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Trend watch: 90% organise in Belgium, 56% also organise abroad

Early 2006 Belgian-based marketing and communication agency THEPLANNER.be conducted a large-scale enquiry towards corporate planners in Belgium. The idea was to formulate an answer to the key question: which destinations do Belgian companies prefer when organising external meetings, incentives or events? The response was overwhelming: over 700 companies took part in this enquiry. An overview of the major trends.

The research shows that 98% of Belgian companies organise meetings, incentives or events outside the office buildings on a regular basis. This does not only bode well for Belgium, but also for our foreign destinations. What is striking is that one third of the companies like to stay close: those who choose for Belgium often (30%) prefer a location within their own province.

Original destinations abroad

Foreign destinations are more popular than ever, that much is certain. 56% of Belgian companies trek across the border to organise their meetings, incentives or events and 98% of them are clearly interested in European destinations, particularly Western and Southern Europe. The top 5 of foreign countries is made up of France (52%), The Netherlands (33%), Spain (26%), Italy/Germany (24%) and the UK/Ireland (23%). Of the remaining countries, particularly Luxemburg (14%), Portugal (12%), Poland (11%) and the Baltic States (8%) are in great demand.

When we look at the cities, we see that capital cities are all the rage. The top five sees Paris clearly in the lead, followed by Barcelona, Amsterdam, London and Madrid.

Top 10 of European cities

Destination	% of companies that are interested
1. Paris	20.55%
2. Barcelona	14.16%
3. Amsterdam	11.94%
4. London	10.5%
5. Madrid	9.16%
6. Luxemburg city / Milan / Rome	5.83%
7. Lisbon	5.27%
8. Berlin	5.00%
9. Dublin / Vienna	4.16%
10. Prague	3.88%

The reasons why companies choose for one destination and not another are fairly diverse. One major aspect of course is accessibility, for 51.03% of Belgian companies that is their main motivation for choosing a destination. As a result of the increasing importance of 'procurement', value for money is an important measure for 33.50% of respondents.

Selection criteria of Belgian companies when choosing their destination

Criterion	% of companies using the criterion
1. Accessibility	51.03%
2. Value for money	33.50%
3. Destination's originality	23.71%
4. Possibility to organise incentives	22.68%
5. Good infrastructure	20.10%
6. Professional services & organisation	14.43%
7. Excellent meeting infrastructure	13.91%
8. Climate/weather	12.37%
9. Culture	10.82%
10. 'business link' with the company	10.30%

What is remarkable is that the 'destination's originality' is important to 23.71% of the companies. There is a great need for new and unexplored destinations that are easy to reach. For 10.30% of companies, having a 'business link' with the destination is a winning criterion: these are destinations where the company has a site, where there are potential customers or where the company is planning to invest. In this respect we see a growing interest in Poland and the Baltic States, because both regions have become a gateway to Central and Eastern Europe and the Russian market for many companies.

What types of venues are Belgian companies interested in?

61% of Belgian companies are interested in hotels to host their meetings, incentives or events. But this means that our companies are not afraid to think outside of the box when it comes to choosing a venue. Almost half of all Belgian companies (45%) are looking for contemporary, hip and trendy locations. That is why the easily-accessible Western and Southern European capitals, with their wide range of 'hot spots', play such a prominent role in this study.

That Belgium is a nation of food lovers is also apparent from the fact that 37% of all companies consider a restaurant as an ideal location. But we Belgians also love our history and culture. And this is clearly reflected in our choice of venue. Here you will find an overview of the most popular locations, brimming over with 'culture' and 'history':

Type of venue	% of companies that are interested
1. Castle/Manor	35%
2. Abbey, church & convent	34%
3. Historical venue in general	30%

- 4. Industrial location / Museum 25%
- 5. Theatre 21%

Large diversity in interests

For bigger meetings, 36% of the companies prefer going to a state-of-the-art congress centre. What is striking is that the level of interest in low-budget venues is fairly limited: just 12% of all companies select a venue purely based on its low (rent) price. Chalets/gîtes on the other hand, are remarkably popular: 28% of respondents are interested in them as an alternative to traditional hotels. Other types of locations that are popular among Belgian companies are golf clubs (31%), boats (29%), themed, family and amusement parks (28%) and spas (20%).

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NOTES FOR THE EDITOR

We would like to thank the following sponsors for their contribution to this enquiry:

The Spanish Tourist Office : www.spain.info
Warsaw Destination Alliance : www.destinationwarsaw.com
The Polish Tourist Office : www.polska-be.com
The Outsider Coast : www.theoutsidercoast.be

Inspiration seminar

THEPLANNER.be will be organising an inspiration on 22 September in Brussels, during which the results of this study will be further discussed, and a myriad of ideas will be given that suit the corporate reader's needs. The event is open to corporates only. www.corporateplanner.be/invitation

CORPORATEPLANNER.be

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