

*in*VOYAGE

ANNUAL REPORT

Global trends and inspiration for the luxury events and incentives market



FOREWARD

W

here did the last year go and when did the inVOYAGE

community become such an amazing collective of thought-leaders?!?!?

The inVOYAGE Annual Report focuses exclusively on the luxury incentives and events market and is more comprehensive and thought provoking thanks to the incredible contributions from over 150 events professionals and thought-leading articles from the likes of CWT M&E, BCD M&E, CR Worldwide and Top Banana.

We've spent the last six years building the strongest collective of luxury event professionals across the globe – many of whom have contributed to this report and thanks also go to our editor Susie Harwood for pulling all this together.

From Stockholm to Singapore and London to Los Angeles, events professionals have been surveyed and interviewed to bring you a truly global perspective on the current and future trends in luxury incentives and events.

Our research reveals that the luxury events sector is experiencing solid growth as corporate brands increasingly recognise the value of face-to-face events for tapping into the growing experience economy and engaging and rewarding their employees and customers.

Event professionals remain optimistic about the future, with many forecasting further growth in 2020 and beyond. But challenges remain. The coronavirus outbreak that has come to the fore since we carried out our research and created much of the content for this report, is posing huge challenges for the events and travel industries worldwide, resulting in event



cancellations and varying levels of uncertainty.

From a global perspective, sustainability continues to be a key trend, posing both challenges and opportunities for businesses within the luxury events sector. Since last year's Annual

Report there is a far greater desire among all sections of our community – corporate, agency and supplier – to incorporate CSR and sustainability into their incentives and events programmes.

The report also explores the top ten trends set to shape the incentive experience over the next decade, uncovers which destinations are currently in favour for luxury events, spotlights the six hottest emerging MICE destinations, and reveals the top ten hotel openings that luxury event planners are most excited to check out in 2020.

It's no coincidence that we're taking inVOYAGE to Mykonos in Greece this year which finds itself listed as one of the top trending luxury incentive destinations.

Thanks again to all our great contributors and I hope you enjoy the report. Be it via our annual event, our weekly inSPIRE edit or social channels, we'd love you to connect with inVOYAGE and join our growing collective of luxury #EventProfs!

Happy reading,

Richard Joslin

RICHARD JOSLIN

Co-Founder & CEO, inVOYAGE

“ From Stockholm to Singapore and London to Los Angeles, events professionals have been surveyed and interviewed to bring you a truly global perspective on the current and future trends in luxury incentives and events. ”

CONTENTS



Contributors



SUSIE HARWOOD

Editor, inVoyage



DAVID GOULD

CEO of CR Worldwide



IAN CUMMINGS

CWT Meetings & Events
Global VP, Commercial

"Witnessing climate related incidents on a global scale should ensure we all have a deep commitment to sustainability within our lives and our industry should lead by example. We're pleased to share our insights with the inVOYAGE community."



JOHN KELLY

Snr. Director,
Marketing EMEA,
BCD Meetings & Events

"Sustainability is the single biggest issue in M&E right now and it is vitally important that we address this area now. I am passionate about addressing change and I'm grateful to inVOYAGE for supporting this."



JEMMA PEERS

Client and Commercial
Director, Top Banana



4 TRENDS

- 5 Top-line trends in the global luxury events market
- 9 Top 5 challenges for luxury event planners
- 12 Regional view
- 16 Ten incentive travel trends for the next decade
- 22 A work-life blend: adapting to a generation of wellbeing

25 DESTINATIONS AND VENUES

- 26 Top destination trends for 2020
- 30 Top six emerging destinations for 2020
- 37 Top ten hotels 2020

43 SUSTAINABILITY

- 44 No going back: Sustainability and CSR are here to stay!
- 46 The business benefits of embedding sustainability
- 48 15 top tips for more sustainable events
- 50 The challenges of delivering an event with sustainability at its heart



TRENDS




Top-line trends IN THE GLOBAL LUXURY EVENTS MARKET

2019 was a strong year for luxury events and incentives across the globe, and the outlook remains largely positive for 2020 and beyond.

Our exclusive research (based on a survey of more than 120 global luxury event professionals followed by in-depth interviews with around 30 senior agency representatives) reveals that more than half (59%) of luxury event professionals saw an increase in the number of events organised or hosted last year. Some 30% reported no change, while only 11% reported a decrease in the number of luxury events.

For 2020, 62% expect the number of luxury events they organise/host to rise, with 32% predicting no change and just 6% a decrease. Scott Cullather, CEO at INVNT says the events industry is growing because companies are increasingly seeing the value of face-to-face. "To put it simply, events are no longer an after-thought tacked on to an overarching marketing budget – the most successful brands are actively investing and ensuring they form a central part of it".



Event budgets will rise in 2020 and beyond because consumers are continuing to seek out live experiences over material objects. 

Scott Cullather, CEO at INVNT

Budgets are predominantly holding steady with some growth – 29% reported an increase in luxury event budgets in 2019 compared with 2018, with almost half (49%) stating that budgets stayed the same, and 22% seeing a decrease. Budgets in 2020 will stay the same according to 55% of survey respondents, with around a third (34%) expecting budgets to rise and 11% predicting a decrease.

Cullather is firmly in the budget increase camp. “Event budgets will rise in 2020 and beyond because consumers are continuing to seek out live experiences over material objects. In positive news for our industry, there are countless reports and sources that support this. Forbes, for example has stated that 74% of Americans now prioritise experiences over products, and Fast Company is predicting that experience economy spending will reach \$8 trillion by 2030,” he says.

“While consumers of all ages have a part to play here, it’s important we pay close attention to the experience hungry, purpose orientated millennials and Gen Zs, who are fast becoming our two most powerful demographics. They are soon to be – and in many cases already are – our key purchasers and decision-makers.”

RISING COSTS AND EXPECTATIONS

Other luxury planners are less positive, and even those that are seeing budgets rise say that the extra cash is often being eaten up by increased costs. “Budgets are increasing, however the prices for hotels,



62%

of luxury event professionals expect the number of luxury events they organise/host to rise in 2020

59%

saw an increase in the number of events organised or hosted last year



restaurants, airlift, excursions and activities are also higher. This means we essentially have the same money to spend on incentive travel programmes,” says Joost de Meyer, chairman and CEO of US-based First Incentive Travel.

One of the key challenges outlined in last year’s inVOYAGE report was client budgets not matching expectations, which continues to be a huge issue in 2020. It’s becoming increasingly difficult for agencies to go bigger and better and keep delivering that all important wow-factor when there’s no more cash available (see top five challenges feature on page 9).

Charlotte Gentry, founder and CEO of London-based Pure Events says that while she’s not necessarily seeing budgets grow, clients are looking for greater value from the events they are doing. “Whatever their budget looks like – they want more value and a greater level of experience. We are still having to work harder for the budgets we are being given. It’s rare these days that a client gives you a budget and says off you go. The major trend is strategic analysis and ROI – they need to know the return they are getting,” she explains.

Many of the agencies we spoke to are also seeing a shift in how budgets are allocated, with more emphasis placed on the experience than flights and hotels. “Budgets are increasing on the whole, however funds are redirected to areas where results are more tangible. For example, preferred destinations with more on offer from an experience perspective, and more budget allocated to areas such as F&B concepts, entertainment, activities and less so on venues/ hotels and production,” says Chantal Challenger, regional account manager at BCD Meetings & Events in Asia.

TRENDS

BI WORLDWIDE’s events design director EMEA, Katrina Rannard agrees, adding: “Where budgets are fixed, we are noting that this all-important unique guest experience is not being diluted, rather attendee numbers or event duration are being reviewed. The guest experience is the primary motivator.”

SHORT-HAUL VERSUS LONG-HAUL

This budget shift towards experience, combined with rising costs, is in turn resulting in a rise in short-haul events and incentives. “We are still really struggling to get people to go long-haul, mainly because of the travel costs,” says Gentry.

Black Tomato Agency Co-head and Head of Sales David Heron adds: “We have certainly seen less long-haul enquiries than short-haul. A key trend for us last year was more demand for UK and Ireland-based incentives from our UK clients. They still want high-end exclusive experiences, but they want to stay closer to home.”



A key trend for us last year was more demand for UK and Ireland-based incentives from our UK clients. They still want high-end exclusive experiences, but they want to stay closer to home.

David Heron
Co-head at Black Tomato Agency

This trend could in part be due to the growing influence of CSR and sustainability on events and incentive programmes, with many companies keen to reduce carbon impact and do the right thing as far as the planet is concerned, which makes long-haul flights harder to justify. Sunny Lai, executive creative director at Freeman, Singapore,” says: “In 2019, almost 40% of our briefs required some element of CSR and sustainability. Brands are becoming less brand-conscious, and more people-conscious. They want to portray themselves as a friend in line with the lifestyle of their consumers and employees, and they recognise the change in mindsets around sustainability.”

INCENTIVES BOOM

While flights may be becoming harder to justify, incentive travel programmes are not. Our research reveals that incentives are one of the biggest areas of growth in the luxury events sector – 53% of

TRENDS

60%

local/cultural experiences
authentic to destination

14%

gastronomy experiences

9%

adventure/adrenalin
activities

6%

CSR experiences



**MOST
POPULAR
INCENTIVES**

event professionals reported an increase in incentives in 2019 (33% reported no change and 14% reported a decrease in incentives).

Steve Hodges, former director of incentive travel at Mary Kay Corp who recently set up his own incentive consultancy, WOW consult, believes there are a few driving factors behind the incentives boom. "Incentives go hand in hand with employee recognition and employees respond positively to recognition, particularly recognition that is visible to others. This motivates those that earned the award as well as those who didn't (but very much want to) earn the award and the recognition in the future," he says.

He adds that most people love to travel but may not have the time or budget to cover a luxury trip and an incentive award provides that opportunity, plus if the incentive is operated properly, company executives are in attendance and mingling, adding further value for the qualifiers. "Few investments return more value than dollars invested in a well-planned incentive," he concludes.

In terms of which types of experiences are most popular for incentives – 60% of survey respondents said local/cultural experiences authentic to destination, with 14% reporting demand for gastronomy experiences, 9% adventure/adrenalin activities, and 6% for both CSR and team building experiences.

RISE OF THE HYBRID EVENT

Hybrid events that combine meeting and incentive elements are also increasingly popular – 59% reported an increase, 37% saw no change and only 4% reported a decrease.

Bethany Chamberlain, event director, USA at TAG (The Appointment Group) Events comments: "We have come across a few companies that are holding their annual conference in more glamorous locations like the Bahamas. Instead of doing a longer conference and a separate incentive, they are taking the whole company away to a better location for their conference, which can feel like an incentive in itself."

IT and telecoms are the sectors seeing the most growth in luxury events, according to just over half (52%) of the luxury event professionals we surveyed. Finance is also strong, with 45% reporting growth in the sector, followed by automotive (31%), retail (21%) and FMCG (10%).

Looking ahead, the majority of the agencies we interviewed are optimistic about 2020 and beyond. "We are in our busiest time of year at the moment. We have a real flurry of activity in the first quarter and a lot of our clients are wanting to do more events. Overall, we expect our incentive business to remain relatively on a par with last year, primarily as we are seeing a strong increase in meetings and conference requests," says BI WORLDWIDE's Rannard. ■



53%

of event professionals
reported an increase in
incentives in 2019

TOP 5 CHALLENGES FOR LUXURY EVENT PLANNERS



DESTINATIONS THAT WERE PREVIOUSLY CONSIDERED SAFE, ARE NOW BEING PERCEIVED AS RISKY BY CLIENTS.

Ask luxury event planners around the world what their top challenges are, and you'll get any number of answers since many challenges are unique to individual businesses, while others are country or region-specific. For example, planners in the UK are concerned about Brexit and how that might impact the way they do business, while agencies in Asia have the ongoing tensions in Hong Kong to deal with, and Belgium is facing new regulations in the insurance sector that will impact incentive programmes (see regional snapshot page 12).

But there are some challenges that many event professionals do have in common regardless of where they are based. Here are the top five for 2020, according to our survey...

TRENDS

1 BUDGET VS EXPECTATIONS

While luxury event budgets largely remain stable (55% of our survey respondents expect budgets to stay the same in 2020), clients continue to expect more bang for their buck year on year. So, it's no surprise that budgets, and specifically balancing budget against rising expectations and costs, was named a top challenge by 28% of our survey respondents.

"Budgets aren't increasing year on year, but costs are, so it becomes more of a challenge to deliver on objectives," says BI WORLDWIDE designer director, events Katrina Rannard. "Travel is so accessible now and with the growth of social media, everything's got to be Instagrammable, which adds to the pressure to take it up another level. But the budgets are not increasing to take it up to that next level. We are lucky we have clients that we have worked with for many years so we can work closely with them to set expectations and achieve their objectives within budget."

Unrealistic expectations as to what can be achieved within budget is also having a knock-on impact on supplier relations says Angélique Eriksen, founder & CEO at Egg Events, which has offices in Paris, Geneva, Brussels, Dubai and New York. "It's putting increasing pressure on our relationships with suppliers. We try to work in partnership with all of our clients and hotel groups, but sometimes what our

clients ask us to negotiate is embarrassing and it's not fair. Sometimes they ask a little too much especially in destinations like Thailand or Vietnam, where they imagine things being very cheap."



2 FINDING NEW AND UNIQUE EXPERIENCES AND DESTINATIONS

Creativity and finding new emerging destinations or unique experiences, was also named a top challenge by many event planners. "I don't feel a budget challenge, I feel more of a content challenge – to always go the extra mile," says Jan De Ridder, founder of Belgium-based agency The Boosting Group. "Luxury is so much more than just expensive hotels and foods. It's about finding something totally unique, otherwise people could just book it themselves."

Charlotte Gentry, founder & CEO at UK-based Pure Events agrees. "Clients are demanding increasing innovation for the destinations they are choosing to go to. That's where you have to be incredibly different. There is an increasing push to be experiential and creative," she comments. "That is our biggest challenge as a business – continuing to inject creativity into what we do and marry up to the clients' expectations of what they want from a creative perspective."

Some agencies are finding that airlift is impacting their ability to pitch new and exciting destinations to clients, while others are struggling with unique activities for larger incentive groups. Heidi Baillie-David, team lead product development, senior buyer at Creative Group Inc (formerly Meridian Incentive), says: "Flights really impact where our clients will go. Canadian clients only tend to want direct flights, and automatically rule out destinations that require connecting flights, so we are quite limited on choice."


3 PERCEIVED LACK OF CREATIVITY FROM DMCS

Closely linked to the above challenge – another concern for agencies is a lack of creativity from DMCS, especially as clients increasingly demand more local and authentic experiences.

Karin Wolniczak, managing director at German agency nice(-) Events says: "DMCs are just rolling out the same activities they have been doing for years. Our clients don't want another walking tour, they want something new and unique. I've actually had several situations where I am the one who has come up with a new idea myself, and asked the DMC to help deliver it, then they go on and sell that idea to other clients afterwards."

Brussels-based VO Event's Client Services Director Denis De Wagheneire agrees: "I can totally relate to that. DMCs don't think out of the box, even when we challenge them. I am actually working with a local event agency in Ibiza instead of a DMC as their approach



Luxury is so much more than just expensive hotels and foods. It's about finding something totally unique, otherwise people could just book it themselves. 

Jan De Ridder, Founder
The Boosting Group

WITH CLIMATE CHANGE CONSTANTLY IN THE PRESS, JUSTIFYING LONG HAUL FLIGHTS IS BECOMING HARDER



The one thing that is often underestimated it is the impact of geopolitics into our destinations' choices. ∞

Marine Debatte, head of events solutions, BI WORLDWIDE South East Asia and Greater China

is more creative. I don't mind paying for a conceptual approach, I just want a programme that matches our client's values."

But Hugo Slimbrouck, director of strategic partnerships at Ovation Global DMC, argues that agencies are not playing open book with DMCs. "Agencies should be much more open. Most of the RFPs that come through are really basic and not very detailed. If we can clearly understand why the client wants to do the event, we can use our local knowledge to enhance their key message and what they want to achieve," he says.

4 CLIMATE CHANGE AND SUSTAINABILITY

While sustainability is a top trend in the events industry and viewed by many event agencies as an opportunity to differentiate themselves, it was also named a key challenge for a variety of reasons.

With climate change constantly in the press, justifying long haul flights for events and incentives is getting harder for corporates, with several agencies concerned about the potential impact of flight-shaming. There's also the impact climate change is arguably already having in some parts of the world, from increased cyclones and flooding in tropical destinations to the recent wildfires in Australia, that are making it more difficult to know where and when to travel.

While carbon offsetting is one way of reducing the negative impact that events and travel have on the environment, it also costs more and at a time when budgets are already tight, making the right decision for the planet isn't always easy or viable. Peter Jackson, director at UK agency red e2, says: "The impact of offsetting on budgets, and therefore margins, is a huge challenge."

Agencies say they are also struggling to find green certified hotels for clients in certain markets, particularly emerging destinations. VO Event's De Wagheneire explains: "It can be difficult to find sustainable partners – DMCs and hotels. In Northern Europe, especially Scandinavia, they are already quite far ahead with sustainability, but the further south you go, the harder it gets to find sustainable partners."

5 SAFETY & SECURITY

Safety and security have always been of paramount importance when planning luxury events and incentives. But Joost de Meyer, chairman and CEO of US-based First Incentive Travel says that political unrest in many areas of the world is resulting in "security becoming more and more important for clients." Destinations that were previously considered safe, are now being perceived as risky by clients, while the recent Coronavirus outbreak that is now spreading across the world and has resulted in numerous event cancellations, shows how other non-political but potential threats to delegates' safety need to be closely monitored by the events industry.



"If there is anything that the past decade - and year - has shown is that no one is shielded from nature or politics," says Marine Debatte, head of events solutions, BI WORLDWIDE South East Asia and Greater China. "The one thing that is often underestimated it is the impact of geopolitics into our destinations' choices. It is central in our destination analysis. On top of the real and rational risks, perceptions are also very important." ■

REGIONAL VIEW

A snapshot of what's happening in luxury events markets in key regions across the globe...

EMEA

More than three and half years after the British public voted to leave the EU, Brexit is finally happening, following the snap general election in December which saw Boris Johnson and the Tories win a majority.

While the UK has agreed the terms of its EU departure, both sides still need to decide what their future relationship will look like. This will be worked out during the transition period between 1 February and 31 December 2020, during which the UK will continue to follow most of the EU's rules while it negotiates a new trade deal.

Brexit will undoubtedly have an impact on the way UK event agencies do business in the long term, but many believe the departure will be positive for business in the short term. "Some decisions have been on a hold due to the political instability around the election and Brexit. Now there is more stability, we feel that decisions that were on hold will be made," says Sophie Morris, managing director at Worldspan.

As far as the rest of EMEA is concerned, Ian Cummings, global VP, commercial at CWT Meetings & Events describes it as a bit of a mixed bag. "Business for us has been fairly consistent and steady in the UK but France has ongoing challenges, Italy is down a bit and Germany seems slower. The Nordics had a strong year in 2019 and looks solid for 2020 as clients in that region continue to invest in face-to-face," he explains. "Overall, we're expecting single digit growth in EMEA this year."

GREECE AND ITALY REMAIN POPULAR DESTINATIONS FOR LUXURY EVENTS WITHIN THE EMEA REGION





Top destinations in EMEA for 2020 are Italy and Greece, with South Africa, Dubai and the UAE seeing strong demand (see Top 10 Destinations List on p27). While the favoured event destinations of London, Barcelona and Paris remain as popular as ever, planners are increasingly looking at secondary cities to avoid over-tourism and get better value for money.

Several new regulations in EU countries, including VAT law changes in Germany and regulations around incentives in the insurance market in Belgium are causing concern for event agencies based in those markets.

Corporates could lose their ability to reclaim VAT on hotel and other bookings in Germany after the country's parliament approved important changes to its tax regime in December. The new rules, part of the EU Tour Operators' Margin Scheme (TOMS), will apply where an events agency or venue finder pays a supplier itself and then recharges the corporate client. "Our clients used to be able to claim that VAT back, but the new regulations mean they will no longer be able to do that, so it's going to be more costly for the customer," says Karin Wolniczak, managing director at German agency

nice:-) Events. "This is a very new and major challenge for us."

Meanwhile, in Belgium, new regulations in the insurance industry will mean that businesses will no longer be able to run three or four-night incentive trips. "Incentive trips cannot last longer than two days and one night and there has to be a business element of a minimum of four hours training or a meeting," says Jan De Ridder, founder of The Boosting Group. "This is not good as insurance companies have traditionally been big spenders on incentives and the sector is a big part of my business."

Brussels-based VO Event's Client Services Director Denis De Wagheneire agrees that it's a really drastic change. However, he adds: "We have been through this with the pharmaceutical sector. Before that sector was controlled, there was so much money, then the law changed everything overnight and we had to find different solutions. We now need to find a new way of thinking for the insurance sector too."

Asia Pacific

China was making headlines as we were putting this report together, with the coronavirus outbreak declared a global emergency by the World Health Organisation and major airlines including BA and American cancelling or cutting some flights internationally.

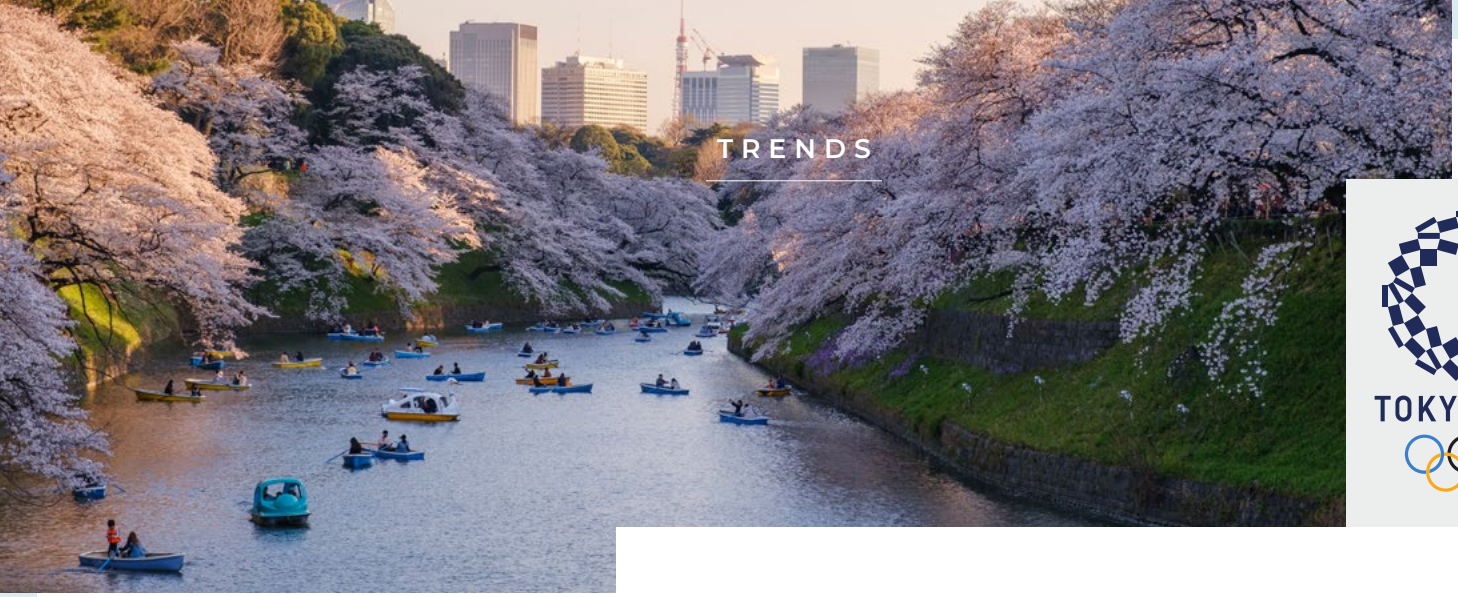
"In Asia Pacific, we have seen political tensions that shift visa policies, pandemic risks, natural disasters that on top of devastating people, wildlife and the environment, are also crippling economies," says Marine Debatte, head of events solutions, BI Worldwide South East Asia and Greater China.


"Our Asian attendees are sensitive to the visa situations. If we add in climate change and now other risks rising on the health side, the number of destinations that are "safe to operate" can shift within a few days. This is to the benefit of some strong and stable destinations, but if pandemics are involved or large airport hubs, this can also paralyse an entire region."

Despite these challenges, the luxury events market remains strong in the Asia Pacific region. Sunny Lai, executive creative Director



EVENT PLANNERS IN ASIA PACIFIC ARE INCREASINGLY HAVING TO MONITOR PANDEMICS AND NATURAL DISASTERS



Social media has enabled people to share their moments at these events, and this increased opportunity for exposure has allowed brands to exercise more creativity with their luxury events. 

Sunny Lai
Executive Creative Director
Freeman, Singapore

at Freeman, Singapore, has seen a rise in luxury events and incentives. “In recent years, Singaporeans are becoming increasingly affluent. This has also influenced how Singaporeans are making their decisions. More people now have a desire to look richer and more well-to-do,” he says.

“To meet these demands, we are seeing an influx of luxury events in Singapore popping up here and there. In addition, social media has enabled people to share their moments at these events, and this increased opportunity for exposure has allowed brands to exercise more creativity with their luxury events.”

Chantal Challenger, regional account manager at BCD Meetings & Events in Indonesia, anticipates further growth within APAC. “BCD M&E have acquired a number of new opportunities. Specifically, within the Consulting industry, we are seeing expansions in region with increased demand for luxury sourcing,” she says. “Within the last year (2019) our growth for luxury sourcing increased by 40%. This will only increase further as the accounts continue to expand and more bookers are on boarded internally.

In terms of destinations, Singapore, Malaysia and Thailand are up there, Bali remains popular for incentives and Japan is looking strong for 2020, thanks to the Olympics this summer. Challenger says that with younger more adventurous generations moving into the workforce “we could potentially (if not already) see considerations made towards incentives going off the beaten track to more obscure and special interest destinations including Laos, India, Azerbaijan.”

Costs also remain a challenge in the luxury sector in APAC, despite the huge boom in luxury hotel development across the region, which is increasing choice for meeting and event planners. Challenger explains: “There are many luxury brands now opening, and the expectation is that rates are more competitive, but this is not the case. Luxury brands still remain the hotels least likely to negotiate better, more competitive rates within this luxury tier.”

North America

The U.S. economy missed the Trump administration’s 3% growth target for a second straight year, posting its slowest annual growth (2.3%) since 2016, as consumer spending showed signs of flagging. Many economists are expecting growth to continue to slow in 2020 and 2021, as the country gears up for the presidential election race later this year.

Despite this, the events industry remains positive about the prospects for growth. “We’ve seen good growth in North America and US clients remain pretty bullish and confident in investing more in face-to-face events,” says CWT M&E’s Cummings.

TRENDS

Joost de Meyer, chairman and CEO of US-based First Incentive Travel says the strong economy is resulting in more demand for incentive programmes. "The economy is doing well so companies are more and more interested to do incentives. Luxury events are also on the rise because guests want to have great experiences in unique locations," he adds.

While some growth is coming from increased spend by corporates with established programmes, Steve Hodges, founder of incentive consultancy, WOW consult, says there are also more businesses trying out incentives for the first time. "I am getting more inquiries from companies that don't have incentives or don't understand how an incentive adds value.

"I am very sure that competition for employees is a factor here. Younger generations are typically more travel savvy than us baby boomers so they will respond well to incentive programmes and their availability could help with the decision of which job to take."

Budgets for luxury events in the U.S. are on the whole remaining stable, though some planners are seeing an increase.



MEXICO REMAINS A POPULAR DESTINATION FOR EVENTS AND INCENTIVES AMONG U.S. CLIENTS

Bethany Chamberlain, event director, USA at TAG (The Appointment Group) Events cites a gaming client as an example. "They used to take just 50 game developers to Hawaii, which has been scrapped in favour of one big internal gaming launch for all 650 staff in the company. Overall their budget is double what they used to spend in going to Hawaii so it's a significant increase," she comments.

Across the border in Canada, Heidi Baillie-David, team lead product development, senior buyer at Creative Group Inc (formerly Meridian Incentive), says budgets continue to be challenging. "With the Canadian dollar, the exchange rate is not always on our side so that limits where we can take certain groups," she comments. "We also find airlift a big challenge, as clients are not keen on connecting flights and only want to fly direct, which again limits our choices."

For outbound events and incentives, Europe, Mexico and the Caribbean remain popular with US clients, while US cities will dominate for meetings and conferences in 2020, according to data released by Global DMC Partners (GDP) with seven of the top ten spots on its 2020 Meeting & Conference Destination Hot List taken by US cities. Las Vegas is as in demand as ever, but there is increased interest for secondary cities including Nashville, Austin and Phoenix, thanks to new hotels and a strong cultural appeal. ■

TEN INCENTIVE TRAVEL TRENDS FOR THE NEXT DECADE



As the new decade gets underway, the outlook for incentive travel couldn't be more different than it was ten years ago. At the start of 2010, following the fallout from the global financial crisis, corporate travel bans were commonplace and incentive programmes were being slashed across all industry sectors amid budget cuts. Slammed by politicians and taken to task by the tabloids, incentive travel was also facing a major perception crisis, with corporates paranoid about being seen to spend money on lavish jollies.

Fast forward to 2020, and the future for the incentive travel industry looks incredibly bright in comparison. Not only does our own data show that luxury event professionals are seeing increased demand for incentives, but results from the 2019 Incentive Travel Industry Index, a joint research effort from SITE (the Society for Incentive Travel Excellence), IRF (the Incentive Research Foundation) and FICP (Financial & Insurance Conference Professionals), point to an uptick in incentive travel spend over the next few years.

As incentive travel continues to grow and evolve, we predict there will be a number of trends that will come to the fore over the next five to ten years. So, here's our top ten for the next decade...



TRENDS



1 SUSTAINABILITY WILL SHAPE THE INCENTIVE EXPERIENCE OF THE FUTURE

Given the fact that we have dedicated a whole section of this report to the subject of sustainability and CSR (see pages 43-53), it comes as no surprise that event professionals are predicting that sustainability will have a major impact on incentive programmes in the future.

“No doubt that incentives are changing, and I think the biggest change has to do with sustainability,” says Viane Hermes, sustainability & project manager at Stockholm-based agency Hermes Group. “The “Greta generation” will not “have fun” at the cost of the planet. This is very strong in the Nordics for the moment, but gaining strength in Germany, Holland and the rest of Europe.”

Sustainability is shifting from being an afterthought and nice to have, to a necessity, and companies will respond by finding ways to curb the environmental impact of incentive travel, from offsetting the carbon impact of travelling to choosing green destinations and hotels. Countries such as Iceland and Sweden, which rank high on the Global Destination Sustainability Index, are increasingly becoming destinations of choice for eco-conscious corporates, according to CR Worldwide.

Claire Okrafo-Smart, director of incentives at UK-based Absolute Corporate Events, says: “I am noticing that more incentive clients than ever before are concerned about the environment, and this is going to have a bigger impact than probably anybody over the age of 30 can see coming. I think that carbon-offsetting will comeback in a big way.” Hermes agrees, adding: “That pressure is really coming from below from the employees. We’ve had delegates wanting to offset their own flights when the companies are not doing it.”



The “Greta generation” will not “have fun” at the cost of the planet. 

Viane Hermes, Sustainability and Project manager, Hermes Group



2 TRAIN TRAVEL WILL MAKE A COMEBACK

Trains are one of the most sustainable forms of transport, and luxury travel experts on the leisure side are predicting that train travel will come back in vogue as eco-conscious travellers look for lower carbon alternatives to flying.

Flygskam, a flight-shaming movement in Sweden backed by Greta Thunberg, is also starting to gain momentum, which some planners believe will have a major impact on the incentive travel industry over the next decade and some client’s willingness to fly.

“Flight shaming is going to be a huge issue. I think people are going to have to be creative in finding a way to circumnavigate



INCENTIVES OF THE FUTURE WILL BE ABOUT THE EXPERIENCE FIRST, WITH LOCAL AND CULTURAL EXPERIENCES LEADING THE WAY

this,” says Angélique Eriksen, founder & CEO at Paris-based Egg Events. “For example, could you get to your chosen destination by luxury train? Or you could make the train travel part of the luxury experience? I’m sure the likes of Belmond will see increased demand for their luxury train services.”

Hermes adds: “We have already got briefs that say no flights. Some customers only want a destination they can travel by train, or at least one option which can be reached by train within the proposal.”

3 INCENTIVES WILL SHIFT FROM CONSUMPTION TO CONTRIBUTION

As part of this move to become a more sustainable and socially responsible industry, incentive programmes in the future will focus on positively benefiting the host destinations.

“We are seeing a definite shift from consumption to contribution,” says Ian Cummings, global vice president, commercial at CWT Meetings & Events. “Incentives were traditionally all about consumption – where can I go, what can I do there and what do I get out of this. It was about taking pics and bragging to your mates on Instagram from a luxury five-star hotel with cocktail in hand.

“Increasingly it will become more about going to a destination and contributing to that destination. I think bragging rights themselves are shifting and a picture of you doing something good holds more sway than one of you swigging Champagne. That’s almost coming across as crass these days, and in ten years’ time, I think people will be shamed for doing that.”

ACE’s Okrafo-Smart agrees and highlights an incentive the agency delivered for a client in 2019 that featured litter-picking in the New

Forest as one of the main activities. “I was a bit concerned as the company went from team-building in Amsterdam the previous year to litter picking in the UK, but the atmosphere was amazing. We got the local papers involved, which created a real buzz, and everyone was so engaged.”

4 EXPERIENCE WILL OUTWEIGH DESTINATION

Destination choice is still incredibly important for incentives, with emerging or off the beaten track destinations that delegates have never visited continuing to hold a strong appeal for certain groups and clients.

But there are signs on the leisure side that luxury travellers are choosing holidays based around their hobbies and interests, as opposed to choosing the destination first. Mintel Travel Analyst Marloes De Vries, who presented luxury travel trends at inVOYAGE 2019, says: “It’s becoming less about where you want to travel, and more about what experience do you want.”

Incentive agencies are also starting to notice this trend. “It’s definitely becoming more about the experience, whereas it always used to be the destination,” says ACE’s Okrafo-Smart. “Now people are thinking do I want to sit in economy class for 10 hours to a long-haul exotic destination, which will take up at least a third of the budget, or would I rather stay in Europe and put more budget into having an amazing experience? One of our clients, for example, has just chosen Seville over South Africa.”

Black Tomato Agency Co-head and



60%

of the luxury event planners surveyed for the report said local/cultural experiences authentic to the destination are most popular for incentives.

Head of Sales David Heron also believes that experience will outweigh destination in future. “We had an incentive enquiry at the end of last year where the brief focused on CSR over the destination – the client said what can we do that is worthwhile, and where is it. It’s the first time we have been given a brief like that and it’s really exciting,” he says.

5 LOCAL EXPERIENCES WILL LEAD THE WAY

Sticking with the theme of experiences, when asked what types of experiences are most popular for incentives, 60% of the luxury event planners surveyed for the report said local/cultural experiences authentic to the destination.

“Authenticity is the new luxury,” says Hugo Slimbrouck, director of strategic partnerships at Ovation Global DMC. “Delegates today don’t care about Champagne, caviar and lobster. They are looking for authenticity and want to understand how the locals, live, work and eat.”

Ultimately, it’s about access and giving individuals the opportunity to experience something they can’t elsewhere, which will increase

pressure on both agencies and DMCs to seek out more creative, unique and authentic local activities.

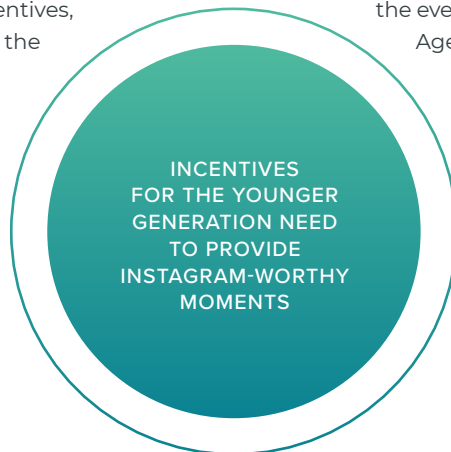
Bethany Chamberlain, event director, USA at TAG (The Appointment Group) believes that this is being driven by the younger generation. “They are all Instagram mad and want to share the amazing and life-changing experiences they have when they travel, rather than pictures of the luxury hotel they are staying at.”

6 EDUCATION AND THE OPPORTUNITY TO LEARN WILL BE KEY

And “life-changing” could well become a new buzzword for incentives over the next decade as employees, particularly Generation Z, increasingly demand incentive trips that enhance their life in some way.


“An experience can be quite a diverse spectrum of things. It could be high profile individuals to engage and spend time with, for example experts in fields such as sports, artisans or chefs. Incentives will become more about education and coming away from a trip having learnt a new skill or something to enhance your life beyond the event,” explains Black Tomato Agency’s Heron.

Egg’s Eriksen says that actively agency is putting together learning expeditions around Expo 2020 in Dubai, that will be high-end like an incentive, but will give groups the opportunity to learn about topics like sustainability.



INCENTIVES FOR THE YOUNGER GENERATION NEED TO PROVIDE INSTAGRAM-WORTHY MOMENTS



Incentives often provide companies with vital face-to-face time with their channel, and we've seen some clients add a day meeting into what used to be a pure incentive to ensure they get the best value out of that time. 

Katrina Rannard
Design Director
events at BI WORLDWIDE

Cummings adds that CWT is doing a similar thing and pitching incentives that are more like learning exchanges, for example taking an automotive client to look at and learn about electric powered cars or a visit a high-tech or carbon neutral city.



MORE INCENTIVES WILL FEATURE A BUSINESS ELEMENT

With education becoming a key theme, there also will be a trend for more clients to use incentives as an opportunity for business, for example to share key messages or reflect on company values with employees or partners.

More than half of the planners we surveyed (59%) said they had seen an increase in the number of hybrid events that include a meeting and incentive. "Incentives often provide companies with vital face-to-face time with their channel, and we've seen some clients add a day meeting into what used to be a pure incentive to ensure they get the best value out of that time," says BI WORLDWIDE, design director, events, Katrina Rannard.

Meanwhile, Pure Events Founder & CEO Charlotte Gentry is seeing more companies add incentive elements to their meetings. "A lot of companies are organising overseas conferences with a strong activity element. It might not be a traditional sales incentive that rewards top performers, but it's still an incentive for employees to work for that business."



BEYOND THE SALES TEAM

The traditional sales incentive for top performers continues to be popular, and that won't change anytime soon, as its proven tool for driving sales growth. However, Joost de Meyer, chairman and CEO of US-based First Incentive Travel says: "The trend is also that it's not only sales related people who go on an incentive trip. Other departments are increasingly part of the incentive travel challenge."

This is a trend that came up in last year's inVOYAGE report and looks set to become more prominent over the next decade. Steve Hodges, former director of incentive travel at Mary Kay Corp who recently set up his own incentive consultancy, WOW consult, says: "I agree that incentives do not need to be limited to sales. If an employee impacts your bottom line, and let's be honest all employees should, then find a way to reward for that impact."

The challenge for non-sales incentives is how to qualify people for that trip. Holly Mills,

head of incentives at Penguins Events says: "We have been doing a lot of work behind the scenes to create an ROI model and the best solution we have found at the moment is to really try and understand the client's values and try and align the qualifications with those values."

Okrafo-Smart says this is exactly what one of the agency's clients is doing. "We have a 200pax incentive to Milan in June this year which used to just be sales staff. Now, 50% of the people on the trip are nominated to win a place against the company's core values, so it could be anyone from the receptionist to marketing manager."



9 SECOND TIER DESTINATIONS WILL COME TO THE FORE AS OVER-TOURISM GROWS

The last couple of years has seen increasing press coverage of the negative impacts of tourism to some of the world's most popular destinations, and the term 'overtourism' has entered the public consciousness.

Barcelona, Dubrovnik, and particularly Venice, are among the favoured event destinations suffering from overtourism, or too many visitors at peak times of the year. Incentive clients and agencies are responding by shunning the crowds and opting for secondary cities or destinations instead.

BI WORLDWIDE's Rannard says: "An example could be that looking at Rotterdam instead of Amsterdam. Or choosing Bilbao instead of Barcelona. You can still achieve your objectives and provide an amazing experience, and the benefit of secondary destinations is that people are less likely to have been there."

There's also a financial advantage of secondary cities too, since overtourism can drive up the costs of hotel and airfare and decrease availability. "We pitched a programme in Budapest against Rome and found we could do so much more in Budapest because the budget went so much further," says Okrafo-Smart.

SECONDARY DESTINATIONS SUCH AS BUDAPEST LOOK SET TO GROW IN POPULARITY AS PLANNERS AVOID OVERCROWDED DESTINATIONS



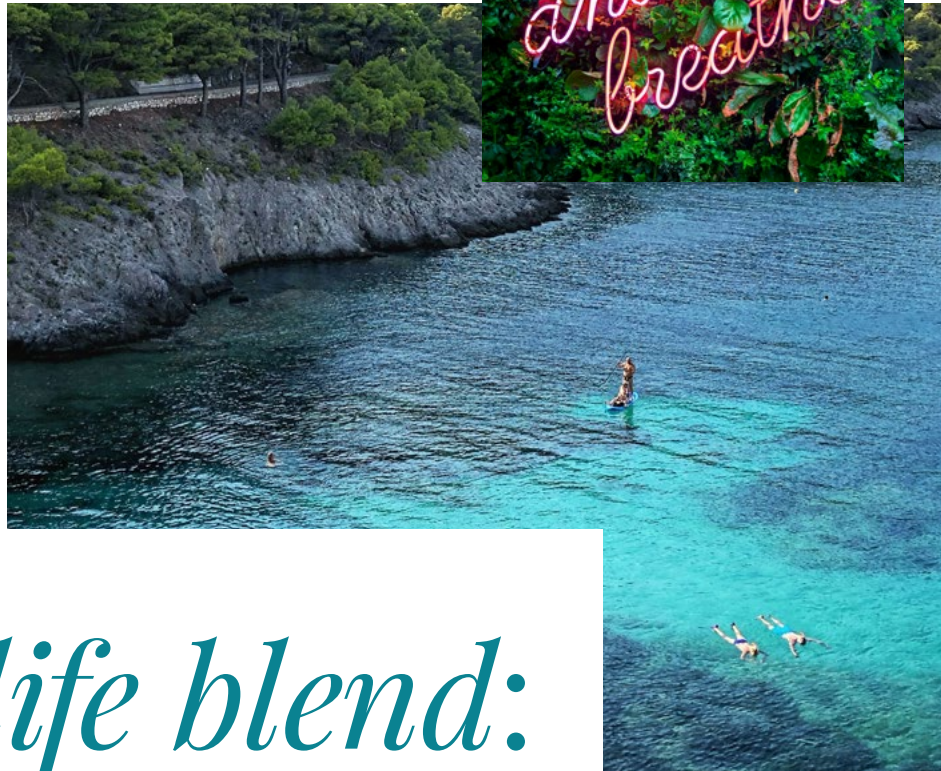
10 WELLBEING WILL BE AT THE HEART OF INCENTIVES

Last but by no means least, employee wellness and wellbeing will continue to gain prevalence in incentive travel programmes, according to the 2019 Incentive Travel Industry Index.

"There is definitely a shift in wellness and community fulfilment being incorporated in incentive programmes, whether that is for personal growth or connecting people and fostering strong communications among teams," says Chantal Challenger, regional account manager at BCD Meetings & Events in Asia.

CR Worldwide's recent report 'The rise of Corporate Wellness 2.0' reveals that incentive, reward and recognition platforms, as well as corporate travel and events, are being increasingly designed around improving mental and physical health. It shows a dramatic 56% rise in activity or nature breaks, often involving animal encounters from gorilla trekking to rhino tagging. This demonstrates a significantly greater commitment to employee benefits based around mental and physical wellbeing, in the form of healthy activities and social experiences. ■

For more on wellbeing, see The Rise of Corporate wellness by CR Worldwide on page 22



A work-life blend: **ADAPTING TO A GENERATION OF WELLBEING**



by David Gould,
CEO of CR Worldwide

New research shows poor employee mental health is costing UK firms £43 billion, an increase of 16% on last year, through rising 'sick days' and employees under-performing at work.

A UK Government commissioned review found 15% of people at work have symptoms indicating mental health issues. It is a similar story across the US where more than half of workers want employers to do more to alleviate mental health problems including stress.

This is spurring a growing trend in US and UK companies offering everything from rainforest retreats and family vacations to extra time off to improve employee wellbeing. A quiet revolution in workforce wellbeing is taking place, spurred by a drive to attract and retain a health-conscious younger workforce. While companies have always offered in-work incentives and benefits to boost 'job satisfaction', this generation expects their employer to care about and improve their

overall mental and physical health - or 'life satisfaction'- outside work.

Workplace stress is rising and taking a significant toll on employee and corporate performance. Studies now demonstrate that stress levels have risen 20% in three decades and 16% have left a job due to stress. Companies are responding to this by investing in employee wellbeing programmes and funding a plethora of in-work benefits built around overall wellbeing such as office 'nap rooms', gyms and yoga facilities and mental health 'first aid training'.

CR Worldwide's report 'The rise of Corporate Wellness 2.0' shows that the scope of 'corporate wellness' schemes is now expanding far beyond office walls and working hours to encompass out-of-hours



health, wellbeing and leisure time. Incentive, reward and recognition platforms, as well as corporate travel and events, are being increasingly designed around improving mental and physical health. Data also shows an increase in corporate spending on employee engagement and rewards overall.

EMPLOYERS ARE DITCHING CITY BREAKS TO BOOST EMPLOYEE WELLBEING

Eco tourism is booming and we are seeing the rise of 'animal therapy', from dolphins used to alleviate mental disabilities to universities using 'therapy dogs' to help stressed students. 'Animal-friendly' companies are also now allowing animals in the workspace.

CR Worldwide has found that this trend is also now extending outside the workspace into the realm of incentive travel – going back to nature. CR's data charts a dramatic 56% rise in activity or nature breaks, often involving animal encounters.

Companies are beginning to realise that time off and improving quality of life outside work is the key to increasing productivity in work.

One multinational IT giant recently rewarded top-performers with safari trips and visits to penguin colonies in South Africa. Traditional Christmas city breaks have been supplanted by trips involving activities such as horse riding and husky sledging. Incentives such as treks with gorillas in Rwanda and orangutans in Borneo, tagging rare rhinos and diving with sharks are becoming ever more prevalent.

Luxury travel incentives are also becoming more social and 'experiential' with corporates offering opportunities to join interactive local music sessions and sample local cuisine. Instagram-friendly locations such as Mexico, Costa Rica and Finland are also now among the most popular and in-demand corporate travel destinations. This reflects a clear drive to reconfigure business travel incentives around the needs of a new health and eco-conscious social media generation.

STAFF ARE GETTING EXTRA VACATION DAYS INSTEAD OF GADGETS

It is progressively being recognised that working less hours makes staff more productive. Mexico has the longest average working hours in the OECD, yet is also the least productive country. Businesses lose thousands of hours each year to stressed, over-worked staff calling in sick or under-performing at work. They also lose younger recruits, who value work/life balance.

In response, half of UK businesses are now implementing a four-day working week for some or all employees while workers in the Netherlands work just 29 hours a week on average. Giants such as Microsoft and Google are toying with the idea; AutoTrader offers the chance to buy extra paid time-off, while Expedia offers flexible working hours.

CR research has confirmed this is creating a parallel sea-change with incentive programmes. Corporate rewards once came in the shape of gadgets or cars but increasingly they take the form of incentive or team travel and extra holiday days. At the other end of the spectrum, an extra day off was the most common reward redeemed by employees worldwide last year. A full-day, half-day, and 10-hour break were the three most popular corporate rewards of 2019 in the US.

Cumulatively, this indicates companies are beginning to realise that time off and improving quality of life outside work is the key to increasing productivity in work. The bosses of the past saw employee holidays as a cumbersome legal requirement, but the boss of the future is more likely to give employees extra time off, and to tell them not to check their emails until they come back.



PHYSICALLY-ACTIVE AND NATURE-BASED INCENTIVE TRIPS, OFTEN INVOLVING ANIMAL ENCOUNTERS, ARE ON THE RISE

THE BOUNDARY BETWEEN PERSONAL AND PROFESSIONAL LIVES WILL CONTINUE TO BLUR

The workplace of the future will be one that dissolves traditional distinctions between the personal and professional and caters to the out-of-work wellbeing of employees. The trend will be towards improving corporate productivity by improving employees' private lives.

We could see future digital reward programmes that reward not just work-related targets but also personal development goals. Data on progress towards New Years' resolutions could be included alongside data on work performance in counting towards employee rewards. Data on reward redemptions and vacation destinations could be used to generate more personalised travel incentives, perks and rewards. Employers will use employee data to reward and encourage personal as well as professional development.

Modern employers increasingly believe that their responsibilities to staff do not end at the office door. From yoga facilities and nap rooms in the office to nature breaks and life coaches outside the office, the future employer will increasingly tend to their employees' physical and mental wellbeing. Evidence shows this is key to attracting younger workers that value self-fulfilment and 'life satisfaction' over work satisfaction. They will also drive a positive transformation in workforce performance. ■





**DESTINATIONS
AND
VENUES**



TOP DESTINATION TRENDS FOR 2020

Luxury incentive and event groups will be flocking to Italy in search of 'La Dolce Vita' in 2020, according to our second annual inVOYAGE Destination Hotlist, which sees the country claim the top spot, up from third place in 2019.



ROME, SICILY
AND FLORENCE
ARE AMONG
THE MOST
POPULAR ITALIAN
DESTINATIONS
FOR INCENTIVE
GROUPS

We asked luxury planners which destinations they are pitching and booking for high-end events and incentives this year and Italy was by far the most popular, with 23% of those surveyed naming the country, and specifically Rome, Florence and Sicily, as in demand destinations.

Karin Wolniczak, managing director at German agency nice:-) Events is seeing high demand for Italy. "Most of our clients prefer Southern Europe because of the weather, with Italy leading the way followed by Greece," she comments. "Italy just has so much to offer – from the quality of the food to the incredible culture. There are so many options as well, from Sicily and Sardinia to Venice, Rome and Florence and the Tuscany region, which are all completely different."

GREEK RENAISSANCE

A new entry this year, Greece bags second spot in our hotlist, with 15% of survey respondents naming the destination as a popular option for 2020. Greece also topped Global DMC Partners' 2020 Incentive Destination Hotlist, based on leads received from its global client base of meeting and event planners.

Aris Tsaldaris president & CEO at Horizon DMC, the official DMC partner for inVOYAGE 2020, believes a number of factors have contributed to Greece being back in vogue. "The travel industry here was reset after financial crisis. Hotel rates went down and we became a value for money destination. At the same time, we have seen investment in new infrastructure – air, road and rail – and a lot of new hotels opening with several major international hotel brands making their debut. We didn't have a Four Seasons or Hyatt before and both of those opened in Athens recently," he explains.

"I have to add that it helps our cause that some of our competitive destinations such as Turkey, Egypt and Tunis are off the map for MICE at the moment. But that said, the Ministry of Tourism and convention bureau in Athens have done a good job at promoting the destination too."

Outside of Athens, Greek islands including inVOYAGE 2020 host Mykonos, plus Santorini, Crete and Rhodes are popular with luxury event planners, either as a twin-centre destination combined with Athens or as destinations in their own right. "Mykonos is really popular with the US market at the moment," says Bethany Chamberlain event director, USA, at TAG (The Appointment Group) Events.

Tsaldaris adds: "Mykonos is one of the best islands in Greece if not the Mediterranean. It's a very cosmopolitan destination that can serve the different needs of potential clients around the world whether they are planning a meeting or incentive."

TOP TEN

Italy

Greece

South Africa

London

Portugal

Spain

France

Dubai

Thailand

Marrakech

LONDON IS EXPERIENCING A HUGE BOOM IN LUXURY HOTEL DEVELOPMENT IN 2020



LONDON'S LUXURY BOOM

The rest of the top ten is not hugely different from the 2019 list with favourites South Africa, London, and Portugal completing the top five, followed by Spain (down from number one last year), Dubai, France, Thailand and new entry Marrakech.

London, up one place from 2019, remains a top destination in part due to the uncertainty over Brexit – and the resulting devaluation of the pound – which has made it a more attractive and affordable destination, according to CWT Meetings & Events. The ongoing boom in luxury hotel development is also boosting the UK capital's appeal – a recent study by Boodle

DESTINATIONS AND VENUES



Hatfield revealed that more than 200 new boutique and luxury hotels are currently in the development pipeline in London.

Recent and upcoming openings include the Biltmore Mayfair, Great Scotland Yard, Nhow London, Nobu Hotel London Portman Square, NoMad London, The Londoner and Pan Pacific's first London property, to name just a few.

THE EXPO EFFECT

As far as the Middle East region is concerned, despite increased interest in the likes of Abu Dhabi, Oman and Qatar, Dubai remains the firm favourite and stays in eighth place for the second year running. The emirate state will be firmly in the spotlight later this year, when the much-anticipated World Expo opens its doors.

Angélique Eriksen, founder & CEO at Paris-based Egg Events, says she is seeing more interest from clients in Dubai. "I think this will grow a lot because of Expo 2020, which will be an amazing hub, and a great addition to any event in the destination, or indeed a reason to visit in itself," she adds.

Running from 20 October 2020 until 10 April 2021, the expo promises to deliver 'a world without borders' with a flavour of 192 countries to be discovered within the pavilions, more than 200 restaurants and 60 shows a day at the region's first World Expo. Unsurprisingly in the build-up to such a major event, the emirate's hotel stock has once again been on the rise.

Top Banana founder & CEO Richard Bridge says: "There's the new Sofitel Dubai Wafi opening this year, which we are looking at for an event in September." Other new arrivals in 2020 include ME Dubai, Marriott

Resort Palm Jumeirah, Hilton Dubai Palm Jumeirah, The Royal Atlantis and SLS Dubai Hotel & Residences, which will be one of the tallest hotels in the city when it opens in the third quarter.

PERCEPTION PROBLEMS

Over in Africa, South Africa unsurprisingly remains strong for events and incentives, taking fourth place, while interest in the likes of Botswana, Namibia, Zambia and Rwanda continues to grow, with the latter making our top six emerging destinations list this year. Marrakech also snuck into the top ten, taking the tenth spot, as MICE business in the North African destination goes from strength to strength. Black Tomato Agency Co-head & Head of Sales, David Heron, says it was one of the strongest incentive destinations for the agency in 2019 in terms of conversions.



We would use Marrakech and we have. But if it's up against other options, it often gets side-lined as clients are very risk averse.

Charlotte Gentry
Founder and CEO
Pure Events



Malta, Singapore, Miami, Croatia were all name checked by luxury planners as popular destinations for 2020, along with Cambodia, which was on our top six emerging destinations list in 2019.

But Morocco still has a perception issue, with some clients still ruling it out over safety, along with the likes of Turkey. "We would use Marrakech and we have. But if it's up against other options, it often gets side-lined as clients are very risk averse," says Pure Events Founder & CEO, Charlotte Gentry. TAG's Chamberlain agrees: "Turkey is an absolute no go for our US clients. The press here are real scaremongers, so it has a still has that stigma that it's not safe."

There are some signs that the tables could finally be turning for Turkey as a luxury MICE destination. Top Banana's Bridge remains hopeful: "The world is waking up to Istanbul again and we have had a few enquiries, although we have not placed any business there yet. It's one of my favourite places in the world with the whole east meets west vibe and there are so many good properties."

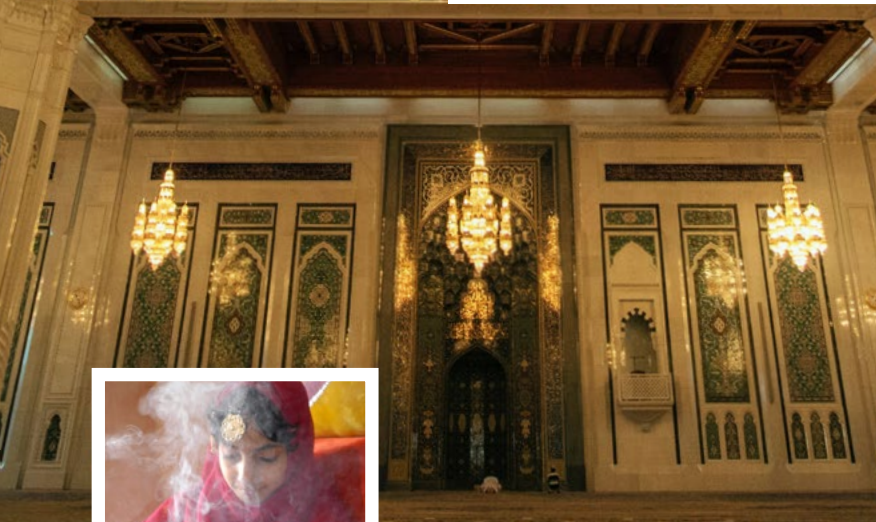
Just outside of the top ten, Monaco, the host destination for inVOYAGE 2019, continues to be in vogue, while Japan is on the radar for many planners, thanks to the Tokyo 2020 Games this summer and a flurry of new luxury hotel openings throughout the country. Meanwhile, Mexico and the Caribbean are also seeing increased demand, particularly from the North American market.

Malta, Singapore, Miami, Croatia were all name checked by luxury planners as popular destinations for 2020, along with Cambodia, which was on our top six emerging destinations list in 2019. Find out which six destinations made our emerging destination hotlist for 2020 next... ■

TOP SIX EMERGING DESTINATIONS FOR 2020

With the world becoming ever more accessible, luxury planners are increasingly looking for off-the-beaten track destinations for those braver clients demanding something a bit different.

According to our survey respondents, the top six up and coming incentive hotspots for 2020 and beyond are Oman, Azerbaijan, Montenegro, Rwanda, Panama and Georgia. Here's a snapshot of what these destinations have to offer and why they should be making their way onto more pitch lists over the next 12 to 24 months...





1 Oman

The Middle Eastern country was by far the most popular emerging destination named by event planners surveyed for this report. While it's been on the luxury MICE scene for some time, it has arguably been overshadowed by its glitzier neighbours Abu Dhabi and Dubai.

But Oman's more authentic approach is making it increasingly attractive to planners looking for an alternative to the UAE according to Global DMC Partners, which named the country as one of its top five emerging destinations for events in 2020-21. "Visitors are attracted to its charming heritage and embracing society, stripped of the glamour of nearby Dubai and Abu Dhabi. With its perfect blend of modern infrastructure and authentic Arabian experience, Oman makes an ideal destination for events," the DMC group says.

A flurry of luxury developments has further boosted Oman's appeal,

with the W debuting in Muscat last year with a 279-room property and the five-star Jumeirah Muscat Bay set to open in 2020, adding to the city's already impressive hotel stock that includes the likes of Ritz-Carlton and Chedi.

Claire Okrafo-Smart, director of incentives at UK agency Absolute Corporate Events says: "Abu Dhabi was very popular for us last year but it's dying off in favour of Oman. There is a lot more client interest and so much more choice with all

the new properties."

Hugo Slimbrouck, director of strategic partnerships at Ovation Global DMC adds: "Oman is already a strong competitor on the incentive side because it has the mountains, sea, beaches and desert, lots of luxury hotels, plus its more authentic. But now they have the huge convention centre in Muscat too, which is adding another layer of business to the destination with large conferences and association meetings."

OMAN OFFERS INCENTIVE GROUPS A MORE AUTHENTIC ARABIAN EXPERIENCE THAN ITS GLITZIER NEIGHBOURS



Marriott, Hyatt Regency and Pullman to name a few.

Global DMC Partners, which also named Azerbaijan as one of its top five emerging destinations, says: "Neither Europe nor Asia, Azerbaijan has undergone an extraordinary transformation after the fall of the Soviet Union, an ancient nation fast entering the 21st century. Baku, its capital, offers impactful attractions. Thanks to its overwhelming history mixed with modern architecture, the city has been developing as a destination for meetings and conferences."

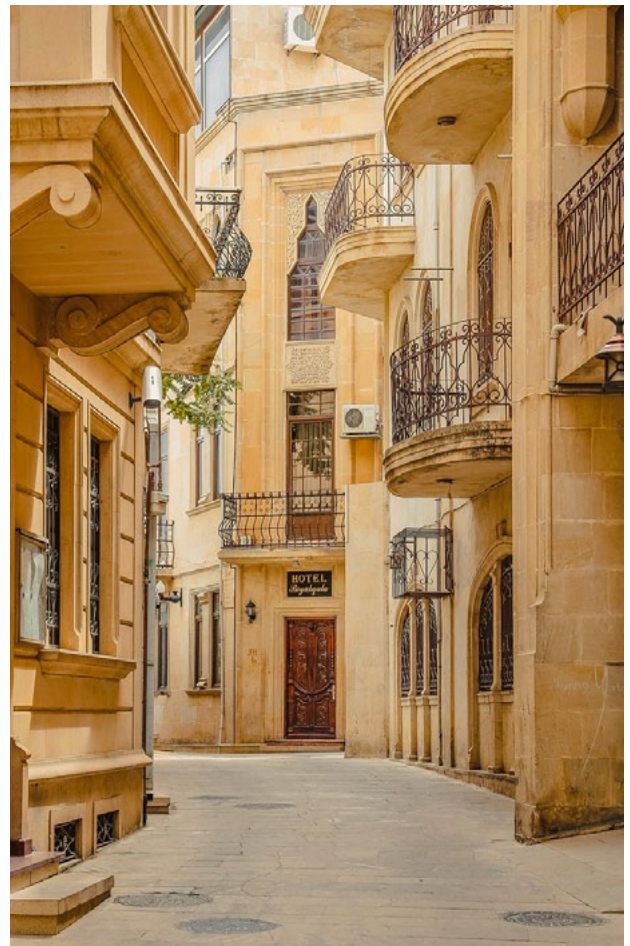
2 Azerbaijan

2019 was a record year for inbound tourism to Azerbaijan, with 3.17 million visits, up from 2.85 million in 2018, according to the country's national tourism agency. This is partly thanks to a series of initiatives launched by the authorities to make travel to the destination easier, such as multiple-entry, short-term tourist e-visas, which can be acquired quickly online.

Capital city Baku also played host to the UEFA Europa League final for the first time in 2019, and hosted its third Formula One Grand Prix, putting the capital city firmly in the global spotlight. This year looks set to be another record-breaking year, with Baku chosen as one of the host cities for Euro 2020 this summer.

As leisure travel to the destination continues to grow, Azerbaijan is naturally catching the attention of event and incentive planners looking for up and coming destinations. Baku boasts plenty of high-end properties, including international brands such as Fairmont, Four Seasons, JW

BAKU'S
OVERWHELMING
HISTORY MIXED
WITH MODERN
ARCHITECTURE
MAKE IT AN
APPEALING EVENTS
BACKDROP





THE STUNNING BALKAN COUNTRY HAS MADE OUR TOP SIX EMERGING DESTINATIONS LIST FOR A SECOND CONSECUTIVE YEAR



3 Montenegro

The fact that the Balkan country is on our top six emerging destinations list for the second year running suggests that it's yet to reach its full potential as a luxury MICE destination. Many agencies report that while the interest is there, it's still quite difficult to get clients to confirm Montenegro.

Heidi Baillie-David, team lead product development, senior buyer, at Creative Group Inc in Canada, says: "We had one programme in Montenegro a long time ago, and they weren't quite ready to cater for incentives. However, there is a lot more interest on the leisure side, and I think that once people start hearing about it personally, it will become more attractive on the incentive side."

Ongoing challenges for Montenegro include

cost and accessibility, especially when compared with its neighbour Croatia, which continues to pull in the incentive crowds. "Croatia is about as emerging as we get for our clients," says Pure Events founder & CEO Charlotte Gentry. "We would consider putting Montenegro forward as an alternative but it's very expensive."

Despite these challenges, Montenegro has plenty to offer – it boasts beautiful beaches, mountains, UNESCO-protected medieval towns and the stunning Kotor Bay, Europe's southern-most fjord. And new luxury openings will increase the choice for planners – the One&Only Portonovi will finally open its doors this April. Further ahead, Oberoi Hotels & Resorts will open The Oberoi Luxury Resort and Spa on Skadar Lake and Marriott has announced plans to open a Ritz-Carlton property on the Lustica Peninsula in 2024.

4 Rwanda

“For a country that was ripped apart just 25 years ago by genocide, the way Rwanda has reinvented itself is incredible,” says Worldspan managing director Sophie Morris, who recently visited the destination.

Despite its diminutive size – it’s about nine times smaller than the United Kingdom so roughly half the size of Scotland – Rwanda packs a punch as an incentive destination and is rapidly gaining the attention of planners looking for an off the beaten track alternative to the more popular African MICE hotspots.

“I would actively sell Rwanda for an incentive group that is looking for something different. It’s a very special destination and going to see the gorillas is a life-changing experience,” says Morris. Jan De Ridder, owned of Belgium-based event agency The Boosting Group says that he is seeing increased interest in Rwanda from clients. “It’s not cheap, but it’s safe, and the quality of the product is increasing,” he adds.

Rwanda has seen a boom in luxury hotel development – One&Only Gorilla’s Nest opened its doors just five minutes from Volcanoes National Park in Rwanda late last year, its

GORILLA TREKKING
THROUGH LUSH JUNGLE
TERRAIN REMAINS
ONE OF RWANDA’S MOST
POPULAR ACTIVITIES

second property in the destination following the opening of One&Only Nyungwe House in October 2018.

Volcanoes National Park is home to a third of the world’s remaining endangered mountain gorilla population and gorilla trekking remains one of its most popular activities. In addition to gorillas, groups can enjoy the diverse birdlife and trek to see chimpanzees and the rare golden monkey only found in Rwanda, visit local villages and coffee plantations and much more.





5 Panama

There were a few Latin American destinations named by event planners as emerging destinations they are considering for 2020 and beyond, including Columbia, Peru and Argentina, but surprisingly it was Panama that snuck into our top six.

TAG (The Appointment Group) Events is one agency that has seen an increase in interest, particularly among US clients. Bethany Chamberlain, event director, USA, explains: "Panama is a bit like Croatia was ten years ago. It's not very well known, and people don't know much about it so wouldn't necessarily go on holiday there, which makes it intriguing.

"There are so many things you can do there. The Panama Canal is of course a must, but there are also the beaches, rainforest activities and lots of CSR experiences with indigenous communities. It's also relatively cheap compared with Argentina, Mexico and Brazil."

There's plenty of new luxury product too, with W, Luxury Collection and Small Luxury Hotels of the World opening properties within the last couple of years and more on the horizon. Set in an archipelago of rainforest islands, just a short flight from Panama City, Viceroy Bocas del Toro Panama will feature 42 private overwater villas when it opens in 2021. A Ritz Carlton Reserve property is also being developed on Pearl Island. The open-air resort will feature 86 rooms, butlers, a private beach club and access to a world-class marina.



PANAMA BOASTS BEAUTIFUL BEACHES AND RAINFORESTS AS WELL AS ITS FAMED CANAL

GEORGIA IS A UNIQUE DESTINATION THAT OFFERS AMAZING AND UNEXPECTED EXPERIENCES



6 Georgia

Georgia and its capital city Tbilisi in particular, takes sixth place in our top six emerging destinations, as the destination starts to pique interest among more adventurous planners and clients.

Absolute Corporate Events' Okrafo-Smart says: "Georgia is definitely rearing her head because it's such a unique destination. You still have that Russian culture and can have some quite amazing and unexpected experiences."

Black Tomato Agency Co-head and Head of Sales, David Heron, adds: "Georgia is a personal favourite for me, it's getting lots of interest but at the moment is still quite hard to convert." He believes it will get the success it deserves, but thinks it will take another year at least for the confirmations to start coming in.

Purple Dog Solutions founder Chris Clarke visited Georgia in 2018 on a trip with Design Hotels and was impressed by what he saw. "I was really excited by the vibe in Tbilisi. If you have got a client who



wants to do something a little bit different – it could be really cool," he comments. "It's also really good value for money.

The hotels we stayed in were circa €160 – a similar type of property in London would be three times as much." ■

TOP TEN HOTELS 2020

If 2019 was an exciting year for new luxury openings, 2020 is shaping up to be even better. For the second consecutive year, we asked luxury event planners which new hotel openings they were most excited about for the year ahead, to create our annual inSPIRE Luxury Hotel Hotlist.

From a sleek boutique hideaway in Barcelona to two central London properties and luxurious beach resorts in Dubai and Morocco by big-name brands, here are the ten hottest openings across 2020 (listed in no particular order), as named-checked by the luxury event planners we surveyed...



1 *Nobu Hotel London Portman Square*

2020 is expected to see the addition of 7,995 hotel rooms across 65 new hotels, marking the largest number of openings London has ever seen in one year (STR). With so much new product in the pipeline, luxury incentive and event planners will be spoilt for choice.

Top Banana founder & CEO Richard Bridge is looking forward to the influx: "I'm excited about the number of hotel openings in London over the next year, especially properties like the new Nobu at Portman Square."

Located in the heart of London's Marylebone, Nobu Hotel London Portman Square is expected to open in summer 2020, featuring 249 guest rooms and suites, together with a Nobu restaurant, ballroom and meeting spaces.

Nobu Hotel London Portman Square is the second London hotel for Nobu Hospitality, the globally established lifestyle brand founded by Nobu Matsuhisa, Robert De Niro and Meir Teper, following the opening of Nobu Hotel Shoreditch in 2017.

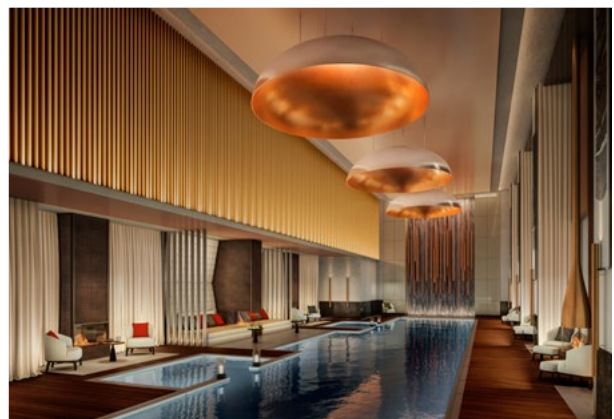




Aman New York

Located at the prestigious address of Fifth Avenue and 57th Street, overlooking Central Park, Aman New York will occupy the Crown building, one of the city's most architecturally significant buildings. Designed by Jean-Michel Gathy, who is behind some of the most esteemed Aman resorts including Aman Venice and Aman Sveti Stefan, this urban sanctuary will feature a dramatic double-height Sky Lobby with subtle Asian influences in tribute to Aman's Asian roots.

The 83-room property will boast a 10th-floor wraparound Garden Terrace, which will feature a bar with sweeping views of Central Park, a Cigar Bar, and year-round dining, a spa, and an exclusive collection of 20 private homes representing the first urban Aman Residences. A stylish Piano Bar in the Sky Lobby, two restaurants, a Wine Library and a subterranean Jazz Club round-out the property's signature elements.



3 *Bulgari Hotel Paris*

Paris is always a popular choice for events, but in 2020, it will be an even better one when The Bulgari Hotel Paris opens its doors in the prestigious address of 30 Avenue George V. "I'm looking forward to seeing the Bulgari in Paris. It's going to be an exciting new addition for the city," says Angélique Eriksen, founder & CEO at Egg Events, which has offices in Paris, Geneva, Brussels, Dubai and New York.

Bulgari Hotels & Resorts latest jewel will feature 76 rooms, a 25-metre pool, bar and restaurant, and a Parisian courtyard. Set on the corner of the Triangle d'Or, the hotel is being designed by Italian architectural firm Antonio Citterio Patricia Viel and will combine a classic Parisian Haussmann-style with a contemporary rationalistic façade.



4 *Fairmont Taghazout Bay Morocco*

After being off the pitch list for some time over safety concerns, Morocco is definitely back in vogue for events and incentives, with Marrakech sneaking into our top ten most popular destinations list. "Morocco had a quiet phase but was by far the best for conversions last year," says Black Tomato Agency co-head and head of sales David Heron. So, it's no surprise to see a Moroccan opening on our hotel hotlist for 2020.

A 615-hectare seaside resort located 18km north of Agadir on the Atlantic coast, Fairmont Taghazout Bay will feature 155 spacious guestrooms with sea facing views. The resort will boast over 2,500m² of meeting space and a Fairmont spa with fitness facilities. A range of culinary offerings will include an all-day dining restaurant, lobby lounge, specialty restaurant and beach pool bar and grill.

5 *Four Seasons Hotel Tokyo at Otemachi*

Set to open this July, just in time for the Tokyo 2020 Olympics, Four Seasons Hotel Tokyo at Otemachi will be the brand's second property in the city. The hotel will occupy the upper six floors of a 39-story office tower and offer around 190 rooms and multiple indoor and outdoor restaurants and bars, as well as sweeping views of the city from the 39th floor rooftop terrace.

It will also feature a state-of-the-art spa, fitness centre and indoor pool as well as extensive meeting and events spaces and an Executive Club lounge for business travellers.



6 *Kimpton Barcelona*

Barcelona's Gothic Quarter is about to get that bit shinier with the opening of Kimpton Vividora Hotel (an inVOYAGE 2020 partner). This sleek boutique hideaway will bring 156 new contemporary rooms to the historic and artistic hub of the city, featuring locally designed furniture with cosy yet stylish fabrics.

The three on-site restaurants have been created to deliver all the warmth and ambience of a favoured neighbourhood haunt. For a chic alfresco experience, head to the Terraza de Vivi rooftop bar and terrace for small plates but big views. All of the restaurants can be adapted for functions – with Fauna featuring a private dining room, the café being perfect for cocktail receptions while the rooftop terrace with its views across the skyline is set to become a popular option.

7 *The Londoner*

The second London entry in our top ten hotel hot list is Edwardian's much-anticipated new property on Leicester Square, The Londoner. BI WORLDWIDE design director, events, Katrina Rannard says: "I'm definitely keeping my eye on all the new properties opening in London in 2020, particularly The Londoner."

Dubbed the capital's first "iceberg hotel" – with more space underground than above – the 350-room five-star hotel is expected to open in June 2020. The subterranean levels of the property will feature a ballroom accommodating up to 864 people, seven private meeting rooms, a spa, 15-metre swimming pool and gym and two private screening rooms. Facilities above ground will include a whisky room, drawing room, public tavern and rooftop terrace restaurant.



8 *Mandarin Oriental, Madrid*

The uber-luxury Mandarin Oriental brand has several key properties opening in 2020, but its Madrid debut is gaining the most attention among luxury event planners as demand for the Spanish capital continues to grow.

Formerly the iconic Hotel Ritz, Madrid, which was designed and built under the supervision of legendary hotelier César Ritz, the 153-room property will reopen as Mandarin Oriental Ritz, Madrid this summer following the most extensive restoration in its 110-year history.

Chef Quique Dacosta, one of the most celebrated chefs in Spain, has been appointed to design, develop and oversee the hotel's five restaurants and bars including a signature restaurant overlooking the famous hotel garden. The ballroom and function spaces, with their large windows facing the Prado Museum are being restored and will accommodate a range of events from meetings to private dinners and parties.



9 *Raffles Udaipur*

"I think that India will start to see a resurrection in interest from the events and incentives market this year," says Black Tomato Agency's Heron. Accor certainly has the destination in its sights with plans for not one but two new Raffles properties in India – the first of which is due to open in 2020 and has caught the attention of the luxury planners surveyed for this report.

Situated on a 21-acre private island in Udai Sagar lake, the 101-room resort is expected to open by mid-2020. Easily accessed from Udaipur's main attractions, the resort will include Raffles' Signatures such as a 1,100m² Raffles Spa, Long Bar, and Writers Bar along with a rooftop restaurant and an all-day dining restaurant, a swimming pool, and deck.



The Royal Atlantis Resort & Residences, Dubai

Fans of Atlantis The Palm will be excited to check out its new sister property due to open in late 2020. This neighbouring resort will offer its own distinctly opulent vibe with two properties stretching out across a whopping 63 hectares of land and more than 2km of beachfront.

The newest behemoth on the emirate will be 43 storeys high and approximately 185 metres above sea level, with the infinity Sky Pool on level 22 offering incredible views across the city, while the lobby bar area will be home to the world's largest jellyfish tank, housing approximately 2,000 jellyfish.

Meetings spaces abound and include a 1000sqm ballroom for 660 guests and six meeting rooms. But this will be a place to celebrate, with 13 bars and restaurants including Dinner by Heston Blumenthal, Hakkasan and Milos by Costas Spiliadis. ■

A person with long hair, wearing a light-colored jacket and a backpack, is hiking on a rocky trail. Their arms are outstretched to the sides. The background shows a steep, rocky mountain slope. The entire image is overlaid with a teal color filter.

SUSTAINABILITY

NO GOING BACK: SUSTAINABILITY AND CSR ARE HERE TO STAY!

2019 was a defining year for the events industry as far as sustainability and CSR – key themes discussed at inVOYAGE 2019 – are concerned. It's clear that event professionals from both our buyer and Travel Partner community, and the wider luxury events industry, are taking the subject incredibly seriously.

A whopping 81% of survey respondents said their company has a CSR/sustainability strategy in place, while the average percentage of RFP/briefing documents that include sustainability is 35%. However, responses ranged from 0% to as high as 85%, suggesting there still a huge gap between those clients at the forefront of the sustainability movement and everyone else.

"We have customers who don't really care about the environment or any potential climate change their incentives might cause. Then we have customers on the totally opposite side, who are fully committed to the preservation of the planet and climate change aware. We also have companies in between that are starting to become aware about sustainability," says Viane Hermès, sustainability & project manager at Swedish agency Hermès Group.


PROACTIVE PROPOSALS

Event professionals are however confident that their clients will place a growing emphasis on sustainability and CSR in future. The majority (85%) of those surveyed said they expect the percentage of pitches including sustainability/CSR to rise in 2020, and all the agencies we interviewed said they are being more proactive and including sustainable options in their proposals regardless of whether clients have asked for it or not.

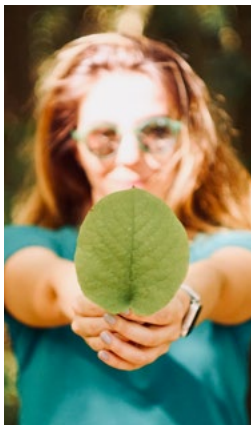


81%
of survey
respondents said
their company
has a CSR/
sustainability
strategy in place.



Even the clients that have historically not shown an interest in CSR now have it on their radar. They are not advanced as some of our other clients, but they are starting to think about the little things and make small steps like not having plastic bottles or straws at their events. 

**Katrina Rannard, design director,
events at BI WORLDWIDE**



“Even the clients that have historically not shown an interest in CSR now have it on their radar. They are not advanced as some of our other clients, but they are starting to think about the little things and make small steps like not having plastic bottles or straws at their events,” says Katrina Rannard, design director, events at BI WORLDWIDE.

She is confident that it will eventually get to the stage where 100% of RFPs include sustainability, but adds that even then, it may come down to desire versus cost – what a client wants to do, and what they can afford to do. “For example, we are running a big conference this year for a client that wanted to give out reusable water bottles and have water fountains on site. But the cost of the water fountains is so much more than having individual plastic water bottles. We will always give sustainable options so our clients can see the difference – and if there isn’t much difference, there is no reason for them not to do it.”

At inVOYAGE 2019 in Monaco, a panel discussion followed by a C-Suite session featuring senior industry leaders, debated sustainability/CSR at length and there was a strong consensus that there needs to be less talk, more action. There was also a call for better communication and sharing of best practices and case studies, which is why we have dedicated a section of this report to the topic and invited several senior industry leaders to contribute.

Learn more about the business benefits of embedding sustainability from CWT Meetings & Events global VP, Commercial, Ian Cummings and discover 15 things you can do now in our sustainability top tips feature by BCD Meetings & Events’ senior director, Marketing EMEA, John Kelly. Finally, Jemma Peers, client and commercial director at Top Banana shares the key challenges, insights and learnings from delivering a recent event with sustainability at its heart. ■



The business benefits OF EMBEDDING SUSTAINABILITY



*By Ian Cummings
CWT Meetings & Events Global VP, Commercial*

Sustainability is no longer an add-on to business practices. It encompasses a holistic way of doing business that creates positive and meaningful change.

News images such as the Amazon rainforest and Australian bush fires have brought sustainability to the fore, along with political recognition of climate awareness campaigning by Swedish teenager Greta Thunberg, and global action taken by groups such as Extinction Rebellion.

“The fact that we now talk about climate crisis instead of climate change, underlines the urgency for all stakeholders to address sustainability very seriously,” says Françoise Grumberg, Vice President, Global Responsible Business and Diversity & Inclusion, CWT.

And as the proportion of Millennials and Generation Z attendees increases in business and at events, so too does a desire for authenticity. Deloitte’s Global Millennial Survey 2019 found the greatest concern for this generation is climate change, while they are happy to jump ship if they disagree with a company’s business practices, values, or political leanings.

Meanwhile, legislation and regulation such as the newly-enacted French Loi PACTE mean that a purpose beyond profits is fast becoming de rigueur for ambitious businesses. The highly influential Business Roundtable group of hundreds of chief executives last summer published a statement reframing the purpose of business and corporations as stakeholder value, not solely shareholder value. The new statement, unveiled in August, refers to creating value for customers, while investing in employees, fostering diversity and



inclusion, dealing fairly and ethically with suppliers, supporting the communities in which corporations work, and protecting the environment.

Against a backdrop of consumer and employee demand for authentic and responsible companies that mirror their own values, there are tangible business benefits to being at the forefront of sustainability. Research shows that engaging in sustainability – what we call responsible

business – contributes positively to shareholder value in the long term, as well as building reputation, avoiding risks, finding new opportunities for growth, and even cost savings. So, it's no surprise we see more requests for an in-depth approach to sustainability. It is no longer just about recycling, but taking a meticulous approach to all sustainability aspects, from environmental footprint and how to reduce it, to reducing risks in our supply chain, tackling modern day slavery and gender equality, as well as diversity and inclusion.

RESPONSIBLE APPROACH

Having a responsible business approach and company culture is ever more important as employees and consumers want to be associated with a brand that reflects their values. Meetings and events are a great way to articulate that as they can have a very strong influence and social impact on a destination and local communities.

COMPANIES
ARE UNDER PRESSURE
TO DEMONSTRATE
TO THEIR EMPLOYEES
AND SHAREHOLDERS
THAT THEY ARE TAKING
SUSTAINABILITY
SERIOUSLY

Research shows that engaging in sustainability – what we call responsible business – contributes positively to shareholder value in the long term, as well as building reputation, avoiding risks, finding new opportunities for growth, and even cost savings.

Our industry bodies are getting in on the act, with MPI launching an inclusive event design certificate program in April 2019, SITE unveiling its Bangkok Manifesto in May 2019—focusing on social responsibility, authenticity and inclusivity in the incentives sector—and the GBTA Foundation running an annual sustainability recognition program for the business travel and meetings industry worldwide.

Major drivers for corporate sustainability are international initiatives, including the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals. The 17 UN Sustainable Development Goals are a call to action to work together to end extreme poverty, fight inequality and injustice, and protect our planet. With a deadline of 2030, there is just a decade left to meet these goals.

CHOOSING THE RIGHT PARTNERS

“There is a market incentive to develop and implement a sustainability programme,” explains Françoise Grumberg, Vice President, Global Responsible Business and Diversity & Inclusion, CWT. “Businesses also find value in selecting responsible suppliers, as this helps them better manage ethical, social and environmental risks in their own supply chain.”

There is a huge opportunity for meetings and events to embed and showcase sustainability and responsibility.

Whether that is offsetting air miles with carbon schemes, choosing the most sustainable venues and locally-sourced and produced food and drinks, eliminating plastic waste or ensuring that activities leave a positive legacy in the destination, meeting the challenge is a win-win for the people, the planet and business. ■



15 TOP TIPS FOR MORE SUSTAINABLE EVENTS



*By John Kelly
Snr. Director,
Marketing EMEA,
BCD Meetings
& Events*



There can be no doubt that incentive trips, meetings, events and travel all have an impact on the environment, but that impact doesn't always have to be negative. By understanding what that impact is and mitigating and reducing it or engaging in CSR-led activities that make a positive impact during and after our events, we will be heading in the right direction.

I am utterly passionate about sustainability, but I want to make it clear that I'm not a tree-hugger, eco activist or scientist. What I am is someone that cares about the planet and how the meetings and incentives industry can make a tangible, positive contribution in this area. I also firmly believe that what we need is a million people making small changes, rather than a handful of people making big changes.

So, it's with that in mind that the overarching theme of my 15 'Top' Tips is that education is key. That can be through the pre-event material you send out (bring your own water bottles as we'll not be providing anything

etc.), to being onsite and advising why, for example, there is no red meat on the menu. People like to feel they are part of a solution so will buy in to this – I promise you.

At BCD Meetings & Events, we're regularly being asked by our clients for case studies, best practices and advice on how to make their events more sustainable and we're in the process of building even more content on our website that backs up our 2018 Green White Paper. It's encouraging that we're seen as pioneers in this area. However, we fully appreciate that this is far too big a topic for us to handle alone, so we're really encouraged and proud to be part of the knowledge sharing initiatives that are being driven by inVOYAGE and other organisations.

It's vitally important to remember that our entire industry is built around engagement and meeting face-to-face. It's at the heart of everything we do, and we know good things happen when people meet. Here are a few tips to get you started with planning more sustainable events.



TOP TIPS

1 Take a walk through of your entire event when planning and look at every single aspect of it. Ask yourself what aspects of the event can be done in an eco-friendlier manner. That could be not having single use bottles of water, paper on tables or getting your set built locally rather than shipping it in. Once you start with that mindset then you'll be in a good place.

2 While your event content should be customised to your audience, increase the life cycle of discarded materials by reducing customisation and event-specific branding, such as date and location. Additionally, look at using electronic noticeboards and signage that has an infinite shelf life.



3 Educate delegates and attendees in advance that elements of your event are going to be green. That could include a meat-free day in catering, no single use plastics allowed (just remember to advise delegates to bring their own reusable water bottles), or no paper being used. You'll be amazed at the adoption by delegates once they understand what personal impact they can make.

4 Create an App that ensures no paper is used and gives green tips throughout the lifecycle of an event.

5 Advise delegates to use public transport or car share to get to and from an event. You could set up your App to allow for a forum on the best travel methods and to share ride options.

6 Support the environment and safe working conditions by buying fair-trade products for your programme, such as coffee and tea.

7 Work with your venue to reduce food waste. Ensure your delegate numbers and dietary requirements are confirmed as close to the event as possible and the caterers are aware and plan accordingly. Wherever possible produce food that can be donated to delegates to take home or given to local charities. Explain to your delegates about the massive amount of food waste created during an event and get them to be part of the solution.



PLANNERS CAN SUPPORT THE ENVIRONMENT AND SAFE WORKING CONDITIONS BY BUYING FAIRTRADE PRODUCTS SUCH AS COFFEE AND TEA AND USING LOCAL PRODUCE



8 Investigate what food and resources are available locally and in season to reduce the food and transportation miles.

9 Help reduce emissions of CO2 and other harmful chemicals by selecting programme venues that are walkable or accessible by public transport and promote alternatives to single-occupant car trips.

10 Select chicken or plant-based food to serve at mealtime. 628,000 litres of water can be saved by opting to serve chicken instead of beef for a 500 person banquet.

11 Plan eco-friendly exhibits by providing a list of green tips for exhibitors and an opportunity for them to donate used or excess items for repurposing.

12 Choose accommodation that has a sustainability credential, such as LEED or ISO Certification. This confirms their use of green features that encourage energy and resource efficiency. Work with your venue to ensure they know that this is high on your agenda and ask them to be part of the solution.



13 Speak with your venue about any similar events that they have going on before or after yours, there may be a chance to share AV or other equipment reducing the need to bring it in twice, this can save money and a lot of waste.

14 Introduce a grading system that shows how green your event is. Gold, Silver and Bronze are really simple and you know people will always be striving to push for better results – evaluate and share the results regularly.

15 Do something. We can all be part of the solution, but equally we're part of the problem if we do nothing! ■

CASE STUDY:

The challenges of
delivering an event with
sustainability at its heart



*By Jemma Peers,
Client and Commercial
Director, Top Banana*

Plastic has been a driving force behind messages of sustainability throughout the events and incentives industry, with more importance than ever being placed on reducing waste from items like straws, cups and bottles over the past 12 to 18 months. But plastic is merely a drop in the ocean when it comes to lowering the environmental footprint of events. Without a doubt, our marine life and oceans are being massively affected by plastic, but if we're looking at sustainability as a whole – it's only a small part of the problem.

As an agency, we have been incorporating sustainable elements into our client events for many years – mostly focused on reducing, reusing and recycling. But true sustainability is so much more than

SUSTAINABILITY



THE ANNUAL CELEBRATION AND AWARDS EVENT WAS THEMED AROUND THE CLIENT'S CSR PROGRAMME, WHICH FOCUSES ON THREE KEY ELEMENTS - OPPORTUNITY, COMMUNITY AND RESPONSIBILITY

that, as we discovered when delivering a recent celebration event for one of their clients which challenged us to incorporate diversity and inclusiveness into their programme.

Perhaps rather naively, I didn't realise how closely the diversity issue was linked to sustainability. But when you look at the UN Sustainable Development Goals, which aim to achieve a better and more sustainable future for all, two of the 17 goals – Gender Equality and Reduced Inequality – both deal with diversity.

The annual celebration and awards event is usually just an evening celebration, but for the first time in 2019, the client wanted to include a business element that focused on its internal CSR programme. The programme has three themes – Opportunity, Community and Responsibility, and it was important to both us and the client that the event itself was complementary to the topics that were being discussed. So, we set about making the event itself as sustainable as we could within the budget and the time constraints – we had eight weeks from the kick-off meeting to delivery!

GOING GENDER NEUTRAL

Opportunity is all about access to work, and giving everybody from working mums and single dads, to people with disabilities and the LGBTQ+ community the ability to work. To ensure the event played into that – we gender neutralised the whole event. Having not done this before, the process was quite eye-opening and challenging.

For a start, we had to change the way we registered people as we couldn't ask for their gender at registration, which made rooming lists incredibly difficult especially when delegates were sharing rooms. The language we used for the entire event, in everything from the pre-



event communications to the script, had to be gender neutralised. We worked closely with PI&R's LGBTQ+ committee to make sure we weren't offending anyone by the language we used – for example, the host couldn't say "hey guys", or "good afternoon ladies and gentlemen". We also knew we had someone in the audience who was transitioning, so we had to be mindful of that.

We obviously had to provide bathrooms that were gender neutral, but we had a duty to provide women's, men's and disabled toilets as well so that people had a choice if they weren't comfortable with using gender neutral facilities. This meant building



SUSTAINABILITY

additional gender-neutral bathrooms on site. We needed to be mindful of our signage and think about braille for people with sight issues, access for anyone with disabilities (we had a Down Syndrome choir performing), make provisions for Muslim guests and provide catering stalls for all the different dietary requirements from Halal to gluten free to vegan. We ensured that every single demographic who might be attending the event had been thought about and their needs catered for.

RESPONSIBLE SOURCING

The Responsibility element of the programme is more around the traditional sustainability, so we looked at responsible sourcing at an incredibly detailed level. This meant making sure everything from the cotton in the hotel beds to every ingredient on the menu was

sourced in a sustainable way and had no links to anything improper, which took time and added an extra challenge.

Naturally for an event that was trying to be sustainable, the ideal would have been to not have plastic onsite. However, this was a celebration event for 5,000 people with alcohol being served so from a safety perspective, we didn't want thousands of glass beer bottles. We made the decision to have plastic bottles, but we brought in our own people to handle the rubbish on site. There were no plastic straws or food dishes – those were all cardboard, and all waste was sorted on-site and taken away in separate vehicles, so we disposed of as much as we could in the right way, even using biodegradable balloons.

We looked at transport and tried as much as possible to minimise the number of vehicles on-site to reduce carbon impact. All delegates who lived outside of a 20m radius from the venue were put up in accommodation and bused in – so we made sure we each bus did multiple stops and was full before leaving. We grouped crew together as well – at one point we had over 150 crew on site – and brought them in on coaches as opposed to having hundreds of cars. We also looked into options for offsetting carbon for the transport, and entire event, but it was too costly.

The main challenge we found was how much more expensive it can be to run a sustainable event. We learned a lot from the experience but feel like we only scratched the surface in terms of what could be done to. I would love to be able to have the budget to go fully out – but we did what we could in the short time we had.

But if for every event, every agency and every client took just some of these elements in to consideration, the results could be enormous. As an industry we have a huge responsibility for creating a more sustainable world and we need to make sure we're working together with our clients, step by step, to make a change. ■



THE EVENT
NEEDED TO
BE FUN AND
CELEBRATORY
AS WELL AS
SUSTAINABLE

We would like to thank everyone who contributed to this report by taking part in our surveys or participating in interviews. Your support is much appreciated.

CONTRIBUTING COMPANIES INCLUDE:

Absolute Corporate Events / Accor Hotels / aigner und oesterreicher OG
AllianceBernstein / American Connections / Arabian Adventures
Argentina Travel Partners / BCD M&E EMEA / BCD M&E APAC / Belmond Reid's Palace
BI WORLDWIDE EMEA / BI WORLDWIDE APAC / Black Tomato Agency / cievents
Constance Hotels, Resorts and Golf / CR Worldwide / Creative Group Inc
CWT Meetings & Events / Egg Events / Fairmont Rey Juan Carlos I / First Incentive Travel
Freeman, Singapore / Global DMC Partners / Grand Luxury Experiences
Green Route Africa / Helms Briscoe / Hermes Group / Hilton Luxury / Horizon DMC
House of Travel / Hyatt Hotels / Iberostar Hotels & Resorts
Incentive Research Foundation / INVNT / Italia Connection / Le Grand Bellevue Gstaad
Lucerne Convention Bureau / Maui Jim Sunglasses / Meetings & Incentives Worldwide
Mintel / Montage International / Mundus Representation / Mutika EMC / nice:-) Events
Nobu Hotels / Ovation Global DMC / Pacific World / Penguins Events / Pico
Powwow Events / Pure Events / Purple Dog Solutions / Rede2 / Relish Events
Rosewood Hotels / Ritz Carlton Hotel Company / Show Division / Stream Comms
TAG Events / The Boosting Group / The Doyle Collection / The Vibe Agency
TMG.INTERNATIONAL / Top Banana / VO Event / W Hotels
Waldorf Astoria Hotels & Resorts / Welcome Italy & Events
Wewent AB / Worldspan / WOW Consult / Yellow Fish

Visit www.invoyage.net to find out more about inVOYAGE 2020, which takes place on 4-7 October in Mykonos, and sign up to receive our weekly inSPIRE edit bulletin featuring luxury news and inspiration for event professionals.

Content by Susie Harwood. Design by Emma Platt