

# GLOBAL MEETINGS & EVENTS 2021 FORECAST: WHAT TO EXPECT?



The companies of the world have quickly adjusted their meetings and events programs to the requirements of a year full of uncertainties in order to maintain contact with customers, potential customers and employees.

This is shown by the Global Meetings & Events 2021 forecast conducted by American Express Meetings & Events, a division of American Express Global Business Travel.

## Hygiene Concepts and Technologies

Although the learning curve has been steep, conference planners for face-to-face meetings have quickly adopted comprehensive hygiene and security concepts and **made greater use of existing technologies for virtual, hybrid and physical formats.**

Online conferencing platforms are showing both their advantages and their limitations, with planners looking for new ideas and strategies to combat the tedium of virtual meetings.

However, everything has its price. The participants of the survey stated that 35% of virtual and hybrid events require the professional support of a full-service agency. Since travel volumes will probably develop differently from region to region in 2021, hybrid meetings will play the role of pioneers for physical meetings.

What other challenges were common with regards to virtual meetings? 40% of respondents claimed that lack of experience was a factor to count with, while 32% mentioned technical issues and 18% mentioned lack of engagement.

“The value that global companies continue to place on meetings and events is evident in the speed with which they have transitioned from physical to virtual formats,” said Gerardo Tejado, senior vice president and general manager of American Express Meetings & Events.

“The message of the Global Meetings and Events 2021 forecast is clear: there must be meetings. There is a great interest in having physical meetings again as soon as it can be safely done. Hybrid meetings will be the catalyst,” he added.

## What to Expect in 2021

In 2021, planners will have to balance the pent-up demand for physical events with budget cuts and shifts. Since flight and hotel tariffs are still somewhat in flow, there are still reservations about early bookings.

Other issues are mainly concerned with safety and security. 68% of respondents claimed that confidence in attendee health and safety components are important for them with regards to holding physical events. 59% mentioned the importance of flexible cancellation and attrition terms.

With regards to the location choice, 77% stressed the importance of accommodating the needs of

social distancing. 52% of respondents noted that disinfection protocols are a key factor for them.

To counteract this uncertainty, the service providers are currently switching to more lenient cancellation and rebooking rules, often at no cost. Globally, meeting planners expect small and simple meetings in local or regional locations worldwide to return 21% faster than any other types of conference, followed by internal meetings at 18%.

## **Regional Trends**

What regional trends did the Global Meetings & Events 2021 forecast discover? Let's have a look at continents one by one to unveil their specific trends and expectations for next year.

### **Europe**

Those surveyed for the forecast expect that physical events will account for around half of all their events next year. There will be an increase in hybrid and decrease in purely virtual events in 2021, while planning the return of physical meetings.

77% of respondents claimed that their company adopted policies for the organization of meetings. This represents the highest number of all the surveyed regions. The top 5 meeting destinations are Madrid, Paris, Barcelona, London and Berlin.

Despite the predicted limitations and uncertainties, most respondents expressed mild optimism about the health of the meetings and events industry in 2021. On a scale from 1 to 10, 12% were very optimistic (8 to 10), 72% saw themselves in the middle (4 to 7) and only 15% were very pessimistic (1 to 3).

### **North America**

North American respondents estimate that almost a quarter (23.6%) of their events in 2021 will have a virtual component and will be smaller local events with fewer than 25 attendees that do not require air travel or hotel rooms. They expect that 45% of the virtual/hybrid meetings will take place via web conferencing and 27% will use a mobile app.

The leading conference types in North America in 2021 are expected to be small and simple meetings (USA) and internal team meetings (Canada). Regionally, the respondents anticipate a decline for most conference types. However, 36% expect the number of executive and supervisory board meetings to remain stable.

With regards to the top 5 meeting destinations, all of them are located in the United States: Orlando, Las Vegas, New York City, Washington and Dallas.

### **Central and South America**

Respondents in Central and South America are very optimistic. In fact, they are more optimistic than any other region about the health of the meeting and events industry in 2021.

76% of planners said career opportunities as professionals in the industry are "excellent". As far as the overall budget is concerned, 41% of those surveyed expect their company to spend more on meetings and events in 2021. This is the highest value of all regions examined.

The top 5 meeting destinations are Mexico City, Buenos Aires, Merida, Sao Paulo and Bogota, thus

showing a geographical representation of four countries.

## **Asia Pacific**

A positive mood can be felt in the Asia Pacific region for the rest of 2020. 16% of those surveyed state that they will hold physical conferences again, while almost half (47%) expect at least a few personal meetings and events in the final weeks of 2020.

Respondents from the Asia Pacific are also confident when it comes to the use of technology, as 64% of them claim to be very optimistic with regards to their ability to use technology during meetings in 2021.

**Respondents in China and Hong Kong expect increases across the board for every type of meeting or event.** Four out of ten planners in the Asia Pacific region (43%) expect more customer/customer advisory board meetings in 2021, while 49% expect more internal team meetings.

The Global Meetings & Events 2021 forecast conducted by American Express Meetings & Events is based on a survey of more than 560 experts in the meetings and events industry from 37 countries which took place in August and September this year.

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