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GLOBAL PARTNERSHIP IN CONFERENCES & EVENTS

International Meetings
10 STEPS TO SUCCESS

www.incon-pco.com

WHO IS INCON?

INCON is a dynamic partnership of leading companies providing consistency and continuity in conference, event and destination management by combining global presence and local expertise. Operating from 160 destinations, the 10 INCON Partner companies employ 3,000 staff, annually organise 10,000 projects, serving 3 million delegates, procuring 5 million bed nights and managing budgets in excess of an estimated €1 billion.

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INTRODUCTION

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Travel is fatal to prejudice, bigotry, and narrow-mindedness, and many of our people need it sorely on these accounts. Broad, wholesome, charitable views of men and things cannot be acquired by vegetating in one little corner of the earth all one's lifetime.

Mark Twain

Newlyweds spend years planning their honeymoon, graduates spend much of their final year plotting the perfect route for their backpacking adventures and the gathering of the world's finest athletes at the London 2012 Olympics took years of planning. Apart from the joys extolled by Mark Twain, what do these experiences all have in common? The answer is simple; they each require a process, a critical path, a roadmap to success.

The global nature of business and of the meetings industry has created a growing demand for international conferences and events. It's no secret that planning an international meeting presents a unique set of challenges. Between language barriers and time zone changes, it can be difficult to communicate with a supplier never mind get to grips with the myriad details which need to be considered and actioned.

As a dynamic partnership of leading companies providing consistency and continuity in the areas of conference, event and destination management, INCON has a wealth of experience in planning and delivering international events. Sharing their expertise and insight, our partners have compiled this 'beginners guide' of best practice and useful tips for holding successful international meetings.

So if you are tasked with planning your first event outside the United States, use our 'ten steps to success' to get you started and minimise surprises in as much as is possible in the planning process.

For the purpose of this publication an international meeting is defined as one which takes place outside the destination of the meeting planner and in particular outside the United States.



Inge Hanser & Roslyn McLeod
INCON Group Co-Chairs



STEP 1 : CONSULT THE DESTINATION EXPERTS

National Tourist Office

Work with the destination's National Tourism Organization, many will have a representative office in the United States. Not only will this eliminate time zone challenges and language barriers but it offers an easy way of researching your event location. Expect the office to provide destination collaterals and imagery which will assist your event marketing. Many overseas destinations have sophisticated subvention systems in place for larger meetings.

Patrizia Semprebene Buongiorno
Vice President
AIM Group International



Convention and Visitor Bureaus

Develop a relationship with international convention bureaus. Attending industry events and tradeshows, both at home and overseas, as a hosted buyer is a cost effective way of researching the meeting offering of a range of international locations. Some trade events to consider are:

- IMEX America, Las Vegas
- AIBTM, Baltimore
- IMEX Frankfurt
- EIBTM, Barcelona
- AIME, Australia
- CIBTM, China

Destination Management Companies (DMCs)

DMCs specialize in the organization of meetings, incentives, conferences and events for incoming groups. As well as offering impartial destination advice a good DMC will have established excellent relationships with local vendors and suppliers. Take advantage of their local knowledge (more information in Step 6).

Global Hotel Chains

Research the hotel chains in your event location. Many international chains have National Sales Offices who can assist with the RFP process. Remember to research regional hotel chains as well as iconic local properties which may not be part of a global structure.

STEP 2 : GET THE PAPERWORK IN ORDER

Ensure all event participants are aware of passport and visa requirements for the destination in question.

Passport

Did you know that only about 30% of Americans have a passport? It may seem obvious but out of a group of 50 conference delegates who do possess passports it is quite probable that at least one passport will be out of date. In addition, many countries require visitors to have at least six months remaining on their passport in order to be allowed entry. Engage with delegates at the earliest possible opportunity and again before travel to ensure passport ownership and validity.

Visa

Be aware that even if all your attendees are traveling from the United States they may not all be US citizens. Therefore they, and you, must know the requirements for entry to the country of your meeting that relate to travelers from their home countries. Is a VISA required? Can it be purchased on arrival (e.g. Turkey) or must it be purchased in advance (e.g. Russia). Costs can vary from \$5 to \$140 so plan for this. Allow sufficient time and resources to arrange visas prior to departure as they can take multiples of weeks to process.

Suggest that delegates make photocopies of their passports and travel documentation and keep in a safe place. So if a passport or luggage does get lost then important information is readily available.

Don't forget protocols for dates may be different to those in the United States – MM/DD/YYYY vs DD/MM/YYYY

Mustafa F. Gurbuz
CEO
Serenas Group



STEP 3 : SAFETY FIRST

Crisis prevention is important for any meeting. Many destinations around the globe are as safe, or safer, than the United States but in today's world security considerations must be of paramount importance. No matter where your event is taking place, it is vital to assess the safety risk. The political and financial stability of a destination can change daily but there are a number of considerations which will go a long way towards reducing the risks.

Travel Alerts

Keep up to date with travel alerts and travel warnings issued by the US Department of State <http://travel.state.gov/travel/>. Communicate any security issues with delegates. Be prepared to provide assistance prior to departure and at the destination.

Nancy DeBrosse, CMP
Senior Vice President, Association &
Government Markets, Experient.



Medical Issues

Be aware of any medical needs your delegates may have. An easy way of gathering this information is by including the question in your conference registration process.

Before visiting certain countries, travelers may need to get vaccinations or medications for vaccine-preventable diseases. Include this information as part of your event planning. Online resources such as the Traveler's Health page of the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) website at <http://www.cdc.gov/travel> will help.

When onsite, ensure contact information is readily available for local hospital/medical services.

Insurance

Assess the insurance coverage you have in place to protect you, the stakeholders and the event participants.

STEP 4 : FIGURE OUT HOW TO GET YOUR DELEGATES THERE

Know Your Airline Alliances

Most national airlines are part of alliances whereby they cooperate with other carriers. Globally, the three major alliances are **StarAlliance** (1,160 destinations), **OneWorld** (916 destinations) and **SkyTeam** (871 destinations).



STAR ALLIANCE



The benefits are many to you as a meeting planner. You can establish a single point of contact for multiple carriers and travel routes, secure discount fares and provide end to end solutions for your event attendees. Marketing support may be available if the airline is chosen as the official carrier.

Research Alternative Routings

Aggregator websites such as www.kayak.com or www.skyscanner.net are useful resources allowing you to research multiples carriers, alternate routings and best value pricing.

Roslyn McLeod
Managing Director
arinex pty limited



The screenshot shows a Skyscanner search for flights from Chicago (CHI) to Rome (ROM) for the dates Tue 18 Oct to Tue 25 Oct. The search results show a best price of \$735. The results are sorted by Price per adult. The top result is a Delta + British Airways flight, which is non-stop, with a price of \$4,191. The flight details are: Depart 15:35 ORD - 08:10 FCO, Return 11:30 FCO - 15:10 ORD. The flight is non-stop and takes 9h 35 (+1) for the outbound and 10h 40 for the return. The price is \$4,191 per adult, with a 'BOOK' button and a 'live' indicator.

Imagine trying to explain to your Managing Director why you overspent by \$3,456 per delegate!

STEP 5 : THINK ABOUT ACCOMMODATION

Determine the type of accommodation which best suits your meeting or event. Consider a range of options to suit different budgets. Many frequent travelers favor the familiarity and consistency of service delivery at global hotel chains which can be sourced relatively easy via the local or regional sales network. Others prefer hotels with a sense of local history and heritage. Know your hotel groups and also your hotel marketing groups e.g. Preferred Hotels, Associated Luxury Hotels International (ALHI). Build relationships with your local national office contacts.

Apart from hotels other accommodation providers might include;

- Serviced apartments
- Bed and breakfast/ guesthouses
- University (outside term time)

Manage expectations. Room sizes vary enormously and what is considered generous in New York City may be less than adequate in an English country manor estate. Bed types and sizes also vary, an American king being different in size to a European king. Air conditioning is pretty much standard across US hotels, this may not be the case in Europe.

Robin Lokerman
CEO, Institutional Division
MCI



Check with colleagues to see which properties they have used and which ones they would recommend

STEP 6 : CHOOSING THE DESTINATION MANAGEMENT COMPANY (DMC)

A DMC will act as your “eyes and ears” on the ground particularly in an unfamiliar location. Your delegates may be making the trip for business but DMCs can be a great source of help with services including social programs, ground transportation, excursions and tours, gala dinner and themed events. With access to unique venues, DMCs can create experiences travelers couldn't have on their own.

Broadly speaking there are three categories from which to choose from;

1. Global DMCs

Wholly owned DMCs like Allied/PRA, Kuoni or Ovation will offer a single source solution at an extensive number of destinations. If you run international meetings on an ongoing basis then you can expect to benefit from the convenience and time saving perspective in that existing relationships can be leveraged over multiple locations. From a financial point of view, working with fewer DMCs may mean better value. Actual services are still delivered by local experts.

2. A global network of DMCs

Many local DMCs will operate as part of a strategic network. Some of the best known are Euromic, Hosts Global Alliance and Global Event Partners. Members of these networks may vary in size and range of service offering but will have been selected as a leading DMC in their destination.

3. An independent local DMC

Operating in a specific location only with a fat rolodexes of local contacts, a local DMC can provide a wealth of on the ground insight and support

To date there are no internationally accepted standards for DMC accreditation. The Society of Incentive Travel Executives (Site) www.siteglobal.com offers its Certified Incentive Travel Executive program to individuals and this designation indicates high levels of competence. The Association of Destination Management Executives (ADME) www.adme.org has done the same.

Consider the company's level of engagement with associations such as Site, Meeting Professionals International (MPI), the International Society of Special Events (ISES), Professional Convention Management Association (PCMA), International Congress and Convention Association (ICCA) etc. Special Events Magazine publishes an annual 'Top 25 DMCs in the World' survey which is another indicator as are industry awards such as Site Crystal and MPI Paragon.

Inge Hanser
Managing Director
CPO Hanser Service



STEP 7 : ANTICIPATE COMMUNICATION ANOMALIES

The problem with communication ... is the illusion that it has been accomplished.

George Bernard Shaw

We have all heard the comedy routines about a situation where important messages have been lost in translation, but there can be no unfortunate blunders when you are charged with organizing an international meeting or event.

Consider the following communication between a US Meeting Planner (you) and a London based Conference Services Manager;

The podium should be placed to the right of the head table. No choice of entrée will be offered and no cordials and sodas will be served.

US Meeting Planner

Ok, so what he means is the lectern should be placed to the right of the head table. No choice of starter will be offered and no dilute drinks or minerals will be served.

UK Conference Services Manager

In short, you need to be especially careful and diligent when it comes to deciphering what may seem like the simplest and most straightforward communications.

Establish a language for written and verbal communication early on. English is the most commonly used language of business. In most international cities and venues that routinely deal with international business, English is spoken by the sales and conference services teams. If visiting a more remote location where English is not first language or commonly spoken, then it may be worthwhile to hire an interpreter. Being able to communicate in the language of the country will make your event experience smoother.

Pick up the phone. Communicating via email, while convenient, is often not the most effective way to get your point across.

Emma Aru
President
ega professional conference organisers



STEP 8 : MONEY, MONEY, MONEY...

Currency

Understand the intricacies of foreign exchange rates. Talk to your Accounting Department colleagues for advice on international currency conversion matters and the safeguards you can put in place to minimize exposure to currency fluctuations.

Consider the implications of negotiating payments in US currency to eliminate currency uncertainty. Meetings often take months, maybe years, of planning. It may be worth locking in at dollar exchange rates to have the stability of knowing what the event costs will be up front. The downside is that with lackluster dollar exchange rates you may end up paying more in the European Union than if you paid in Euros. Without a crystal ball you cannot know for sure what political or environmental factors may affect the exchange rate and in turn your final event costs.

Check out www.exchange-rates.org or the www.forexdirectory.net

VAT

Understand the Value Added Tax (VAT) policy for the country you are visiting. VAT is the international version of sales tax in the United States and depending on the destination of your event it may also be referred to as the IVA or GST.

Practices in relation to VAT vary considerably across the world. Countries have different rules pertaining to what items and services are subject to reclaim and what documentation is required on the claim. Some countries exempt or reduce the cost for meetings. Do your research during the budget and planning process and not after the meeting. Consider working with a VAT reclaim company to handle reimbursements.

Manuel Ferrer
Managing Director
Pacific World Ltd



Visit <http://cei-vat.com> for more information on international variations of Value Added Tax and Goods and Services Tax.

Duty, Customs and Excise

Explore the duty, customs and excise charges of the meeting location country and the impact on the event budget. For meeting supplies and room gifts, avoid shipping costs and duty by purchasing at the destination. Custom brokers can be consulted to provide detailed and specific advice regarding local customs and regulations; appropriate rates and other guidance.

STEP 9 : LOCAL CULTURE

"When in Rome do as the Romans do"

You've probably heard this said so often you may not pay attention to what it means. But in this age of globalization its as important as ever.

Know the culture of your meeting location and be sure to take into consideration any differences in cultural etiquette and local customs.

Bannie Kim
President & CEO
MECI



Did you know for example that in some countries it is acceptable to discuss business over a meal while in others it's strictly taboo? Or that in the United States it is not uncommon to call business colleagues by their first name, this would be inappropriate in Japan.

Tipping is ingrained in the American culture but not the norm elsewhere. In some destinations business cards are treated casually while in others they are handled with a great deal of respect.

Your destination of choice and the profile of your event attendees will dictate how much research you need to do on local customs and cultural immersion. Online portals including www.executiveplanet.com provide essential tips and guidelines on business etiquette across a wide range of international destinations. Research the business sections of your local Barnes & Noble too. Terri Morrison's bestselling 'Kiss, Bow or Shake Hands' is widely recognized as a must read guide to doing business in more than sixty countries while 'When Cultures Collide', the US Executive Book Club award winning book by Richard D Lewis and Ana Marie Sabath's 'International Business Etiquette' series will also help you tease out the subtleties of cross cultural communications.

STEP 10 : THE SITE INSPECTION

Conduct at least one site inspection trip to the location of your meeting and one pre planning trip if possible. No matter what amount of destination and venue research you have carried out, it is invaluable to be on the ground.

Tatsuo Arai
Executive Director
JCS



A site inspection trip will allow you to;

- foster relationships with suppliers and/or DMCs,
- build the event team and create engagement,
- present your event objectives,
- experience the destination,
- build a bank of local knowledge and
- see for yourself how the meeting infrastructure actually works locally.

IN SUMMARY : TEN STEPS TO SUCCESS – YOUR INTERNATIONAL MEETINGS CHECKLIST

- Consult with destination experts
- Ensure participant paperwork is in order
- Carry out safety audit of proposed destination(s)
- Tease out the travel options
- Account for accommodation requirements
- Engage a Destination Management Company (DMC)
- Don't let your communications get 'lost in translation'
- Focus on the finances...budget, budget, budget
- Consider local business etiquette and cultural differences
- Don't lose sight of the site inspection trip

YOUR CONFERENCE, EVENT AND DESTINATION MANAGEMENT PARTNER IN 160 GLOBAL LOCATIONS

Conference, Event and DMC Partner in 160 destinations

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