloaded to the designated printer, who produces and returns proof sheets. On approval, the material is printed and delivered to the site.

A resource that is appreciated by delegates is a meeting syllabus. Presenters are asked in advance of the meeting to submit a written résumé of their

topics. The résumés are reproduced, bound, and distributed on-site, provided on a CD or occasionally available on the organization's Web site for the attendees to download at leisure. As a rule, they are published in the conference language, but translations may be offered if there is sufficient demand to cover the cost. Audio and video recordings may be available to attendees for the same purpose.

LANGUAGE APPLICATIONS

In all multinational meetings the organizers designate the official conference language. However, depending on attendee demographics, the organizers may arrange for interpretation and translation into other languages when the demographics indicate that some delegates, although multilingual, are not fluent in the conference vernacular.

Translation. Written materials intended for multinational audiences may need to be translated as the numbers in each language group dictate. Those items may include marketing literature, the conference program, the attendee roster, handouts, proceedings, exhibit literature, and other printed matter germane to the conference. In addition to the cost of translation, proofreading and printing costs call for a higher budget.

Interpretation. For seminars and breakout sessions at which audiences are smaller and only two language groups are represented, consecutive interpretation may be employed. This requires the presenter to pause frequently to allow the interpreter to translate. However, in general assemblies, simultaneous interpretation (S/I) is the rule. For these sessions, the program will designate available languages with each one's channel number, and delegates are given multichannel headsets.

Professional interpreters in sound isolation booths interpret the speaker's message as it is presented. Because this is very demanding, each language requires two interpreters who work as a team, giving each other breaks when necessary. As a general rule, a skilled professional can interpret highly technical material for 20 to 30 minutes before requiring a break. To facilitate accurate interpretation, presenters are required to provide interpreters with a copy of their talks and any visuals in advance. Budgeting for S/I includes interpreter fees, travel, and lodging as well as equipment rental.

CULTURAL CONSIDERATIONS

Even experienced meeting planners need to be reminded to consider cultural differences as they pertain to program planning. For instance, the "working lunch" that is often a part of North American gatherings is anathema at multicultural assemblies. Program organizers and speakers alike need to be aware of differences in learning styles among various cultures.

Those differences also influence audience participation. For example, the members of some Asian cultures are reluctant to speak out among foreigners

for fear of losing face. Meeting organizers find that interaction and discourse are best achieved in small, informal discussion groups at social events away from the meeting room.

PREPARING PRESENTERS

Speakers, panelists, and discussion leaders who are not accustomed to addressing multinational audiences need to be briefed. To ensure that their messages are received and understood, use the following checklist (Figure 1-1) to prepare the presenters.

SOCIAL AND RECREATIONAL PROGRAMS

A meeting in a distant venue is an added value for delegates and guests. It would be counterproductive to have people travel great distances to an exciting destination and then spend all their time in meeting rooms. Therefore, meeting planners give visitors an opportunity to interact. It is customary at such events to schedule an international reception on the arrival night. Delegates also should be afforded the opportunity to enjoy, historical, cultural, and recreational sites at or near the conference venue. An afternoon or evening at leisure enables visitors to enjoy the area's restaurants, entertainment, and cultural amenities. As a rule, planners contract with a local DMC to organize and supervise these activities.

ENTERTAINMENT

DMCs also can be helpful in contracting entertainment at distant venues. This may run the gamut from a dance band, a comedian, or a magician to a complete folkloric show. Meeting professionals are sensitive to cultural taboos and are careful to avoid acts that may offend the audience. They routinely audition performances before engaging entertainment. Because booking entertainment involves contracts, it is best to work through a local DMC who is familiar with contract laws.

- Make use of visual aids to illustrate and clarify key points
- Use distinct, idiom-free language. Avoid slang and colloquialisms
- Adopt a global perspective and forgo provincial references
- Provide handouts and an outline or abstract
- Repeat questions to ensure they were heard and understood
- Summarize key points
- Conform to protocol

Figure 1-1 Checklist for Preparing Presenters

SAFETY AND SECURITY

Safety and stability of the meeting venue are among the organizers' prime criteria in site selection. For international destinations, they routinely consult U.S. State Department advisories and country-desk officers. Some contract with professional security services for threat assessments of sites under consideration. On site, depending on the sensitivity of the event, they consult local law enforcement officials and may contract for appropriate security resources. Law enforcement personnel also can be helpful in identifying unsafe areas in metropolitan centers. During site inspection visits, the meeting professional also conducts a safety inspection of the meeting venue and meets with facility security officers to evaluate their emergency response plans.

Health problems and medical crises can be minimized if they are anticipated. Delegates routinely are given predeparture information on basic security and safety precautions. They are advised of travel necessities such as prescription copies, allergies, travelers medical insurance, and spare eyeglasses. Emergency notification information is solicited at registration.

Even the safest meeting venue can be subject to unanticipated weather conditions, natural disasters, labor disputes, terrorist acts, and similar calamities. Anticipating those contingencies, many organizations routinely include event cancellation insurance in their meeting budgets.

CUSTOMS, CURRENCY, AND CONTRACTS

Attendees who are new to foreign travel and even some who are not should be advised well in advance of departure of the host country's customs and immigration regulations, especially those covering passports, visas, and prohibited items. They need to know about currency exchange and be aware that many countries charge a flat tax on purchases that may range as high as 25 percent. Called VAT, IVA, or GST, these taxes sometimes can be reclaimed by the individual and/or the meeting planner when he or she leaves the country. However, VAT reclaim is not offered everywhere, the paperwork can be daunting, and the length of the reimbursement process can range from months to years, depending on the country and the complexity of the claim.

Those rules are also important for the meeting staff in terms of payment for goods and services, shipping and customs fees, and documentation for shipments and restricted items. With regard to shipping and customs fees, most planners find it expedient to work with a freight forwarder who will prepare the necessary documents and oversee shipments. The most useful and reliable freight forwarders have corresponding customs brokers in the destination country who will receive the shipment, process the required customs documents, and arrange delivery to the meeting venue. This is especially important when exhibits are a part of the meeting.

Currency fluctuations can have a dramatic impact on meeting budgets, especially those which involve months or even years to implement. Meeting professionals routinely budget a contingency of 15 to 25 percent and use a

variety of financial tactics to protect the budget from cost overruns. Multinational accounting firms, currency brokers, and the international departments of commercial banks are reliable sources of information on banking abroad, paying suppliers, and general financial management.

MARKETING

Marketing the event entails attracting delegates, providing them with detailed information on the program and speakers, and supplying appropriate forms for responding. Although e-mail and Web site utilization are virtually universal, many organizations continue to augment them with print media. Use the checklist in Figure 1-2 to incorporate the best practices into your marketing marketing messages.

Marketing media and literature should reflect the same cultural sensitivity as program presentations. If the material is in English, the designer needs to recognize that the recipient may not have a good command of the language. Acronyms, words with a double meaning, colloquial speech, and the term *foreign* should be avoided.

REGISTRATION AND HOUSING

Design of the registration form should reflect cultural competence. Nicknames and terms such as *first* and *last names* are inappropriate for multicultural events. *Given name* and *family name* are the proper terms in this context. In designating an address, *state/province* and *postal code* are proper usage. If registration fees are charged, details should include the amount for each delegate, early registration discounts, guest fees, currency, and forms of payment and deadlines.

The same thing applies to housing reservations. In addition, registrants should be advised that one group rate for singles and doubles is rare. In some countries double occupancy entails a premium for the second person. This is the case because outside the United States, hotel room rates routinely include

- A theme graphic incorporating event name, location, and dates
- Motivational message describing benefits of attending
- Overview of the business agenda and social and recreational programs
- Program highlights including presenters and a précis of each topic
- Information about the destination, accommodations, and travel options
- Host country's historical, language, and cultural characteristics
- Passport and visa requirements and health information
- Currency exchange, banking hours, and holidays
- Telephone and Internet access, electrical voltage, required adapters
- Response forms for registration and lodging, including fees and room prices

Figure 1-2 Checklist for Marketing Messages

breakfast, and in older European hotels especially, a double room is usually larger than a single room, which often contains only one twin bed. Housing request forms should explain such differences and list all rate options.

As in domestic venues, planners frequently find that the total number of rooms listed for a hotel may not be a reliable gauge of its capacity for a meeting group. The number of guest rooms a hotel will commit to group business varies with season and other commitments such as tour groups.

FOOD AND BEVERAGE

Meal functions can give attendees an opportunity to experience some of the unique cuisine of the host country. Serving local specialties and beverages also can effect savings in food costs. Serving times also vary according to local custom. In Spain, for instance, no cosmopolitan person would consider having dinner before 10 P.M.

Dietary customs vary greatly in some cultures. It is the meeting planner's responsibility to ascertain attendees' dietary restrictions (such as shellfish allergies and gluten or lactose intolerance) and convey that information to the chefs. Although vegetarian regimens are readily accommodated in most venues, albeit subject to interpretation, low-carbohydrate menus most likely will not be prevalent.

To take full advantage of the benefits of another culture's cuisine, meeting professionals arrange with the DMC to offer off-site functions. This may take the form of a dinner at a historic site, a museum, a castle, or a riverboat cruise. Another popular activity is a conducted dine-around that allows participants to enjoy some of the area's restaurants. In briefing delegates on local customs, it should be pointed out that in many countries the total cost of the meal is *service compris*, meaning that tax and gratuities are included. However, a nominal tip for good service is customary.

TRAVEL RESOURCES: AIR AND GROUND

Airline Services

Qualifying and selecting an official carrier for international flights is just as useful as it is for domestic travel. The designated airlines make concessions on fares and other services in anticipation of volume passenger revenues. However, this is not as simple with global travel. For a meeting convened in, say, Helsinki, with delegates departing from points in the Americas, Europe, Africa, and the Middle East, there may not be a single airline that serves all gateways. Code sharing among noncompeting carriers reduces the problem, but some travelers may have to take flights that do not make fare concessions. Destinations served by multiple carriers offer more competitive fares or more flexible terms.

Time of year also has an impact on airfares, just as it does with hotel rates, although this varies with the destination. Buenos Aires in July (midwinter) will be far more competitive than Amsterdam, where July is the height of the tourist season.

There are concessions other than low fares available from airlines, including marketing assistance, discounted freight rates, upgrades for VIPs, and complimentary or reduced-fare staff travel. The airlines also may offer passenger amenities such as use of club lounges, assistance with customs clearance, and group baggage handling.

Meeting professionals prepare for negotiating with potential carriers before meeting dates are firmed up, knowing that time of travel can have an impact on pricing. Other data they need to have include the following:

- Range of acceptable dates
- Originating gateways and approximate numbers from each one
- Percentage of coach, business class, and first class passengers

WORKING WITH PCOS AND DMCS

A PCO or DMC can be an invaluable asset to a meeting planner, particularly in another country. Their knowledge of the language and customs and familiarity with the destination, its attractions, and its support services relieve the organizer of much of the stress an unfamiliar site can engender.

PCOs who specialize in international meetings are generally experienced independent entrepreneurs. They can serve as an adjunct to the meeting staff, offering management and financial services as well as liaison with suppliers.

A reliable DMC has the same professional traits and serves as an expert coordinator of transportation and recreational services. In addition, DMCs frequently provide an on-site hospitality desk staffed by multilingual professionals who are thoroughly familiar with the destination and its attractions.

MEETING TECHNOLOGY

Dependable communication technology, which is vital at domestic events, becomes critical when the meeting venue is in another country. The need to communicate, illustrate, and convey information in an effective way takes on a higher meaning when the organization is in an unfamiliar locale conveying information to a multicultural audience or accessing data from sources around the globe.

DATA TRANSMISSION

High-speed broadband Internet connection is a valuable asset when an organization operates at its home base. Halfway around the world, it is indispensable. There is considerable variance in access, quality, and cost of services in meeting venues around the world. This asset is so important to the success of a meeting that it often is foremost on a corporate meeting professional's checklist at the RFP phase. Corporate planners especially often disqualify an

otherwise acceptable venue if broadband connectivity is not available to the attendees in both the meeting space and the sleeping rooms.

The Internet plays a vital role in the management, logistics, and administration of the event, enabling organizers to access vital data from the home database and industry Web sites. It also has become an essential resource in conveying information to attendees and presenters alike.

PRESENTATION TECHNOLOGY

Laptop computers and streaming video for the most part have replaced the formerly ubiquitous slide and overhead projectors. Speakers are able to prepare elaborate presentations using computers or access a vast network of visual images from a wide variety of data banks to enhance their presentations.

Most meeting venues around the world offer the customary audiovisual and technical products as well as the technicians needed to operate them. Professional-quality sound systems, video projection, wireless interpretation networks, and interactive response systems, which once were considered advanced technology, are now standard fare in many countries.

There is a caveat, however. Meeting organizers need to be aware of differences in electrical current and video standards (including DVD) and related technological variances. A video recorded in Canada or the United States, whether on tape or on a DVD, is not compatible with a system in Germany or Australia.

EXHIBITIONS

If any single feature sets exhibition centers in Asia and Europe apart from their counterparts in North America, it is their immense size. Amsterdam, Berlin, Hamburg, Hong Kong, Nice, Singapore, and Tokyo are among the cities that boast megacenters that dwarf even Chicago's McCormick Place, the largest in America.

These megacenters, most of which expanded or came on line in the past two decades, are distinguished not only by their size but by their technological advances. Designed to cater to international exhibitors and audiences, they are equipped with sophisticated systems that include state-of-the-art auditoriums with dedicated simultaneous interpretation capability, subfloor channels for exhibit utilities, and data transmission and security systems that permit remote monitoring of all areas. Some offer rental of PDAs, which can be programmed with full data on any exhibition, replacing the traditional printed exhibit manual.

There are differences as well in how exhibitions operate and how they are configured. In most of Europe, the customary "pipe and drape" so familiar in the U.S. exhibit booth (called a "stand") is replaced by a hard-wall structure built on site.

IN CONCLUSION

This chapter has pointed out some of the many characteristics of international meetings from both a philosophical and a logistical viewpoint. When Christine Duffy, CEO of Maritz Travel and a world-class conference organizer, was asked to characterize the consummate global meeting executive, she provided the following profile: “Successful international event planners anticipate the learning process. They study their industry colleagues’ attitudes, their culture, their values. And they adapt accordingly in order to build a mutually rewarding relationship.”

That distinction has to do with the meeting professional’s attitude. Most planners exhibit an inquisitiveness about the regions and cultures in which they function. They genuinely care about the people. This concern is communicated to those with whom they interact and is reciprocated. Europeans and Latin Americans have an expression for this kind of person: “simpatico.” The most successful international planners are those who recognize that *different* does not mean better or worse; it just means different. By embracing the diversity of the countries in which they work rather than expecting everything to be “just like home,” these professionals enrich not only their own professional careers but also the programs they plan and manage.

KEY POINTS

Global events may take many different forms, depending on locale, objective, format, program dynamics, and attendee demographics.

Factors that distinguish such events from their domestic counterpart include immigration and customs regulations, currency, political climate, and language and cultural differences.

Organizers research and make use of a variety of networks and resources during the planning stage to select a site for the event.

The program is the main focus of any meeting or convention. When the audience composition includes people of various nationalities, factors such as interpretation and speaker orientation must be taken into consideration.

The presence of participants with different cultural backgrounds affects all aspects of the event, including registration, program content, audience dynamics, protocol, meal planning, and entertainment.

To the customary risks characteristic of domestic events must be added a thorough assess-

ment of potential threats and emergencies that are specific to a foreign destination, including safety, health, weather, crime, and political stability.

Comprehending currency instruments and differences in contract law and practices is essential to avoid budget overruns and misunderstandings.

Marketing to multicultural audiences requires a distinct perspective and methods that account for language and cultural differences.

Attention to detail at the preevent planning stage pays dividends during operations.

When planning exhibitions, organizers need to be aware of differences in facilities, exhibit configurations, nomenclature, and operations.

In planning and arranging air travel, consideration is given to widely dispersed origination points. Long-haul flights and multiple-time-zone travel have an impact on the program.

Variations in electric current, bandwidth access, and video standards affect data transmission and audiovisual technology. Advance knowledge of those variations is essential.

CHAPTER GLOSSARY

- APEX Fare.** Reduced advanced purchase excursion fare offered by international air carriers.
- Bank draft.** A bank document authorizing the holder to draw on funds through another financial institution.
- Banquet event order (BEO; now called event order).** A form prepared for each event by the facility confirming room setup, meals, beverages, staging, equipment, price, and related details. Also called a function sheet or résumé.
- Carnet.** A customs document that permits the holder to import merchandise or equipment duty-free for a defined period. A bond is posted to guarantee reexport. This is essentially a visa for goods and equipment.
- Committed capacity.** The number of guest rooms a hotel will commit to a meeting group at any given time.
- Delegate.** Voting representative at a meeting. A generic reference to person attending an international meeting.
- Demipension.** A room rate that includes breakfast and dinner. In North America it is called the Modified American Plan (MAP).
- Destination.** Country, region or city under consideration for an event.
- Destination Management Company (DMC).** Usually a locally based firm staffed by experienced, multilingual guides and operations personnel familiar with the area's attractions. DMCs organize theme events, leisure activities, and off-site tours and also provide airport transfers and ground transportation to and from off-site events.
- Family name.** The preferred term for "last name" on registration documents.
- Force majeure.** A contract clause limiting liability for event cancellation due to circumstances beyond both parties' control: war, strike, natural disaster, acts of terrorism, and so on.
- Ground operator.** Similar to a DMC. A company or individual providing ground transportation.
- Head count.** The total number of people attending a meal or event.
- Head tax.** A fee charged in some countries for arriving and departing passengers.
- Interpretation.** Oral translation to another language or several languages.
- Long haul.** Flights involving more than five time-zone distances.
- Pickup.** The number of guest rooms actually occupied in a room block.
- Plenary session.** General assembly of all participants. Also called a general session.
- Proceedings.** An official published transcription of all full conference sessions.
- Satellite meeting.** A seminar or symposium on a related topic occurring before, during, or after the main meeting.
- Service compris.** A menu designation indicating that a gratuity is included in the price.
- Threat assessment.** An analysis of an area or venue that is conducted by a professional security firm to identify risks and potential dangers.
- Translation.** Conversion of written material to another language.
- Turnaround (turnover).** Time required to break down and reset a room for an event.
- VAT.** Value-Added Tax charged on products and services. Also known as IVA in Spain, Portugal, Italy, and Latin America and GST in Canada.
- Venue.** Physical meeting site: a hotel, conference center, and/or facility such as a congress center.

PASSPORT

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