

International Outlook: How North American buyers view global meetings and incentive travel opportunities

Introduction

Over 120 meetings and incentive travel decision-makers in North America (91% USA; 9% Canada) responded to the first 'International Outlook' Survey conducted by IMEX. Questions were emailed in August 2005. Because the respondents had been pre-selected as hosted buyers by the exhibition, the assumption can be made that these executives characteristically organise events in a global context.

Findings

Job title and responsibility

Over 40 job titles were identified, among them Company President, Executive Vice-President, Executive Director, Chief Executive Officer. The majority (approx. 60%) held more meetings/incentive travel-specific positions including Meetings Organiser; Professional Conference Organiser; Corporate Venue Planner; Meetings and Conference Services Director. Other more precisely focused titles were Sports Marketing Manager; Foundation Director; Event Consultant; and Association Meetings Organiser.

Number of international events

More than two-thirds (68%) of those responding organise up to 10 events annually outside North America. Of the rest, 20% are involved with from 11-50 events a year; with 12% referring to 51 or more events.

Attendance at international events

Around a third (35%) of international events involve up to 50 participants; a further 41% are attended by from 51-250; and there were broadly equal proportions (plus or minus 8%) for the size categories 251-500; 501-1500; and 1501+.

Event types

A full spectrum of types of event included: sales meetings; association conferences; board/stockbroker meetings; media symposia and congresses; sports and golf

incentives; team development pursuits; conventions with trade shows; incentive travel programmes; fund-raising projects etc.

Reasons for choosing international destinations (in ranked order)

- 1st : To encourage a more global outlook within our organisation
- 2nd : The exotic appeal of international destinations
- 3rd : We have strong international links and a global focus
- 4th : We like to be different and adventurous
- 5th : The better value of overseas destinations
- 6th : We already have visited the majority of North American locations

Specific factors mentioned

'Globalisation of trade' ... 'Our licensees are overseas' ... 'Growing confidence and experience in international travel' ... 'Our clients operate on an increasingly global basis' ... 'Geo-Political developments in our business sectors' ... 'Easier international travel' ... 'Effective management of security concerns'.

How destinations are selected (in ranked order)

- 1st : Own experience
- 2nd : Information gathered from an exhibition
- 3rd : Member recommendation
- 4th : Suggestions from agencies/professional advisers
- 5th : Internet research
- 6th : Brochures and advertisements

Top 5 Regions which appeal for your international events (in ranked order)

- 1st : Europe
- 2nd= : Australia/New Zealand; and Caribbean
- 4th : Asia/Far East
- 5th : Latin America

Top 25 International Destinations (not in ranked order)

Amsterdam; Aruba; Athens; Bahamas; Beijing; Buenos Aires; Costa Rica; Czech Republic; Delhi; Dubai; Dublin; Hong Kong; Jamaica; London; Mexico; Milan;

Munich; Paris; Sao Paulo; South Africa (Cape Town); Sydney; Tahiti; Thailand; Tokyo; Wellington.

Most challenging problem when organising international events

Top 10 (not in ranked order)

'Finding locations that association members will want to visit' ... 'Safety issues' ... 'Containing the costs of air travel' ... 'Performance and commitment of suppliers/building trusting relationships with suppliers' ... 'Having to use new (unknown) destinations' ... 'Shipping and customs fees' ... 'Hotels whose management staff keep changing' ... 'Lack of value of the dollar making some countries seem expensive' ... 'Finding enough things for all the delegates to do' ... 'Trying to schedule flight times, connections and transfers so that delegate time isn't wasted'.

Most pleasurable outcomes from organising international events

Top 10 (not in ranked order)

'Working with people of different cultures and backgrounds, and learning from them' ... 'Experiencing new destinations' ... 'Building new relationships' ... 'Integrating the history, architecture and art of the destination into our event' ... 'Using good local professionals' ... 'Shedding light on US culture to European delegates' ... 'Seeing things I've only read about' ... 'Creating better understandings' ... 'Seeing delegates come alive again when they escape the routines of work' ... 'Meeting new people'.

Name one important lesson in international event organisation to pass on to others

Top 10 (not in ranked order)

'Research personally in advance' ... 'Practice greater sensitivity to other cultures' ... 'Check and re-check business and social etiquette' ... 'Plan well ahead' ... 'Put everything in writing' ... 'Use professionals/DMCs locally' ... 'Have a doctor on call on a 24-hour basis' ... 'Be patient with other cultures' ... 'Don't be afraid to try new places' ... 'Don't underestimate the value of a good customs agent and shipping partner'.

Factors likely to encourage, or discourage, your future international demand

Top Five (not in ranked order):

'Currency fluctuations' ... 'Safety/Security concerns' ... 'Friendly cultures' ... 'Ease and costs of direct transportation' ... 'US Political stances'.

Relevance of global issues in planning MICE events

Environmental concerns: The majority view is that green issues are of 'average to medium importance'

Social responsibility: The majority view is that social responsibility is of 'moderate, but growing importance'

Security: The majority view is that safety considerations are of 'extremely high importance'

Multi-culturalism: The majority view is that multi-cultural planning is 'currently interesting, but likely to become highly relevant'

Advanced technology: The majority view is that integrating advanced technology into events is 'always very relevant in order to cope with the needs of high-tech attendees'

Buyer recommendations to international governments

Top 10 (not in ranked order):

'Create international advisory boards of travel professionals to attack problems' ... 'Minimise visa issues and delays' ... 'Make your destination safe and stable' ... 'Deal more fairly with reimbursing VAT and Sales Tax' ... 'Take more account of the economic advantages of MICE tourism' ... 'Do more to facilitate justifiable site inspection visits' ... 'Do more to foster the goodwill of returning delegates to encourage future visits' ... 'Generally do more to support the business tourism industry' ... 'Subsidise and control the costs of security' ... 'European governments should adopt a pro-US stance to create a favourable climate of opinion'