

## **Innovation matters, say MICE planners**

### **- experts reveal what's new; where's hot; why originality counts**

*First-ever research has been carried out by IMEX on the topic of innovation in the meetings and incentive travel sector. Respondents represented 12 countries within Europe and Scandinavia; plus the USA; and also a cross-section of 'emerging' MICE markets including Bangladesh, Nigeria, Pakistan and Turkey. The range of job titles of survey participants typically included: events consultant; PCO; VP-Marketing; congress manager; IT+Logistics manager; account director; DMC; incentive travel consultant; general secretary; and PA to chairman. The majority of replies were from meetings industry specialists but among corporate markets represented were finance, export trading, management accountant, and engineering, whilst association personnel covered fields as diverse as professional development, chambers of commerce, and surgery.*

\* \* \*

The analysis began by inviting the experts to rank six attributes of a destination (whether country, city or resort) in perceived order of importance for those selecting locations for their events. The findings are (in order):

- The infrastructure (airports, hotels, transfers etc) is of a high standard
- Attendees consider it a new and therefore appealing place to visit
- It is easy to get to for most, or all, of those involved
- It offers the necessary value for money appropriate to the event
- It is perceived to be a reliable, traditionally popular and sensible option
- It is perceived to be environmentally-aware

Whilst logical and practical factors (infrastructure, access, value) clearly seem to matter within the selection process, the two most 'emotional' considerations, those of a sense of newness, and the rationale of greenness, are ranked quite differently by planners.

## **innovative thinking**

The corporate, association and intermediary buyers were invited to explain why they think it matters within the meetings and incentive travel industry to try to be innovative and to introduce new thinking. Their verbatim comments included: 'innovation is the motor to keep everything going'; 'in the war to attract delegates to events you need to stand up and be original not just with the concept and agenda, but also technology'; 'meetings planners need to be ahead of their clients'; 'we try to be on top of travel trends and offer emerging destinations still in their infancy as this motivates and stimulates more effectively than 'old' ideas'; 'breaking from routine is the most effective advantage against aggressive competition'; 'innovation and creativity are the key to staying in business'; and 'being seen to be new is the basis of appealing to young people'.

## **pleasing new ideas**

More specifically, respondents were asked next to identify the 'most pleasing' new ideas that they have successfully introduced to their meetings and incentive programmes in 2007. Replies included (verbatim comments):

- *'getting away from 'white cube' meeting rooms in favour of unusual venues such as historic houses'*
- *'introducing Web 2.0 software to enable participants to influence the conference programme'*
- *'offsetting CO2 emissions'*
- *'launching our own conference registration programme to avoid having to buy this externally'*
- *'replacing thank-you gifts for speakers with certificates explaining that trees had been planted in their names'*
- *'introducing an interactive webinar programme that focuses on cultural differences and awareness'*
- *'providing a new relationship management programme that enables delegates to book networking sessions in advance'*
- *'requiring each delegate to make a short presentation explaining their goals and plans for 2008 and describing their intended impact on behalf of the company'*
- *'anything to do with social responsibility'*
- *'introducing total quality management procedures'*

## 'hot' destinations

Survey participants were asked to shortlist which they thought would be the 'hot' new destinations for the future. In alphabetical order the 10 named most frequently were as follows:

Argentina; Costa Rica; East European countries (especially Bulgaria and Romania); the Far East generally (especially China); Istanbul; the Middle East (especially Dubai); Montenegro; North Africa (especially Morocco); Peru; and South Africa

Finally, respondents were invited to select a destination that they admire most for its ability to make 'newness' a strong part of its MICE marketing appeal. In alphabetical order the 10 named most frequently were as follows (with characteristic comments):

- **Australia** – 'for its emphasis on informality in lifestyles'
- **Dubai** – 'renowned for making the impossible possible, and doing new things all the time'
- **Egypt** – 'it ticks all the boxes for the future by combining heritage, activities, resorts, weather and welcome'
- **The Far East** – 'for managing always to appear excellent value for money'
- **Germany** – 'for skilfully blending the messages of traditional charm and old-fashioned hospitality with that of cutting-edge technology'
- **Iceland** – for its fresh orientation on youth, action and adventure'
- **India** – 'now additionally attractive for non-stop flights and its fascinating booming economy'
- **Istanbul** – 'for successfully integrating the old and the new'
- **Switzerland** – 'for brilliant branding'
- **UK** – 'for marketing savvy, the high concentration of industry professionals, and the new sense of rediscovery that has been introduced'

One further possible pointer to the future is an emphasis placed by many buyers on the growing appeal of less well-known 'second and third' cities or regions within an already popular destination. Whilst their success ultimately would depend on there being favourable transportation links, these 'niche' locations are considered likely to be beneficiaries of the search for newness within countries already fashionable, but

needing a fresh dimension to their image and product range. Examples include Glasgow in Scotland, and the South Tyrol in Italy.

- Ends -