

CURRENT CHALLENGES AND TRENDS OF THE MICE SECTOR



2020 has threatened one of the industries that relies the most on people and human interaction: business tourism, events and meetings - the MICE sector.

The health crisis has had such an influence on event planning that it was transformed to implement new forms of organization along with health protocols and social distancing. **But new opportunities have also emerged in the process, such as streaming and virtual meetings.** Hybrid events and webinars are a reality that is here to stay, and while we all hope that fairs and face-to-face meetings can be resumed soon, the health and sanitary recommendations will have to be taken into account.

Most MICE events are aimed at cultural enrichment, social exchange and economic stimulation; and most are presented in the form of meetings, incentives, congresses, ceremonies, conferences, exhibitions and even festivals. There is no single sector or industry of society that does not use events as a form of growth and development, so event planning is a specialization with an extensive field of work and great possibilities for professional development.

Challenges for MICE Sector

The COVID-19 pandemic has largely shaped how events should be planned for the remainder of the year and in the near future. Therefore, trends in this area are aimed at maintaining the health security recommendations that have been established to slow the advance of the pandemic and prevent new cases. Some of these are:

- Limit the number of participants or use venues large enough to guarantee social distancing: open spaces have priority as well as those with good ventilation.
- Implementation of required sanitation and health measures: disinfecting stations and hand sanitizer dispensers at different points of the event.
- Development of hybrid events: attendees enjoy a face-to-face/online experience where participants who cannot attend in person can do so online. This option reduces the number of people in a place without affecting the number of attendees.
- Dependence on the laws and decisions of public bodies and specialized organizations.
- Flexibility in schedules so that they can be reprogrammed immediately in case of last-minute changes.

Industry Performance Trends

In the coming months, the MICE sector draws the following patterns related to the market, technology, the people who participate, and the destinations where the events are held.

1. Demand will surpass supply

By 2020, as in previous years, the demand for events continues to rise, even surpassing the supply. According to the special travel's meeting and events division of Carlson Wagonlit Travel (CW Meetings & Events), the demand for events will increase between 5 and 10%. However, the development of spaces to hold events does not move at the same speed as demand, so reservation rates could increase between 2.4 and 3.7%. Faced with this situation, many event planners are adjusting budgets or, on the contrary, reserving venues as far in advance as possible to avoid additional costs.

2. Attendees still prefer face-to-face events

Most people have spent so much time in front of a screen in 2020 that they still prefer face-to-face events. In fact, many brands use events as one of the most effective channels of communication with their consumers. The reason is that live meetings are a great opportunity to generate networking, being even the second aspect that attendees look into when choosing to attend an event, right after content.

3. Events with a sustainable approach

There is no doubt that the future must be sustainable to guarantee the survival of the species. Therefore, it is now more and more frequent to see events with such approach and that try to generate a positive impact through the promotion of local economies and the preservation of the environment.

4. Destinations do matter... a lot

New event attendees have managed to merge the world of leisure and business into a new dimension in which the tourist destination is crucial when deciding whether or not to attend an event.

In fact, according to recent surveys, about 70% of attendees say that the venue of the event is a determining factor when confirming their attendance, while 30% say that it is decisive (data taken from the International Association of Exhibitions and Events, IAEE). For this reason, organizers function as dual agents who plan the event on the one hand and the attendees' travel experience on the other, choosing comfortable and attractive destinations and managing cultural and culinary activities to enrich the experience.

5. Experience personalization

As time passes, attendees seek greater personalization. Big events require a well-managed schedule to avoid missing interesting content. To solve this, event organizers have come up with different strategies, such as the personalized design of the event based on the collection of previous data (Big Data). Other tools allow managing large spaces with multiple speakers, offering advice to attendees in real-time, and mapping the development of the event and the attendees.

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