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SPECIAL **2021**
MICE
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THE MICE SECTOR PLANS TO RECOVER
ITS POSITION FIRMLY

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Editorial

Everything is ready for our comeback

MICE tourism has been shaken by the Covid-19 health crisis, initially coming to a complete standstill, and showing a drop in activity of more than seventy per cent. It has had to adapt in record time so that venues and operators could comply with today's new health and safety protocols and guidelines. Furthermore, to maintain a certain level of activity, the sector has accelerated, increased, and extended the use of technologies at all levels.

Bubble, outdoor, multi-site, hybrid, and virtual events have, for the moment, replaced traditional in-person functions, that have become near to none, due to the restrictive movement measures related to the pandemic. As well as the drastic increase of technology use leading to new stakeholders and companies becoming a part of the MICE ecosystem, the sector unanimously believes that all these different formats that are solving 'our today' will also remain in the future. Hybrid and digital formats create new expectations because they increase the time and scope of event participation, and they multiply the possibilities for dissemination and the generation of customer loyalty. However, several sector representatives and different studies have already started to warn that face-to-face gatherings and personal contact are irreplaceable when it comes to aspects as essential as marketing, networking, experience and the signing of deals.

With this in mind, all of the sector's representatives have taken steps, and they are already ready to resume in-person activity as soon as the health situation improves, movement restrictions are relaxed, and face-to-face events can return.

During the last months, the MICE sector has worked hard to become stronger, better and not lose its competitive edge, as well as underpin the qualities that make Spain one of the most important tourist destinations and event organisers in the world. With the much-desired V recovery as its goal, it claims that the advantages and experience that positioned Spain as one of the best in the world for MICE tourism have not weakened one iota. And the changes experienced during these last months will enhance its business model even more.

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One of the most affected economic segments aspires to be one of the drivers of recovery

WITH THE PANDEMIC, THE MICE SECTOR HAS HAD TO REINVENT ITSELF

Although the pandemic initially brought activity to a halt, the sector is working hard to reschedule postponed events. And Spanish destinations have even already started to stage in-person but, mainly, hybrid events, following all prevention measures perfectly and exceptionally fulfilling the expectations of associations and companies”, claims **Spain Convention Bureau**.



An event that was held recently in Barcelona.

MICE tourism has been one of the sectors most affected by the global health crisis. Spain's Outbound Tourism Observatory (**ObservaTUR**) calculates it has dropped by seventy per cent. As the president of the **SCB**, **Augusto Hidalgo** explains, business tourism is based on people from different places getting together, and transport restrictions, the closure of borders and capacity limitations have affected the MICE segment a great deal”. However, the sector has reacted; it has adapted to the situation by implementing all kinds of different



To its previous edition at Ifema, Gamergy attracted a record-breaking 61,000 attendees, but this year, Gamergy 2020 will be a 'one-off' online event.

measures, it has resumed a certain level of activity, and it is getting ready to be reactivated in full as soon as possible. SCB and MICE sector representatives worked with the **Secretary of State for Tourism** and the **Ministry of Health** in the drafting of the “Measures to Prevent the Spread of SARS-CoV-2 coronavirus” document. And they have prepared and widespread a summary “to promote Spain as a destination to host events implementing the highest possible safety measures”, says Hidalgo to **Hosteltur**. “When clients decide to start organising events again, all the necessary logistics will be in place”, he adds.

A favourite destination
Spain started in a privileged position.

Just before the health crisis, as well as being a consolidated destination, it was already one of the most important MICE destinations in the world. According to statistics from the **International Congress and Convention Association**, the prestigious **ICCA** ranking, in 2019, Spain was in 4th place in the worldwide ranking of large international rotating events (with 578) per country, and by the number of participants, it ranked 2nd in the world with an estimated 348.728, closing in on the long-time leader, the United States with an estimated 357.137. Barcelona, 4th in the ranking by number of meetings per city (156), tops the chart for estimated total number of participants with, as stated by ICCA, an “impressive” 157.000 delegates.

In number of meetings, Madrid holds 5th worldwide position (with 154 major events) and ranks 3rd in total number of participants with an estimated 91.900 delegates. Valencia is one of the impressive newcomers to the Top 50 by number of meetings, climbing 44 places holding 48th position (with 54 major international events).

According to ICCA, the industry's growth data for 2019 "reveals the importance of face-to-face meetings and shows that the industry will be key for recovery".

7,016 million euros

In Spain, 2019 results were "the best in history", according to **Spain Convention Bureau**. The economic impact of business tourism totalled 7,016 million euros, 5.7 per cent more than in the previous year. In **SCB's** member cities (56 and one county council), a total 29,603 meetings were held, 14.7

"In 2021 we hope to regain an important part of the meetings' market especially the associative sector, but, as in the entire tourism industry, we are in the hands of external factors", say representatives from SCB

per cent more than the previous year, with 4,791,982 participants, 11.4 per cent more, according to the Executive Summary published by **Madison**.

SCB's president, the mayor of Las Palmas de Gran Canaria, **Augusto Hidalgo**, points out that "MICE destinations in Spain have carried out numerous training initiatives, prepared guidelines and implemented protocols and hygiene and health measures for events to be held with the utmost safety and security". These measures are implemented throughout the sector's value chain, "in an enormous implementation effort that has generated a notion of professionalism, responsibility and security; features that will be greatly appreciated by event organisers". All of this work, together with the day-to-day liaisons with convention and congress organisers and professional promotional and

commercial activities, will foreseeably yield results from next year.

In 2021 we hope to regain an important part of the meetings' market, especially the associative sector, but, as in the entire tourism sector, we are in the hands of external factors such as the evolution of the pandemic both in Spain and the rest of the world, the recovery of air connectivity and the financial position of companies", explains Hidalgo, who believes MICE will recover "somewhat later than leisure tourism due to a simple organisational issue because meetings are planned earlier and involve a great deal of preparation".

The sector will come out stronger

During these last months, "the sector has carried on moving", organising and preparing training sessions and extensively using technological

"According to ICCA, growth data for MICE tourism in 2019, reveals the importance of face-to-face events and proves that the industry will be a crucial element for recovery

resources. Hidalgo points out that associative networks and public-private collaborations have also been reinforced.

"In terms of training, digitalisation, market analysis and teamwork, I believe that once this crisis is over, Spain will be a very competitive country in the MICE sector", he adds.

He predicts a rapid response: "Our cities and the sector's professionals are ready to offer maximum prevention guarantees at events. Once this situation is behind us, the sector will be able to respond quickly, efficiently and professionally to the requirements of both national and international associations and companies, making their events memorable. And once everything is back to normal, in a couple of years, we hope to reach business figures similar to those of the last decade". ■



The Meliá Sitges auditorium hosted the Sitges Film Festival, with its 1,384 seating capacity reduced to seventy per cent and with an hour break between films to be able to air and clean the venue suitably.



The pandemic has accelerated the digitalisation process, and it has revealed advantages like the possibility of organising more meetings, reaching wider audiences and expanding markets.

HYBRID AND VIRTUAL EVENTS ARE HERE TO STAY

If “streaming” was already a common practice in the business tourism industry, with the pandemic it has now become a must. Sector actors are experimenting with new formats and setting up solutions to alleviate the drawbacks of not being able to host events and trade fairs in-person; examples being experience enhancement, “market-places” and the generation of business and networking.

The pandemic has forced companies to expand their imagination in order to reactivate the business tourism sector. As well as hybrid and virtual events,

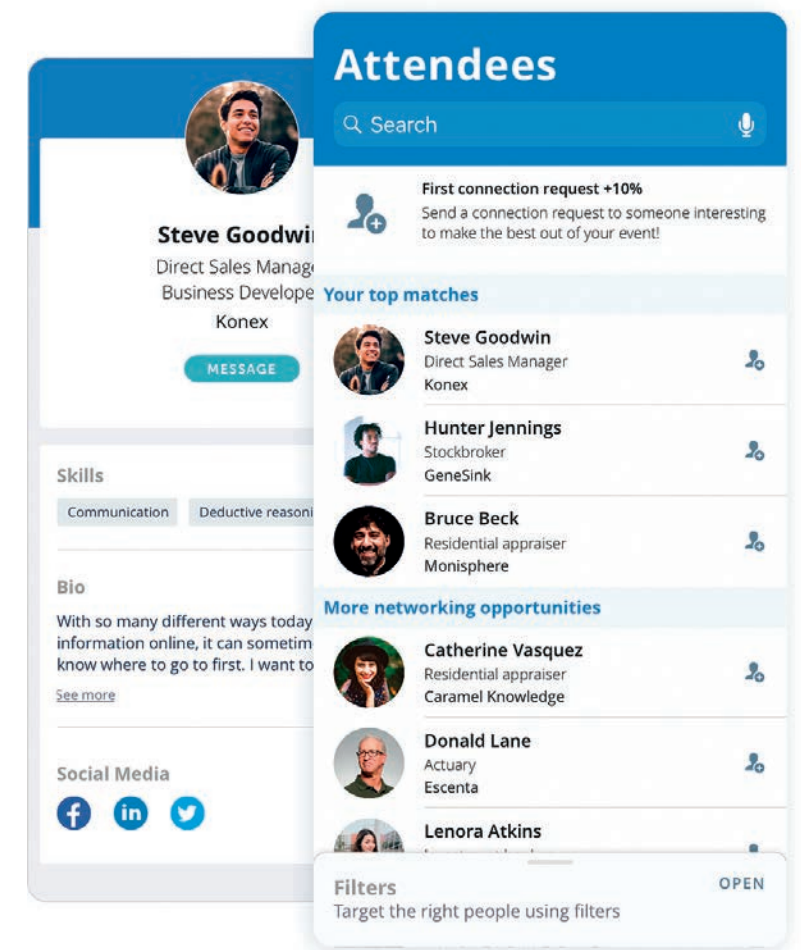
multi-site events are also being organised and outdoor or mixed outdoor and indoor events are becoming more and more popular. Among the large events that were held face-to-face, Málaga was one of the Regional Hub locations for the **International Congress and Convention Association’s** 59th annual congress, with its primary location in Kaohsiung (Taiwan) and held in parallel at seven other “hubs” all over the world including Málaga and Luxembourg in Europe. This event included virtual meetings and in-person sessions. The tourism sector’s most important annual trade fairs have adapted to these new formats, and London’s 2020 **World Travel Market (WTM)** went entirely virtual, for the first time ever

since it was first held in 1980. As stated by its organiser **Messe Berlin**, the upcoming **ITB Berlin** travel show will also be going completely virtual from the 9th to the 12th of March 2021. And, Madrid’s **International Tourism Trade Fair, Fitur**, has been postponed until May (19th–23rd) hoping to maintain its significant international impact and promote professional meetings among companies, countries and tourism destinations. Every year this trade fair welcomes 250,000 attendees from all over the world, and it generates an economic impact of 330 million euros for Madrid.

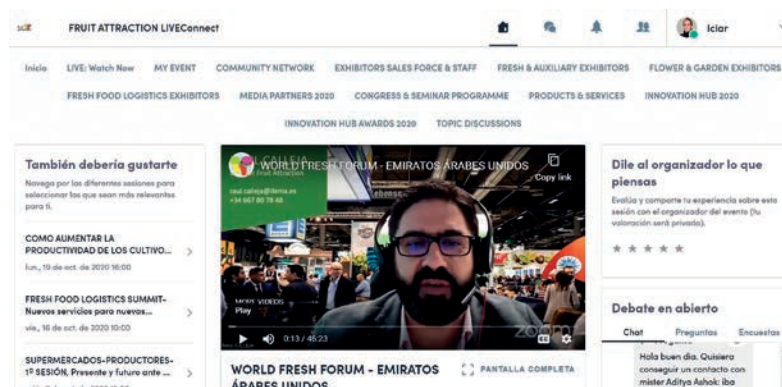
An additional benefit

Hybrid events, with in-person and virtual participants, are making their way in the business. **Augusto Hidalgo**, president of **Spain Convention Bureau’s**, told **Hosteltur** that their importance lies in the fact that “they prove it is possible to host congresses and meetings adapting to the circumstances caused by the pandemic”. Covid-19 has accelerated a trend that has been around for the last few years, fostering greater use of technology in the organisation of meetings, from the information and registration process to providing accreditations, payments, access, dissemination of scientific communications, the use of 3D systems, technology for presentations, and participation and voting tools, he points out. “At the moment, hybrid events are essential, and they are a trend that is here to stay. We are sure that technology and digitalisation are tools that will also make in-person events, that will soon be the ‘Stars’ again, a whole lot better, adds Hidalgo.

The advantage of hybrid events, with the obvious limitation of capacity and social distancing in face-to-face sessions, is that, as well as having an in-person component, they also allow for people to attend online from anywhere in the



Fruit Attraction 2020 participants.



This year, Ifema’s fruit and vegetable trade fair was held online using the Fruit Attraction Liveconnect platform.

world, which heightens and brings an added value to the meetings. For example, the 41st Congress of the Spanish Society of Internal Medicine (Semi) was organised online using an innovative 3D virtual reality platform and with a hundred different activities. As well as showing a great ability for reinvention, by going virtual new types of stakeholders and companies are being added to the MICE ecosystem, with technology as their great ally. “To face these exceptional times we are living, helped by technology, we have been able to integrate these new formats rapidly, and we have activated solutions that have not only turned out to be alternative resources to traditional events but have also come to provide an

“
Hybrid formats mean people can attend events online, they improve reputation and customer loyalty, and they entail involving technological companies within the MICE ecosystem



Grupo Mónico is committed to hybrid formats and to adapting to the needs and requirements of this option.

additional benefit because they help to reach a lot more people and optimise resources, and for their great impact on reputation and customer loyalty, stated the general director of **IFEMA, Eduardo López-Puertas**, at the recent Franco-Spanish Economic Forum, that was a hybrid event.

The head of the exhibition fair venue in Madrid defends the industry's remarkable ability to adapt to these new challenges and advocates for innovation, creativity, bringing value to society, opening new businesses and “undergoing the transformation society needs to come out of this crisis stronger, and contribute to making business relationships more solid and viable”.

A greater competitive edge

The progress made in digitalisation stands out as a way to revive and build new profitable trade fair formats. The creation of powerful and smart platforms are making it possible to hold hybrid and digital trade fairs to keep on doing business. “We are learning fast because we are well aware that this type of innovation is here to stay and it

will become the best and most efficient accessory for content and global participation in traditional face-to-face formats when we return to normality”, adds Ifema's director.

As an example, he mentioned the Fruit Attraction Trade Fair that had to transform itself and go completely digital “to be able to run Spain's main fruit and vegetable e-trade platform based on artificial intelligence, set up with an online ‘Marketplace’ to support companies and keep the exchange of interests and business interaction going”.

The use of technology has escalated to gain competitiveness. Ifema's director states that “Digitalisation is helping us to turn venues into one of the safest places to be once business activity is back on track”. And in this sense, amongst implementing many other innovations, Ifema has invested a great deal into ensuring high levels of security for the movement of people with capacity controls, temperature taking and heating devices to parameterise the flow of attendees. And it has also worked hard to deploy 5G connectivity. ■

The Federation stresses that Spain is a safe, meticulous, professional and reliable destination for conferences

PCOS ENHANCE WHAT IS ON OFFER WITH ALL KINDS OF DIFFERENT FORMATS

After the initial stage of the pandemic when all in-person activity came to a halt, conference tourism showed “a great willingness to resume business”. This was done initially with hybrid or blended formats, to then progress towards in-person events “with a reduced number of attendees to build trust, the most appreciated and necessary intangible right now”, says the president of **The Spanish PCO and MICE Forum**, Matilde Almandoz, in an interview with **Hosteltur**.

The impact on international events, that plummeted due to movement restrictions has been a lot greater. National events depend on different variables, like the number of attendees or who the promoter is. Almandoz explains that the situation triggered in February “overwhelmed every single tourism destination”, affected by the consequences of the epidemic and all kinds of different restrictions. This situation affects us all: “Spain, one of the top five conference destinations in the world, and the other competitors that share that distinction are the countries most devastated by the pandemic.

Creativity and ITCs

On the response of the sector, Almandoz claims that “products and services are getting a whole lot better with a range of different formats and always providing two fundamental features to continue offering memorable experiences: creativity and the latest technological advances”.

PCOs already used technology a great deal, so “streaming” has been a standard feature at conferences for at least fifteen years. “It is probably the end recipients who have now realised its practicality,” explains the president of the federation.

“Now is the time to move forward and look into new aspects and adapt to new formats and trends, with the ultimate goal of improving and offering the excellence we've always talk about. In this sense, we have proven we are a very versatile and resilient sector”, she points out. The president of OPC emphasised the need to convey a clear message: “Spain is a reliable, professional, meticulous and safe destination for conferences”. “We now need to start planting for the future to be 100 per cent ready the day the situation changes”, she adds.

A good position

With how things have outstandingly evolved recently, the sector will be crucial in recovery. “In recent years the MICE industry has evolved and grown a great deal, and without a doubt, once the situation recovers 100 per cent, and in-person events can continue as usual, even with certain restrictions and necessary health measures, we need the industry, companies and associations to start trusting the sector and its professionals again”, she highlights. She points out that Spain was third in the world in ICCA's 2019 rankings, with cities like Madrid and Barcelona also in third and fourth place. Beyond the positioning of these two regions, Almandoz notes that “this trend was growing in other regions that were also committed to MICE tourism”. ■



The 3rd MICE Forum scheduled for March, took on a hybrid format in September.

The pandemic has boosted hybrid events, and these will keep us going while restrictions are still in place

SPANISH TRADE FAIRS ACCELERATE THEIR DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION

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Trade fair venues are trying to focus all their efforts on getting ready for 2021, while this year, they are scheduling hybrid events and tackling the challenges of digitalisation much faster than expected. In 2019, **Spain's Trade Fair Association, AFE** for its initials in Spanish, recorded 424 audited trade fairs, a total 49,819 exhibitors, 12,307 of which were international, and 5.7 million visitors.

In a statement to Hosteltur, the president of the **Spanish Association of Trade Fairs (AFE)**, **Xabier Basañez** said: "The current situation is very complicated, and nobody can really foresee the consequences the pandemic will end up having on our sector."

"When events were allowed to return, organisations and trade fair venues were ready to get back to business with all possible preventive and safety and security measures. In recent months this has resulted in the organisation of some face-to-face events at regional level, and also hybrid and virtual events", he said. But most professional international trade fairs have had to be postponed,

"conditioned by movement restrictions and also by the economic difficulties some companies are already going through".

Some trade fair venues have resorted to Temporary Redundancy Schemes and cuts in working hours and in general, they are trying to get ahead with specific measures and institutional support. "We have every confidence in 2021's trade fairs when we hope the situation will improve gradually and we will be able to get back to a certain level of normality," he adds.

To adapt, "the first thing is to transform, at least for the moment, certain trade fairs into virtual or hybrid events, with



National Congress of Advocacy held in May 2019 at Feria Valladolid.

certain parts held in-person and others online, using digital platforms that in most cases have allowed us to reach a wide spectrum of potential participants". In terms of preventive and health measures, venues and national and international associations have joined forces to put together standard protocols and guidelines.

The current difficulties and uncertainty the sector is facing, like many others, forces us to reassess our business model and analyse what aspects can be improved to be more competitive in the future, and carry on supporting companies, professionals and individuals with a marketing tool as irreplaceable as trade fairs", states Basañez. Trade fairs face different challenges that the health crisis has accelerated, such as digitisation, and others they continue to work on like sustainability and internationalisation, he points out.

The economic impact of Spanish trade fairs, according to a study carried out in

"
We are convinced that trade fairs can significantly help companies and contribute to the recovery of economy in general", says the president of AFE.

2020 with 2018 figures, indicates that the economic impact of their activity amounts to 13,000 million euros per year, creating 123,100 direct and indirect jobs.

Record-breaking numbers will be back

The general manager for conventions at Ifema, Belén Mann, points out that whenever possible, the venue is starting to digitalise trade fairs "responding to the demand for hybrid events". For its external clients, it has started to offer "maximum flexibility in terms of hiring in the short- and medium-term." "We have also looked for alternative businesses and events that have been less affected by the pandemic," she adds. 2019 was a record year for ifema, with more than 800 events held and more than 180 million euros in turnover. Apart from the usual events in its calendar, prominent events "for their international repercussion and importance for the city, were medical congresses such as the European Respiratory Society (ERS) congress with almost 20,000 participants, or the European Association of Dermatology and Venereology (EADV) congress that gathered near to 10,000 specialists. The largest event was the COP 25, Climate Summit that attracted more than 30,000 people to Madrid.

Another example of success was Feria de Valladolid, with a 3.5 million-euro turnover in 2019, hosting some twenty trade fairs and almost 200 different activities. Standing out as an important event was, the National Congress of Advocacy, with more than 2,500 attendees. This venue has now focused on hybrid events to "promote the attendance of international stakeholders." Among the measures adopted, those that stand out are the installation of access control systems to identify the correct use of face masks, temperature measurements, the traceability of every single participant and more hygiene and disinfection measures. ■

INTERVIEW

Iker Goicoechea is the president of the Spanish Association of Conference Centres, APCE

We aim to recover the position we once held strongly and solidly

Although the MICE sector is suffering “a great deal” due to the pandemic, in his interview with **Hosteltur** the president of **Spain’s Association of Conference Centres (APCE)**, **Iker Goicoechea**, points out that the facilities and the excellence and professionalism that make the country the most popular in this sector worldwide “remain intact”, so recovery will be “sound, strong and without hesitation”.

What is the situation of MICE tourism in Spain with the standstill caused by the health crisis?

Quite bad. Within the measures being adopted based on the health situation, there is a direct wave towards the world of meetings, and the devotion to our convention centres is very strong. We have come to terms with this because we are well aware that it is due to a health crisis. We are concerned about different measures such as capacity restrictions that are not relativised to the space available and set a maximum in absolute numbers that, in large venues like ours (Kursaal), where we can guarantee social distancing, limits us. We accept this with resilience, trying to do everything we can in the situation we are living.

Are there differences between large and medium-sized cities?

No, the conditions are similar. The nuances on the different communities have not been so different for there to be significant differences. In general, the situation is bad, it is difficult, and no-one is safe.

And between Spain and other destinations?

Lots of postponements, like the international events that we have had to delay in Spanish cities, are also occurring in other European cities and around the world, there are no notable differences. The MICE sector is suffering a great deal globally.

Virtual, hybrid and multi-site events are being held. What solutions are APCE’s members implementing to maintain activity?

The most important Conference Centres and trade fair venues in this country are technologically very well equipped. We have plenty of room for social distancing, and we have professional teams that have managed some of the world’s most important international events. We are answering to the demand for more hybrid events without any problems. Those ‘responsible activist’ customers who are continuing with their projects and events – responsible in health and financial terms when going ahead with them – in these difficult times we are living, are choosing hybrid formats, with streaming.



The 68th edition of the Zinemaldia 2020 San Sebastian Film Festival, in Kursaal.

This formula is working and most likely, the concept of hybridisation, mixing face-to-face sessions with online ones, will be a change that is here to stay. For years now, we have been hosting corporate events and congresses, reaching a wider geographical audience thanks to the internet. This situation has accentuated that pre-existing reality.

Would you say that what has happened highlights the importance of in-person meetings?

As human beings, we have emotional and social needs, and now that these are lacking, we have realised how essential that elements of cohesion and relations really are. A message with or without an emotional component is not the same, and this is articulated through in-person events. We are convinced of this, and we believe that this recovery will be stable, strong and without hesitation.

Given the remarkable evolution of the sector in recent years in Spain, will the MICE sector be key

in recovery?

Our expectations are, without a doubt, for a V-shaped recovery, precisely because MICE, and in particular, the large infrastructures that APCE represents were very well positioned in international markets before this catastrophe struck. Once we have overcome this health crisis and restrictions can be relaxed, we aspire to firmly and solidly recover the position we held because the foundations that put us there, our top-level infrastructures and professional teams with great experience in high-level events, the advantages of the territory itself, the climate, food, etc. are all there and have not diminished one iota”. Let us see if we are also able to articulate European funds to strengthen, if possible, our competitive edge improving the digitalisation of spaces or efficiency and sustainability elements we were already deep into. An opportunity has opened up for us to accelerate those processes and for us to keep being competitive.

When do you think recovery will come?

We are not sure, but in the MICE and meetings’ segment, there is a ‘certain’ agreement to look beyond Easter. Autumn and winter are going to be very hard and challenging, but we have hope, and reality is that relevant congress events have been rescheduled for spring, May-June. We believe that this after-Easter period could be a significant milestone for recovery and in returning to normality so that autumn can be as ‘normal as possible’. And, hopefully, it will be so.

Do you think Spain’s reputation has been damaged?

Being a country that welcomes tourists and specifically those from the MICE and professional events’ sector, our reputation has not been particularly damaged. The foundations that took us to the top remain intact. We hosted the COP-25 conference just before the pandemic, picking up the baton from Chile and it was spectacular and very successful in terms of organisation. We must not forget that. ■

Travel managers calculate that travel investment has fallen around 58 per cent because of the pandemic

Confidence bubbles will mark the return of corporate trips, and smart destinations will gain the upper hand

Taiana González
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Lots of companies are revising their travel policies because the pandemic has hit them hard, but they know that these trips will be essential to reactivate their business. Managers will be decisive when looking for flexibility and when collecting information so that corporate trips can resume without health risks.

Travel managers need to invest in technology and online training and gather more information on the health of travellers and the health situation in different destinations

The volume of investment by Spanish companies in business trips, equalled 12,800 million euros in 2019, according to a study published by Gebta & Braintrust. Due to COVID-19, Spain's Association of Business Travel Managers (AEGVE) estimates that the loss already surpasses 58 per cent and experts believe that figures won't equal those of before the pandemic for around three years. Companies will change their travel policies, and they will all focus on them being essential and on the and safety and care of their employees.

A slow recovery

The role of travel managers "should be based on technology and online training to understand and efficiently implement the transformation process in its organisations", says André Ibañez

Cevallos, head of Training & Research at AEGVE and Global Travel & Events manager of Grupo MAXAM.

The Travel Manager's job will involve adapting to the new rules and regulations on travel approval; drafting more frequent and detailed preliminary reports; collecting information of the health of travellers and on the health situation at different destinations, in addition to strengthening their relationship with travel agencies. Both companies and employees agree that most trips are essential for business; however, the pace of recovery is very slow. It is foreseeable that the first industries to start travelling again will be those in sectors that have benefited from the crisis: pharmaceutical, food, electronic commerce, distribution and telecommunications.

Health and tourism hand in hand

In the world of corporate business, the key to recovery will depend on "the creation of confidence bubbles and scenarios". Transparency in the destinations' health and hygiene measures, transport, hotels, and intermediation and complementary services will be decisive.

Travel managers will look for airports and airlines that comply with social distancing rules, disinfection measures, and medical care if necessary, and they will value the flexibility to change dates, extend validity and even endorse tickets to other people in the company. When it comes to hotels, they will welcome digital solutions to avoid direct contact: check-in and checkout apps and the choice of rooms with virtual reality.

Movement restrictions between countries and the need to restrict venue capacities will make the sector focus on "smaller spaces and combining hybrid events, blending in-person and digital experiences", says Ibañez Cevallos. This will generate more demand for hotels with meeting and conference rooms set up with excellent technological resources.

Bearing in mind that corporate travellers are 'Connected Travellers', who want to be able to check safety and security recommendations or view the status of their bookings in real-time, "smart tourism destinations will face

the challenges arising from the crisis in an advantageous position because they will improve the diversification of their destination and product offering".

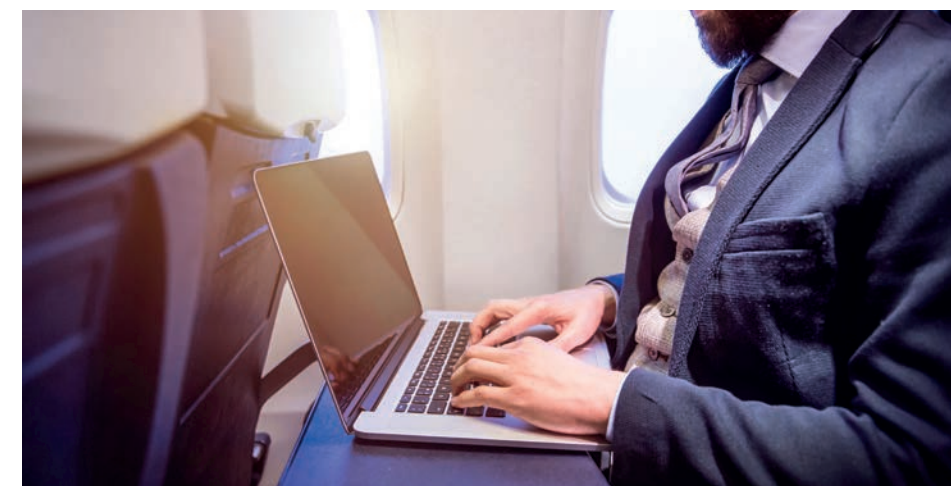
The first green shoots

We are currently at a standstill, and we predict recovery in two or three years", states André Ibañez Cevallos. But, although companies do not yet have defined travel plans, they are all looking into resuming them because they believe travel is essential to reactivate their economy.

"Corporate trips generate trust; they 'humanise' work, increase productivity and Create Harmony by being able to share ideas and solve problems together. On business trips, body language and facial expressions play a significant role, and in the end, this helps to close deals, explains the head of Training & Research at AEGVE. The first trips will be commercial, followed by intracompany, training and small meetings. Until wariness has died-out, large events with thousands of people in closed spaces will have to wait. In the next three years, medical, scientific, technological and events with a social and environmental purpose "will be the clear trend". And, at AEGVE they believe that thanks to these events "it will be possible to restore the reputation and confidence we were known for, attracting new investors and business". ■

“

We are at a standstill, and we predict recovery in two or three years", depending on the international and national health, economic and social outlook, states André Ibañez Cevallos



Corporate trips will be back, the process will be slow, but it will happen, because they are essential in the reactivation of companies' business.

Hybrid or outdoor meetings and individual incentives are just some of the options

Urban hotels reinvent themselves to attract the new MICE customer that has emerged with the pandemic

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The pandemic has put the capacity for resilience and reinvention of hotel chains to the test, as well as also having accelerated procedures to respond to the new needs of the market in all fields, especially the MICE sector; although some were already there, and most importantly, are going to stay. Shorter trips and smaller in-person meetings because events are going hybrid. Are hotels ready?

As recommended by **Lucie Chmelikova**, member of **Boston Consulting Group's** Global Competence Center, MICE hotels, "need to rethink what product they are going to offer to exploit the revenue opportunities generated by virtual events, like the remodelling of spaces and a closer collaboration with technology providers to meet the market's new needs and requirements".

As stated by **Nicolás Lleixà**, Chief Commercial Officer at **Sercotel Hotel Group**, the fact is that, due to the pandemic, urban hotels have drastically changed the type of customers they are targeting. The hotel chain is now concentrating

on attracting to its urban hotels "a type of customer that is between two and five hours away by car, independent professionals and people working in sectors that have not stopped business, like those in the food industry, for example." For these customers, they have specially created "the room-office and room-gym products, meeting needs and requirements that were already being seen as a must, making the use of rooms much more variable". The same is happening at **Only You Hotels** where, as pointed out by the company's Sales and Marketing Corporate Director, **Alfonso Pérez**, customers are "very local", even coming from the same city, looking

for new experiences in their own area. "In our case, we have found a market niche that has not been catered for, entrepreneurs and investors, who we want to offer that 'little bit more' to, by helping them profit from the intangible". According to Pérez, due to "the relocation of jobs in large corporations," another unattended niche has appeared, to which he proposes "a product similar to that of 'cheques gourmet' so that employees can work in flexible spaces". "This is in fact what we would call an 'evolution' of the customers we already had in hotels like Only You Atocha, where we could find many executives working from the hotel's

lobby. Now we offer them safe areas to continue doing so", he explains

Niche markets that have started to recover...

Although **Fernando Vives**, Chief Commercial Officer at **NH Hotel Group**, has acknowledged that "conventions and in-person training sessions for large corporations will not be back until September 2021, SMEs are already on the move, and there are industries that need to start travelling again, and have the capacity to do so".

According to Vives, the MICE market's most immediate future depends on "people from large corporations travelling on their own, as long as health security is guaranteed, local events with small groups and hybrid events with participants connecting remotely from different NH hotels, thanks to the company's great investment in technology".

... and products to cater for them

Not surprisingly, in its proposal for hybrid meetings and events,

NH Hotel Group offers the MICE segment the most advanced technology with **Hybrid Meeting by NH**, making it possible for both large and small groups or people to meet up in different places and combine in-person and virtual meetings at exceptional locations while also respecting every country's different health protocols and guidelines.

In Spain, they have joined forces with **BMotion Audiovisual** creating a network of fixed sets at different hotels, ready to stage highly disruptive events, also with 3D-design settings. In this way, customers can enjoy the advantages of a 100 per cent face-to-face event with all of the added benefits of a virtual one.

Faced with the need to help attendees keep their distance and ensure adequate air circulation, hotels are also offering the possibility of hosting small meetings outside. Accor, for example, has promoted the use of its outdoor areas in properties in Spain and Portugal under the concept of

"**Open Air Meetings**"; meetings held on terraces and in gardens to guarantee more safety and security for attendees. This service is complemented with excellent and healthy food in individual portions and with a picnic layout.

Meliá Hotels International also offers the possibility of staging outdoor events, and due to restrictions for group travel they have designed individual incentive trips and innovated with a product that allows remote-working when on long-term stays.

On its part, **Artiem Madrid** has private rooms, areas for "coworking" and informal meetings, as well as private growth and development areas (ECDs), just perfect for meetings. **Room Mate Hotels** already offers the possibility of conducting rapid tests on all its event attendees at its facilities with **QuirónPrevención**. These are just a few examples of how hotels and hotel chains are innovating to inspire confidence and reactivate this delicate tourism segment. ■



Madrid Marriott Auditorium Hotel, with some of the largest spaces for events in Europe, reopened on September 1st focused on individual customers.

Innovation leads a paradigm shift in passenger flight experience

Within their services, airlines are now offering biosafety, flexibility and anti-Covid19 technologies

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The COVID-19 pandemic has put health, safety and security and disinfection at the forefront of passengers' experience. As travellers are returning to aeroplanes, airlines are thinking-up new and innovative initiatives to keep their customers and crews safe during all phases of flight, making people feel confident it is safe to travel again.

Biosafety measures such as the use of face coverings, hand sanitizers, cutting-edge cleaning and disinfection techniques or new technologies that avoid interaction between passengers and airport and airline staff are replacing some of the services that defined 'everyday' flights in pre-COVID times. What has not changed is that passengers continue to be at the heart of all activity.

Most airlines have relaxed their policies for changing flights, and they have revised their baggage allowance. Some airlines have even stopped letting passengers take hand luggage on board to avoid interaction with the crew or among passengers.

Another initiative that has started to become standard practice in the airline industry is the signing of agreements with laboratories to offer customers more affordable coronavirus tests when they are travelling to places that require a negative test result 48 to 72 hours before travelling.

Safe and flexible

Iberia has adopted a number of sustainable and innovative solutions for the daily disinfection of its aircrafts' cabins. To clean its short and medium-

haul fleet, it uses new electrostatic spray guns loaded with a fine disinfectant powder that reaches even the most inaccessible parts of the armrests, headrests, folding trays and toilets as well as other parts of the cabin. The airline also offers its passengers the possibility of making an appointment to have a Covid-19 test at affordable prices. In terms of new policies, **Vueling** has completely relaxed its policy for flight changes, allowing changes to dates, routes and even passenger names up to 48 hours before flights. Customers will automatically receive a flight credit for the total price paid, which can be redeemed at any time during the following eighteen months. It has also revised its baggage allowance, limiting the number of cabin bags to speed up boarding and disembarking times. It is now an 'à la carte' service that allows each passenger one carry-on bag that fits under the seat in front of them and free checked-in baggage unless of course, they pay for a higher fare.

Air Europa has also presented a New Flex fare, with excellent ticket refund terms, that allows passengers to change their flights as many times as they need to and choose their seats at no extra cost, just by paying the fare difference. The airline is also giving all of its passengers a face mask to wear

“

Biosafety and technology are helping to create new trends on board that are likely to continue after COVID-19 abates

on-board, complementing the one they already have to wear from the moment they get to the airport.

Air France is letting customers who want to cancel their trips, change the date and destination of their flights without documented justification free of charge unless there is a fare difference. Or if they prefer they can choose a refundable voucher that can be used for any flight until March 31, 2021. If the airline cancels a flight, customers can choose to postpone their trip, change their destination, or ask for a full refund of the ticket or for a voucher, that is also refundable if not used. The French airline also has a deal with laboratories in France for customers who want to book an appointment to take a Covid-19 test before they travel.

Lufthansa, Swiss and Austrian Airlines will expand the range of services they offer their economy class passengers as of spring 2021 on short and medium-haul flights, allowing them to purchase a wide selection of food and beverages, in some cases with regional touches.

KLM has started to use a new robot in its catering service to prepare meals for its economy class passengers, officially activated by the Dutch airline's president and CEO, Pieter Elbers himself, making KLM Catering Services (KSC) the only company in the world to use a robot of this kind. This new system will reduce handling costs and make it easier for meal tray adjustments while increasing quality and flexibility and focusing on customers, being able to offer them a wider range of products on different types of trays.

Due to the suspension of their inflight catering service, **Transavia, Air France-KLM Group's** low-cost airline, in a one-of-a-kind partnership with JustEat, allows passengers to order food before boarding and to get it delivered on their flight. The company in charge of preparing the food is Dutch catering company iFleet and information on what routes this service is available on can be found on the airline's website. ■



Air Europa: cleaning and disinfection of the cabin with ozone.

Transavia offers meals to take on board.

Flexibility, cost control, and adaptability are its weapons

Agencies are working on continuing business by using new tools and sticking together

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“The seriousness of the situation means that a large proportion of the country’s companies are on the ropes because business has fallen across the board and continues to be very low, and it will take time to get back to reasonable levels,” says **Juan Carlos González**, president of **GEBTA**. He praises the work carried out by CEAV in their fight to “ensure agencies receive all the measures necessary,” and he recalls how at the beginning they focused on cost control, “with the aim resuming business with the minimum possible wear and tear,” a strategy, “devised with the idea that the pandemic would be short-term.” Furthermore, given the hope of recovery that was felt before the summer, “both in the holiday and the corporate sphere, the private sector put a great effort into opening its businesses and putting products onto the market. But the truth is, we are back to stage one, with zero return”. Without forgetting the incredible work put into customer care and service: “An uncompensated

customer care, that I hope will in the future be remembered giving agencies the high recognition they deserve once this is over.”

For these upcoming months, Professor Anton Costas’s three-R strategy – Resist, Recover and Reinvent oneself – seems to be the way to go. Unfortunately, “not all companies will be able to complete the journey in question.” He points out that resilience levels “are not the same for all of the sector’s companies, and this will regrettably mean a lot of agencies will be ‘left in the gutter’.”

Those that overcome the first stage “still have a long way to go, because the circumstances and the market will have changed”. For business trips “it will be essential to have played your digitalisation cards right, be flexible enough to adapt to a precarious and changing scenario and choose the right business model. At GEBTA we have been working on the transformation of business models since 2018 and, without a doubt, this theoretical exercise is of great use at times like these, because it has allowed us to gain time and perspective”.

Reinvent and innovate

On his part, **Rafael Garrido**, CEO



The world of Sports continues to create opportunities for agencies. Players from Celta de Vigo after the signing of the contract with Halcon Viajes in October.

of **Nautalia Viajes**, states that his MICE department’s strategy consists of “adapting to a digital and virtual environment, that allows for all kinds of different attractive and spectacular events”. The company is opting for purely virtual or hybrid formats where only the speakers are present in-person at the studio or the venue chosen for the event. Approved and certified voting tools are used and “the staging and set designs are impressive, using videos, 3D technology, etc.” We are also highly committed to travel management for sports teams, integrated within our MICE department because to carry out their activity they need to travel, and the COVID context is not affecting this kind of customer”.

Juan José Hernández, national director of **Globalia Meetings & Events**, points out that these new circumstances have forced us to reinvent our business model: “To adapt to the situation with innovative alternatives, always thinking of the safety of our clients and our team. Like at any large event, we face inconveniences and unforeseen circumstances so being ready is the key”. Among the strategies developed by Globalia, he draws attention to the GlobalBox experiential platform. The company hopes to use this platform to

“*The sector has given its all, but it has not received enough help or public incentives, as countries such as France and Italy have, benefiting for example, internal transport,” believes the president of GEBTA*

continue motivating professionals by offering options specifically designed to adapt to the needs of each user.

Globalia highlights the importance of the initiative posed by the new I’m association that represents 40 travel agencies. **Juan del Hoyo**, CEO at **Viajes Azul Marino**, states that with this initiative, among many other things, they are focusing on “trying to get PCRs at lower prices and working with hotel chains to make all the necessary standards clear everywhere”.

As a company, Azul Marino is developing a strategy focused on controlling costs, maximising revenue, ensuring continuity in the long-term and taking care of its employees: “We are trying to retain everyone, not only at the company but also emotionally with the project”. In the frame of business travel, they have also implemented a campaign with **Avasa**.

Juan Carlos González, general director of the **Corporate Department at Ávoris**, specifically points out that BCD is “the first agency to have a Security Manager and an End-to-End travel safety product, our Security Pack; and we also have a new brand for congresses, Bco-Nnects that manages large virtual or mixed congresses as well as bubble events like the ACB basketball final”. ■



Venues are looking for ways to continue generating business

Andalucía is fighting to keep its MICE sector competitive

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MICE tourism continues to be a priority in the region of Andalucía. Proof of this is the public authorities' deep investment in continuing to support this kind of activity, starting with the **Regional Government of Andalucía**, that has given support to professionals at different events like the IBTM World Virtual. "Given the tremendous crisis in the sector, we thought it would be appropriate to help companies by offering them free participation", explain representatives from Turismo Andaluz. Another example would be the **ICCA Congress 2020**. Turismo Andaluz, Costa del Sol Convention Bureau and Turespaña sponsored the **ICCA Regional Hub Congress in Málaga**, one of the cities chosen to host this virtual international event. Furthermore, within the 2020 Collaboration Agreement signed between the

Andalusian Public Enterprise for the management of Tourism and Sports and **Prodetur**, different presentations and roadshows were carried out together with **Sevilla Congress and Convention Bureau** in October. While in November, the Tourism Innovation Summit was held as a hybrid event and continues its endeavours to become a regular event in the field of innovation.

"Fibes has received 2.5 million euros from the City Council with a capital increase from Contursa, to help with maintenance costs compensating for the decline in business"

The capital is fighting hard to adapt events to the current situation. "We are trying to organise meetings within this specialised sector and encourage participants to do business with each other", explains **Antonio Jiménez**, manager of **Fibes**. In recent years, high social content events like Sicab, have changed their focus, looking more at the competition or business side of things.

Event catering has been limited a great deal to guarantee social distancing and is no longer available onsite at trade fair venues. Also, significant progress has been made concerning online, and hybrid events using them "as a new source of income, somewhat replicating the model included in the Plan8 presentation, where we set-up a kind of television studio to broadcast from digitally, offering space for a limited audience in one of the large rooms".

Best practices

From **Málaga Convention Bureau**, **Francisco Quereda**, advisor to the



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Mayor's office on matters concerning the Management of Congresses, points out that "As well as standing by our partners, supporting them in these difficult times and involving them in the destination's recovery strategy, by organising together with Costa del Sol and Turismo Andaluz one of the four Worldwide Hubs for the ICCA 2020 Congress, Málaga has gained the reputation of being a safe destination and the perfect place for European MICE professionals to start

fair and congress calendar and by a significant increase in international business, the Fycma Congress Centre with a total 183 events, surpassed the record set at 400,000 attendees. They explain that Fycma "has addressed the last part of 2020, by committing to be at the service of the production sector now more than ever". The venue aspires to be "a useful tool in the process of economic recovery to continue generating wealth, business

of a Roundtable for MICE Tourism, and that this was already among its objectives before the outbreak and is in line with the interest shown for business tourism in the province in recent years. He points out that organisers are "strictly" following the safety protocols and are being flexible with postponements, cancellations and payment terms. There is also a clear move towards outdoor spaces, including extraordinary locations, and Fam



Fycma has made a great effort to adapt its spaces and become more digital.

meeting up again".

In September the City Council started and continues to conduct antigen tests at all major MICE sector events like trade fairs and congresses to detect any possible cases and "this has been a great success". In fact, the ICCA International Congress has referred to this kind of testing at its congress in Málaga as a "good practice" example.

In 2019, Málaga hosted more than 300 congresses, resulting in a near to eighty per cent hotel occupancy rate. And in a year that was marked by the consolidation of the trade

opportunities and promoting job creation". Apart from adapting to different event formats, it has also put a tremendous logistical and organisational effort into making aisles wider, putting up signs marking the various routes to be followed, delimitating and adapting spaces and prioritising open set-ups and stands.

Flexibility and technologies

From **Cádiz Convention Bureau**, the head technician, Ignacio Santiago, points out that one the Tourist Board's ideas is the creation

Trips adapted to today's needs and requirements.

In turn, the general director of **Almería's Chamber of Commerce, Victor Cruz**, stresses the great effort put into following safety measures, using new technologies for virtual events and finding other uses for the province's congress venues -like sitting exams, employee selection tests or holding business meetings. And although campaigns have been launched to attract agricultural, religious and food sectors, he does believe Almería needs to promote this segment a whole lot more. ■



CÓRDOBA

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PR

Seville, a well-established destination's commitment to innovation

By the end of 2019, the city of Seville had registered, that year, a record-breaking 3.12 million travellers who stayed at hotels and apartments, 6.7 million overnight stays –5.33 per cent more than in 2018– and an occupancy rate of 77.03 per cent. Thanks to major events like the MTV Europe Music Awards, the Goya Awards or the World Travel & Tourism Council Global Summit, the city's reputation in the MICE segment had grown immensely, and expectations were extremely optimistic.

In terms of congresses, having hosted events with more than 6,000 people at FIBES, and climbing 26 places, Seville made it into ICCA's worldwide TOP 100 best cities for congresses.

The coronavirus crisis has represented a turning point that has accelerated the destination's commitment to governance, innovation and sustainability, the backbone of its work in the coming years.

Hosting the first Tourism Innovation Summit last November at FIBES is perhaps the best example of this. It was a hybrid event, organised following all safety requirements, with 1,263 in-person attendees from sixteen different countries and almost 4,000 streaming connections. The first Tourism Recovery Manifesto was agreed at this event, and the sector's world leaders presented their proposals to define the roadmap for tourism transformation and reactivation. Hosting this event was a “great



step forward” and an example of how we need to work under current circumstances, and it will be followed by others that CONTURSA is organising in strategic fields of innovation such as Aerospace, Blue Economy and Science and Health, will follow.

Promoted by the City Council and launched in June, the Plan 8 strategy to Boost Tourism showed how well the public and private sectors can work together and established a number of actions for the city to undertake in the short, medium and long-term, integrating digital traits.

The city's venue list has increased

this year despite the situation. So now, as well as its fabulous hotels and its charming palatial homes, there are more options, like for example, the replicate of the Nao Victoria ship, docked in the Guadalquivir river.

When referring to municipal venues, emblematic public spaces like the Plaza de España square, the Casino de la Exposición or the Marqués de Contadero Visitor Centre are also available for professional meetings and are listed on the Sevilla Venues' website, and FIBES has enhanced its positioning as a Safe Venue earning important certifications like the Safe Tourism Certified seal, Global Safe Site and WTTC's Safe Convention Centre Stamp.

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ARA

Thanks to technology, open spaces and protocols, the members of Zaragoza Congresos are now organising congresses and conferences

Zaragoza is hosting events with complete safety

According to a study carried out by the **University of Zaragoza**, in 2019, Zaragoza hosted 530 events, 1.7 per cent more than the previous year, with 128,000 delegates generating a direct and indirect economic impact of 100 million euros. The delegates and event organisers gave Zaragoza an 8.46 out of ten.

For 2020, expectations were to break all business tourism records in Zaragoza, with a ten per cent increase compared to the previous year. Many of the events planned were of great relevance given their size, international nature or impact, examples being the World News Media Congress, the Zaragoza Congress of CIDEU Ibero-American Centre for Strategic Urban Development or the SEMERGEN National Congress for Primary Care Doctors, as well as those organised by nutrition, allergology and radiology medical societies and associations. But then Covid-19 came along, and

things have changed a lot. Hardly any of the events planned in 2020 have been held, except for those staged before March 15th, representing fourteen per cent of all those scheduled.

“Fortunately, our work has been to get those scheduled in 2020 postponed to 2021 and 2022, and in most cases, this has been so”, say representatives from **Zaragoza Congresos**.

Adapting fast

The members of Zaragoza Congresos have not only adopted all necessary safety measure and been certified to avoid Covid-19, but they are also ready and set up with the all the technology needed to host hybrid and virtual events, helping Zaragoza to keep its position as one of the main MICE destinations in the country.

As well as large estates with outdoor spaces and venues and hotels with terraces, events can also be held in

the city's parks and natural areas, for example Parque del Agua Luis Buñuel, in the Expo area or the José Antonio Labordeta Park by the Auditorium.

To continue boosting MICE tourism in Aragón's capital, Zaragoza Convention Bureau has prepared two dossiers with all of its partners' technological features and health measures.

Recovery has made itself felt after the summer months, with events being held that have proven it is possible to do so complying with health regulations and with complete safety. Staged as in-person events, the Live-med Congress attracted 120 family doctors to Zaragoza's Conference Centre and the first edition of the City of Zaragoza's Historical Novel Conference, held at Caja Rural de Aragón's impressive building, welcomed a thousand attendees divided into groups of 250 and lasted for five days.

Zaragoza Turismo was the first Spanish tourism board to attain the **AENOR** safety certificate, in spring. This certificate covers Zaragoza's Conference Centre- Auditorium, the Principal and Mercado Theatres, all three tourism offices, the palace of La Lonja, the city's Historical Centre and the Inland Port, Roman Baths, Roman Forum, Roman Theatre and Pablo Gargallo museums.

ZCB draws attention to how the city and the Autonomous Community of Aragón have shown complete transparency as regards to the number of COVID-19 cases. Zaragoza Congresos undertakes to warn and inform organisers and attendees if their safety and health are in danger. ■



A recent event held at Zaragoza's Conference Centre with safety and security measures in place.

Oviedo is starting host congresses and conventions all year round

Asturias takes great care of conference attendees and supports its MICE sector

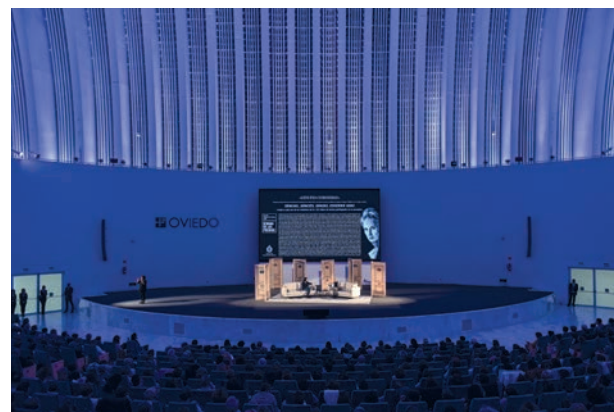
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Oviedo Convention Bureau has wasted no time. “When, due to the pandemic, event activity was reduced or altogether cancelled – most of which has been reprogrammed for next year and beyond – Oviedo’s **department for Hospitality, Tourism and Congresses** dedicated itself to adopting all the necessary measures and protocols to turn facilities into safe spaces and services”, explains **Ángeles Solís**, from the Tourism and Congress Department at Oviedo’s City Hall. These measures were “strictly” adhered to at the Congress and Exhibition Centre, the Príncipe Felipe Auditorium, the Hostel for Pilgrims and the municipal Tourist information Office. “Thanks to the size of the facilities and the implementation of these measures, the Congress Centre and the Auditorium were able to host various events and functions when the health authorities permitted gatherings. Followup contact tracing revealed zero contagion at the events held.

In 2019, and only referring to public facilities – the Auditorium, and especially the Congress and Exhibition Centre–, Oviedo hosted more than 100 congress events, held mostly in spring and autumn, “but, also every month of the year, seeing slight increases in January and August”. These hundred events attracted more than 54,000 attendees. Both venues combine this kind of activity with the city’s cultural programme, so, apart from in the tourist offices, in 2019, the Auditorium and the Congress Centre were busy 282 and 215 days of the year respectively.

The number of conventions has increased. The Health Sector continues to be prominent, but with more events now being held by other sectors, things are changing. The City Hall’s endeavours to support MICE activity in the city is evident in the municipal aid offered; for example, 34 applicants have received 270,000 Euros in grants.

Gijón has also maintained the upward trend it started in 2015. Numbers have increased annually to above five digits, and that is only counting events that meet Spain Convention Bureau’s criteria: congresses, conventions and conferences, ignoring any other type of event or exhibition fair. The number of international meetings has also increased.



Oviedo, home to major events. Picture: The Princess of Asturias Foundation (FPA-Iván Martínez).

Daniel Martínez, manager of **Gijón Turismo**, explains that “from the very beginning, both the public and private sectors have put a great deal of effort into setting up all the necessary protocols that not only give a feeling of safety and security but also guarantee it”. For example, Laboral Ciudad de Cultura, a very emblematic venue, restructured its service portfolio to offer alternatives to in-person, blended and virtual formats.

“There is a continuing need to organise congresses and conferences to exchange and update knowledge in the sphere of associative and scientific meetings”. However, “there is currently uncertainty caused by the pandemic”. This situation has led to changes relating to trends, business models, and terms of contracts within the increasing globalised competition, that will probably continue once the current crisis has passed. ■



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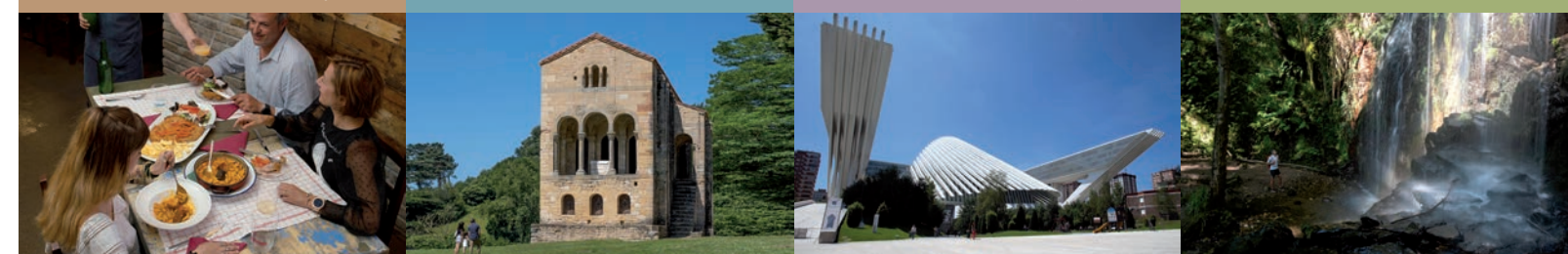


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Being a true Natural Paradise, with seven Biosphere Reserves and the best-preserved coastline in Spain is reason enough to choose Asturias as the place to host your event. But the Principality also offers five other significant arguments that guarantee complete success:

1. A "Reuleaux Triangle"

The metropolitan area defined by Avilés, Gijón/Xixón and Oviedo/Uvieu creates a "Reuleaux Triangle" with a thirty-kilometre radius ". The facilities and services in this area all very close to each other and well connected. Together they have 10,000 'beds' and more than 250 halls for meetings and conventions that can cater for up to 30,000 people.

2. Iconic facilities

The Niemeyer Centre, Laboral-Ciudad de la Cultura and The City of Oviedo's Congress and Exhibition Centre, designed by the architect Santiago Calatrava, are three architectural gems considered true icons of universal culture. Three prominent venues with spaces for all kinds of different congresses, exhibitions, performances, etc. at very competitive prices.



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3. 100 per cent Asturian experiences

Can you imagine doing a team-building activity where you become a gold panner and scoop gold nuggets out of a river with your bare hands? And what about going down into a real coal mine, wearing a miner's outfit? Or, becoming a shepherd for a day and discovering all the secrets behind Cabrales cheese, going out into the mountains looking for grizzly bear tracks, or taking a few laps around the Fernando Alonso circuit...? How about organising a cider pouring contest for your company at an Asturian 'llagar'? Where can you live all of these experiences if not in Asturias?

4. Extraordinary venues

Gijón Aquarium, where you can have dinner with sharks, is just one of many places that will surprise your guests. Another fascinating venue is Asturias's old Model jail, today home to the Historical Archive and where you can enjoy a cocktail and live music. And for truly unique presentations, the Mining and Railway Museums or the El Molinón stadium.

5. The best hosts

Known for their hospitality, commitment, and hard work, Asturians are the destination's best asset. Polished skills, dedication to service, simplicity and cuisine that needs no introduction. In Asturias, they are welcoming by nature, and will only let you go home one way: satisfied.



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NOR

Northern Spain is hanging in there with strategic plans and ‘mise-en-scène.’

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In northern regions, the trend is positive. MICE tourism continued to grow in San Sebastián in 2019, seeing a 13.5 per cent increase in the number of meetings held, and that was without counting incentives of trade fairs. In 2020 it continues to be a key priority and strategy for **Donostia San Sebastián Turismo**. Its department for Congresses and Events is working “closely with local professionals”, and notes that “the latter want to continue staging their professional events in San Sebastián because of the prestige and visibility hosting events at home gives them and because of the knowledge exchange and synergies that are

generated”, but also to maintain the region’s international position with hybrid events.

Ander Sarratea, manager of **Ficoba**, the venue for trade fairs in Gipuzkoa, explains that “by being meticulous with health and hygiene measures, trade fair grounds like Ficoba can continue to offer a viable alternative. “Recently, we have had the opportunity to host two general public events: the fourth occurrence of Caravantur and the 17th edition of Bioterra, the doyenne of all our trade fairs”, he adds.

The president of OPC Galicia, **Ana Trevisani**, points out that in April and May, they started “training and preparing for the new reality ahead and learning about the new tools to be used”. New facilities were set

up for the organisation of hybrid and virtual events”, and thanks to this, Galicia now has several different studio sets in places like the **Palexco Conference Centre** (Palacio de Congresos Palexco), in A Coruña or the Galicia MICE Set in Santiago’s City of **Culture**.

A campaign to promote the sector was designed together with Turismo de Galicia, updating all the necessary tools to consolidate Galicia as a safe destination. In 2019, the MICE sector was very strong in the region and generated an estimated 30 million euros in business (without counting trade fairs).

As an example, **Belén Montero**, manager of **Galicia’s Congress and Exhibition Hall** (Palacio de Congresos y Exposiciones), explains that the venue has designed a more than 1,500 square meter virtual set in one of the Centre’s exhibition halls, and “there we have room for up to 300 people following all social distancing and safety measures.”

Vigo Convention Bureau highlights the creation of the “streaming” set at the **Auditorium-Pazo de Congresos Mar de Vigo**. A lot of work is being carried out by the authorities in Vigo to promote it as a safe destination. 2019 had been a great year, with 197 events, showing an 18.6 per cent rise.

The president of OPC Rioja, **Alberto Picatoste**, points out that business had not quite caught up to what it was like before 2019. They have been adapting to the standards and protocols and holding meetings with the public authorities to request grants for the sector. ■



Uhinak 2020, held in November at Ficoba.

CAN

Santander Convention Bureau has devoted time to optimising responses

Cantabria prioritises supporting its MICE sector



A picture from the ‘Santander es luz’ (Santander is light) event, held at La Porticada.

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Companies and institutions have worked together in Cantabria, offering their support in this crisis.

“Santander and Cantabria’s tourism sector’s commitment with the MICE segment has been 100 per cent at a time especially complicated for the industry”, representatives from **Santander Convention Bureau** explain.

Its members have achieved this by “enhancing technological features, making rates and terms of contract more flexible, involving the whole production chain and all its workers, always vigilant to ensure safety rules are followed strictly and maximising

public-private partnerships which have been the key to supporting a strategic sector for Cantabria’s development in the tourism industry”.

Santander Convention Bureau has also put a great effort into supporting the sector’s development in 2020, providing technical advisory services on protocols, procedures and regulations when organising events, monitoring event postponements and cancellations, and supporting the organisation of events in the city, always following safety measures.

Furthermore, “from the beginning of the crisis, efforts have been launched to support the local sector, examples being the possibility of using municipal venues free of charge, as long as it is professional

organisers from Cantabria who are staging the event.

The organisation points out that “their commitment to this sector will continue to be a part of the city of Santander and Cantabria’s development roadmap to be high-quality destinations, convinced that, by working together, the MICE sector will be in the best possible conditions to carry on staging meetings, congresses and events guaranteeing the utmost cleanliness and safety”.

These measures have been a top priority for venues. For example, in the case of the **Palacio de Festivales de Cantabria**, they point out that since being able to reopen, small cultural events have been held, mostly recitals and with capacity strictly limited to fifty per cent. When talking about congresses, they have been offering maximum flexibility for date changes, and they are also working on being able to host these kinds of events as soon as possible, without changing the prices for the hiring of venues and services.

Investment in outdoor events is planned to be a successful bet. In mid-October, the artistic, cultural and scientific event, “**Santander es luz**” – “Santander is light” – was held at the Plaza Porticada in Santander, and as stated by its organisers –**IFCA, Cantabria’s Institute for Physics** together with the City Hall’s **Departments of Tourism and Education**–, this has confirmed the idea that safe events can be organised in the city. ■

PR

Santander-Cantabria, a natural and safe place to host events

The current pandemic is proof that in Cantabria –even in the exceptional circumstances we are living – it is possible to organise events and do so guaranteeing maximum safety and security.

place at venues and hotels, attendees are required to register in advance, and professionals will be on watch, making sure rules are followed at all times. Close collaboration between public organisations and the private

5,000 square meters and the La Magdalena Palace that after its recent refurbishment has increased the capacity of some of its rooms. These venues have also updated their technical features to adapt to today's new event formats.

Likewise, hotels and other accommodation have put a great effort into guaranteeing the safety and health of their customers by introducing prevention measures, that in many cases go far beyond what is required sharpening their minds to find solutions that will allow their customers to carry on hosting events and meetings with the utmost safety.

The MICE sector's new setting, marked by a shift towards virtual environments, has also called for the sector to adapt rapidly by updating its technological features and capacities. To continue providing services in-person, virtually or combining both, professional congress and event organisers have adapted to this unique situation, attending to the new needs and formats of events.

Entertainment activities, nature, food and the authenticity of local traditions can still be enjoyed while always respecting capacity restrictions, social-distancing and the use of face coverings. Outdoor activities in natural spaces like Picos de Europa – The Peaks of Europe – or Santander Bay, visits to the Cabárceno Nature Park, food experiences and discovering charming villages and towns continue to take centre stage in the social programmes of congresses and events, and are the region's unique selling point.

The starting point is already a competitive advantage: a stunning natural environment, a sparsely populated territory with a high quality of life, a range of different things to offer, and a MICE sector that is well aware of the importance of providing safe and high-quality services. The size of the destination makes it easier to provide personalised services and simplify everything to do with the organisation of events.

The organisation of events entails a lot of traceability and thanks to this few activities are now as safe as attending events: hosts and suppliers are required to implement contingency plans, security and prevention measures have to be in

sector is another measure to be mentioned.

To guarantee a safe MICE destination, all of Cantabria's stakeholders in this sector have included safety protocols in their day-to-day operations and measures to facilitate customer service in these new circumstances. As far as venues are concerned, as well as having implemented contingency plans and relevant preventive measures, they also have large open spaces where busy events can be held respecting social-distancing restrictions and all other requirements. Venues to be mentioned are the Santander Congress and Exhibition Centre, with a surface area of more than



CANTABRIA

MICE DESTINATION



Cantabria
Infinita



It wants to get back to hosting established events and attract new ones

Castilla-La Mancha is getting ready for its comeback



López-Villaseñor Municipal Museum.

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Support from the public administration is fundamental in today's world. A spokesperson from the **Regional Government of Castilla-La Mancha** tells Hosteltur that "Different cross-cutting economic support measures are available for different kinds of companies in the region and these last months work has also been done to update and redefine the region's MICE product". The General Directorate for Tourism, Trade and Crafts, points out that

"This redefining process includes providing a new destination dossier indexing all of the different venues, accommodation and auxiliary companies that provide services for the MICE segment in detail". And, as soon as we are allowed to start organising congresses and professional events again, we will be ready to resume activity because we are designing an updated website and editing a new specific promotional video. A spokesperson from the **Quijote Convention Bureau**, part of **Turismo de Ciudad Real**, points out that to be up to speed "once the situation calms down" they

have focused on training, attending all kinds of different conferences and meetings related to business tourism. "We want Ciudad Real to be seen as a safe destination for all kinds of tourism, not only MICE tourism". And "We want to offer our venues to provincial and local companies for provincial and local events, but always thinking of the possibility of also hosting regional and national meetings and events". For 2020, the organisation had scheduled several national medical congresses and others for different associations that it hopes to reschedule when things are back to normal. ■



The sector is devoted to making sure participants have peace of mind

Castile and Leon strengthens its MICE brand

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One of Castile and Leon's Regional Ministry for Tourism and Culture's strategic goals during this term is the creation of the **Castile and Leon Convention Bureau** now renamed **Castilla y León MICE**, explains a representative from the General Directorate for Tourism. Hence, "a department has been specifically created within the **Fundación Siglo** to launch the Convention Bureau and this institution's purpose will be to boost the promotion and commercialisation of business tourism in our Autonomous Community". The region wants to promote this segment as the key to developing a profitable and sustainable tourism industry that also offsets the seasonal effect of tourism. Among other measures, **Feria de Valladolid** has transformed one of its pavilions into an auditorium that can cater for up to 380 people and where it will be possible

to host events, conferences and congresses following the current social distancing rules. Measuring more than 3,000 square meters and with an average height of 8 meters, airflow will be 24,000 cubic meters, and this will help to provide additional guarantees.

The **Forum Evolution Burgos Conference Centre** has introduced a strict protocol that includes the setting up a confinement room in case attendees shows symptoms and giving all their staff specific training on the Prevention of Occupational Risks concerning Biological Hazards. They have also received the 2020 Digital Tourist Award for their efficiency in introducing health security protocols. And, the **Miguel Delibes Cultural Centre** has been able to reactivate a number of its cultural events with online tools and limiting its capacity, but, in terms of congresses, "the capacity measures issued by the health authorities have led to the cancellation or postponement of all scheduled events until the current situation improves". ■



Forum Evolution Burgos is hosting official events.

There is only one León

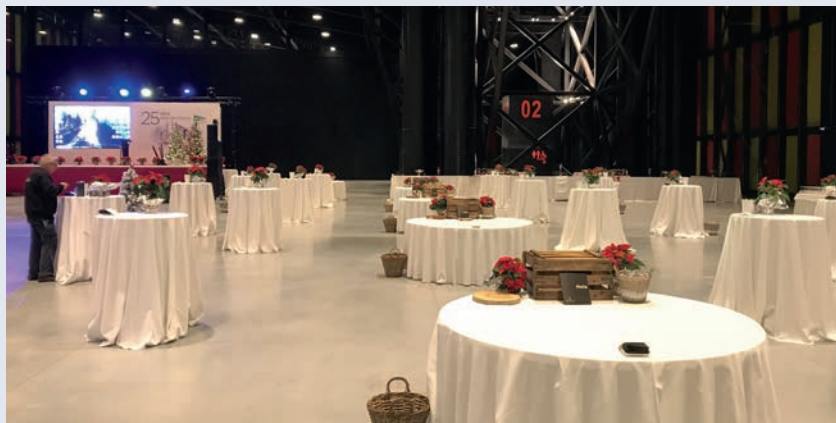
León is a city that never ceases to surprise you. It combines the past and the present, and it brings together a range of elements that give it that special “charm” everybody talks about when they visit. But León is much more, becoming the ideal candidate for hosting all kinds of events, congresses, conferences, etc. always showing great hospitality, a virtue gained from being a crossroads between the ‘Camino de Santiago’ route and Via de la Plata.

This old kingdom is well known for its spectacular cultural and artistic heritage, its traditional food, the friendly nature of its people and its fantastic and extensive province replete with resources, which undoubtedly makes this destination a place you will always want to go back to.

This city that goes back to Roman times brims with life throughout the year, and lately, it is really thriving and becoming exemplary in many aspects. León stands as one of the Spanish cities with the highest quality of life and as an example of sustainable mobility. All kinds of different musical and artistic events and international festivals are held in the city, and it is a destination with industries on the rise; examples being cybersecurity, biotechnology, e-commerce and logistics.

A Conference and Exhibition Centre integrated into the city

To all this social, cultural and business activity, we need to add something else that is putting León in the MICE sector’s spotlight, and that is that León is becoming an excellent option for congresses and events. Its strategic location and closeness to Madrid, just two hours



away by AVE, are turning the city into a thriving option for this kind of tourism because it offers perfect professional, complementary and technical services to host all kinds of events embellished with León’s own special personality.

This two-thousand-year-old city’s 10,000 square metre Conference and Exhibition Centre, with its contemporary industrial design, reminiscent of the place where it is located, make this fantastic space a remarkable setting to hold any mass event. Without a doubt this venue has become a revitalising element, contributing not only to the city’s urban transformation but also becoming the destination’s flagship. But León also has other impressive and extraordinary venues that will give any professional meeting the



magnificence and exclusivity it requires. Proof are Antonio Gaudí’s Casa Botines, the Sierra Pambley Foundation and other fantastic palaces and mansions that can be found on the streets of its famous historic quarter, a great busy and bubbling meeting spot. These last few years, León has been implementing a critical plan for its MICE segment. More hotels to cater for its new Congress and Exhibition Centre, a more than 10,000 squared-meter multipurpose venue in a city that last year welcomed more than 12,000 people attending congresses, and that by the end of the year showed a notable increase compared to the previous period. More than 20 events had already been scheduled for the next year.

León complements the MICE segment with everything business tourism requires to satisfy its needs, auxiliary service companies, traditional and modern cuisine (with two Michelin Stars), an offer like no other and countless options for incentives in a province full of resources.

León, City of Congresses, has everything to be the place where events turn into special occasions, in a destination with its own identity, because... There is only one León.

LEÓN CITY OF CONGRESSES



AYUNTAMIENTO DE LEÓN



Revenue from meetings and events falls 78.3 per cent in 2020

reACT MICE Catalonia, the Catalan strategy to recover MICE tourism

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Due to the impact, gatherings, travel and movement restrictions have had on the tourism industry, the crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic has dealt a severe blow to business tourism in Catalonia, and its capital Barcelona, two internationally renowned MICE destinations that hold worldwide records in the number of international meetings, attendees and income. In figures, the total amount spent by foreign tourists who were travelling for business or to attend trade fairs and congresses has fallen by 78.3 per cent compared to the same period of 2019.

Last year, Catalonia welcomed 1.61 million foreign tourists travelling for business, company meetings, trade fairs and congresses (+15 per cent), coming mainly from France, Italy, Germany and the UK, and spending a total 1,741.9 million euros (+5.4 per cent) in the destination, according to data from the Egatur survey carried out by the National Institute of Statistics (INE).



The Barcelona International Convention Centre has resumed face-to-face activity.

“This severe crisis has forced us to rethink the public sector’s role. It needs to become more responsive, flexible and agile, and open to public-private partnerships. We need to reinvent events, review safety aspects, send a message of confidence to the markets and redefine the model with a clear commitment to digitalisation and technology, sustainability, data and customisation, putting

event attendees at the centre”, states a representative from the Catalan Agency for Tourism (ACT).

Recovery Strategy

The Catalonia Convention Bureau, part of ‘ACT’, aims to support the MICE industry in its reactivation with a short and medium-term plan, reACT MICE Catalonia, resulting from the exchange carried out with professionals from the public and private MICE sector, that sets out three main strategic lines: digitalisation, sustainability and the legacy of events, meaning, the social return they may have on the host destination’s local community.



Catalonia’s Agency for Tourism invests in digitisation, sustainability and the social return on the destination’s local community

Actions of the Plan:

- Structuring of a new product that responds to the new needs and demand for hybrid events and technological solutions that, at the same time, offers safety guarantees and trust.
- Communication through campaigns that build up trust.
- Development of a platform that makes it possible to keep organisers up to date on new proposals and measures put into place.
- Commercial and tactical promotional activities for the reactivation of business, considering how the situation develops and the flexibility of the markets, to always be present in the minds of event organisers.
- Training and generation of data to define future strategies.

‘ACT’, through the Catalonia Convention Bureau, hopes to recover local and nearby markets in the short-term. “The recovery of distant markets will be achieved in the medium to long-term, and Catalonia will once again become a worldwide reference popular destination and a magnet for innovative and sustainable events. ■

Events This is the place

Meet up again on the Costa Daurada



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INTERVIEW

Laura Valdeolivas, manager of PortAventura Business & Events

“We are working to provide a controlled environment in our Convention Centre”

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The COVID-19 pandemic and the restrictions to help contain it have generated significant changes in how events are organised. PortAventura Business & Events has been working on redefining its strategy and on procedures to adapt to the new reality of the sector and the new needs of its customers.

How has the COVID-19 pandemic affected PortAventura Business & Events and what biosafety procedures do you follow?

The health crisis has had an unprecedented impact on global mobility and on the habits of people and companies, and primarily, on the organisation of in-person events. At our division, during these last months, we have been working on measures to provide a controlled environment in our Convention Centre. We have designed and continuously update a comprehensive protocol that includes: specific prevention, cleaning and disinfection measures; control of entrances and exits, and the flow of people; hall ventilation; and the management and limitation of venue attendance.

Hybrid and virtual events have seen a tremendous increase in demand. Are you going to make changes to your business model?

Indeed, hybrid events help us to

comply with capacity restrictions and connect with a wider audience virtually, without geographical barriers. It is a tool that allows events to take place as usual under the current circumstances. Later, once the current crisis has passed, large in-person events will once again be held. We believe that, in the near future, both models will share the spotlight to offer a much more complete experience.

What advantages do the new webpage and other digital tools offer?

The idea is to make it easier for our customers to plan their events using digital tools. We have strengthened our online presence with a new and dynamic webpage that includes a virtual tour so that people can explore our facilities more comfortably and help in the design of any kind of event. It also includes an interactive catalogue.

“When holding events in the post-pandemic era, what strengths will the PortAventura Convention Centre have?”

One of the greatest strengths is the size of the rooms and spaces, in a horizontal building, with different entrances and halls. Our spacious outdoor areas offer a multitude of options for new formats. Staging events outdoors also helps us to comply with social distancing rules and stagger the flow of people. On the other hand, by being able to



Laura Valdeolivas, manager of PortAventura Business & Events.

hold events throughout the resort, customers will benefit from how near all of our different spaces are to each other – Convention Centre, hotels, restaurants and theme parks –, keeping movement and risks to the minimum.

What opportunities will this crisis create for MICE tourism?

All major crises bring with them a learning process and new opportunities, that, perhaps, would never have been identified or would have appeared at a later stage. A positive change in our sector is that this situation has accelerated the digitalisation of a considerable amount of processes and procedures, helping us to offer a much more direct, full and fast service. It has also enabled us to include in our safety and prevention plans, health protocols and guidelines, especially adapted to our activity. ■



PortAventura
BUSINESS
& EVENTS



MAKE IT POSSIBLE, MAKE IT HAPPEN

The world is experiencing one of the most exceptional moments in recent times. It is a challenge and also an opportunity to adapt and start over with a new vision for the future.

Our goal is to guarantee the best event experience by meeting all requirements. The PortAventura Convention Centre has **24 rooms, several terraces, and outdoor spaces within a surface area of 20,000 m²**. Its latest expansion incorporates a new room, ROMA, which has natural light and views of the stunning Mediterranean surroundings. Not forgetting five hotels with more than 2,200 rooms, Ferrari Land and PortAventura Park available for private hire, on-site catering services, team-building activities, the list goes on...

Everything that you could imagine for your event is possible with PortAventura Business & Events.



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Innovation and sustainability mark its new tourism strategy

Business tourism in Madrid is getting ready for the post-COVID-19 era

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Business tourism, based on strong public-private partnerships that with this crisis have been further strengthened, is an essential part of Madrid's tourism model. It represents almost fourteen per cent of the city's tourism, and in 2019 alone it generated nearly 1,200 million euros in direct spending in Madrid itself.



Ifema, acclaimed the best convention centre in the world at the World MICE Awards.

Public-private partnerships are one of the keys to start boosting recovery. Thus, the new promotion and communication activities designed by **Madrid Convention Bureau** with a 700,000-euro budget for this year involve the organisation's more than 200 associated companies, representing all of the different business sectors involved in business tourism in Madrid. The agreed plan will include promotional activities in nearby markets with the associated sector to sectoral and training meetings on prevention measures, as well as the launch of an international promotional video also made in joint collaboration.

All this to give Madrid as a destination and its tourism companies more visibility, to show how they have adapted to create a safe and secure environment for their visitors, including the meetings and events' segment, and to regain their confidence.

The mayor, **José Luis Martínez-Almeida**, has pointed out that "recovering the future of Madrid involves recovering tourism, and for this, it is necessary to further exploit public-private partnerships and the dissemination of the sector's good practices". Thus, the City Council wants to demonstrate how holding professional meetings in Madrid is a more than safe option and that the tourism industry is not among those considered to be a risk.

What is new?

These strange times are not preventing Madrid from continuing to show off its new products and services at trade fairs and international events. However, the pandemic has forced this to be done online.

The latest **World Travel Market** was an excellent opportunity to showcase some of the major changes to the capital's tourism infrastructure. Among these, new venues like the **Four Seasons hotel**, the **Canalejas Gallery** and others that will soon be added, like the renovated **Mandarin Oriental Ritz hotel**, scheduled to be reopened during the first quarter of 2021.

These are joining other properties that have already started to get back to business, like **The Westin Palace**, **Riu Plaza España**, **Barceló Torre de Marid**, **Only You Atocha**, **Meliá Castilla** or **Madrid Marriott Auditorium**, among others. The latter has two important strengths, having taken-in non-severe Covid-19 patients when the pandemic was at its worst, this has allowed it to put all of **ICTE (Institute for Spanish Tourist Quality)** and **Marriott International's** protocols' safety measures into practice. And, furthermore, it is considered one of the largest venues for events in Europe with its 869 rooms, imposing auditorium, 56 meeting rooms, and its bars and restaurants. It adapts to the needs of its clients by complying with the established social distancing measures, and always with excellence as Marriott's hallmark and core value. ■



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The best location
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The islands highlight the great value of their health system and their protocols

The Balearic Islands favour the idea of safe travel corridors to start recovering MICE tourism

Taiana González
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The Balearic Islands dreamed that 2020 would be a turning point for the MICE segment, but with the pandemic came event postponements. In the midst of the health crisis, event organisers will choose destinations that convey confidence and trust. Tests at airports and safe travel corridors will be essential to reactivate tourism on the islands.

The Balearic Islands highlight the great value of their health system and the lower incidence of Covid-19 in comparison to other destinations

In 2019, the Balearic Islands' Tourism Strategy Agency (AETIB) included the MICE segment as an essential key to renovate their tourism model, position themselves as much more than just a sun and sand destination and finally make tourism less dependant on seasonal factors. The plan was for 2020 to be the watershed year, but COVID-19 and the concerns that come with it have put this on ice. Looking back at summer, we can see that the implementation of protocols works and that to convey a sense of trust, the most immediate solution seems to be safe travel corridors. The climate, the natural and cultural heritage, and excellent hotels and additional services, make the Balearic Islands a very competitive destination. According to

Ramón Vidal, president of AETIB's MICE Strategic Segment, in this new context, "we also need to highlight the great value of our health system and the low incidence of COVID-19 in comparison to other places in Spain and Europe".

Repositioning the islands

Mallorca hosts major congresses, company conventions and cultural events. In recent years, medical and technological events have become very popular: "This positions us as a benchmark area for innovation and knowledge exchange in the Mediterranean, and this contributes to the social and economic development of the island", says Vidal, who also chairs the **Palau de Congressos de Palma congress centre and**

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The Blau Portopetro Convention Center

A unique space, approximately 2 km away from the **natural park of Mondragó**, an incomparable environment in one of Mallorca's most well preserved areas; Blau Portopetro combines a fully equipped convention centre with cutting edge audio-visual technology for all kinds of personalized events, such as product launching, conferences, presentations, festivals, among other.

1200 m² of polyvalent facilities with 284 comfortable seats, put together to offer everything necessary for a memorable experience, in a perfect environment, where both work and fun come together at their highest expression.

The **Grand Saló Mondragó**, diaphanous and divisible, with a capacity of up to 500 people. The convention centre has four small rooms with natural light, secretarial services and spacious entrance halls ideal for exhibition purposes.

Design, exclusivity and a personalized approach, in addition to its privileged location and unparalleled views of the **Portopetro bay**, will turn this space into a MICE benchmark on the island.



Meeting room	m²	Capacity (ppl)					
		Theatre	School	"U"	Banquet	Imperial	Cocktail
Figuera A	26	20	9	9	-	14	-
Figuera B	26	20	9	9	-	14	-
Santanyi A	26	20	9	15	-	14	-
Santanyi B	26	20	9	15	-	14	-
Auditorium PortoPetro	220+88	284	-	-	-	-	-
Gran Saló Mondragó	560	400	300	-	400	-	400
Mondragó A+B	372	250	200	72	220	-	300
Mondragó A	186	100	90	33	80	-	100
Mondragó B	186	100	90	33	80	-	100
Mondragó C	186	100	90	33	80	-	100
Galani	111	80	60	30	120	-	100
Midori	65	40	40	30	-	-	-
Estels	80	Upon request	Upon request	Upon request	-	-	100

LAS CALDAS
VILLA THERMAL
WELLNESS CLINIC RESORT

asturias

Viator Convention Centre- Las Caldas Hotel

Las Caldas Villa Thermal resort, located in the heart of Asturias, has two hotels, the 5* Gran Hotel Las Caldas and the 4* Hotel Spa & Sport. This space results from the comprehensive refurbishment of Balneario de Las Caldas, an establishment that opened its doors for the first time in 1776.

Its spectacular architectural design makes Las Caldas Villa Thermal and its surroundings a privileged space to enjoy nature, open air sports and the marvellous benefits of the thermal waters in all its forms.

The resort has two thermal-leisure areas, the **Balneario Real** and the **Ecotermal Aquaxana** circuit, both highly prestigious and of particular relevance within the national and international health tourism sector, both for the different treatments as well as for the wellness, sports and healthcare programs it offers, ideal to enjoy in moments of relaxation after work and to organize interesting activities.

The space has 11 multifunctional rooms, suitable for the celebration of different events, all of them equipped with avant-guard technology. Furthermore, Las Caldas Villa Thermal has a complete gastronomic offer available based on local products, the perfect finishing touch for any event or celebration.



Meeting room	m²	Capacity (ppl)				
		Theatre	School	"U"	Banquet	Cocktail
Priorio	395	325	220	75	250	350
Priorio 1	220	160	160	60	140	200
Priorio 2	175	160	160	60	110	150
Salón de los Espejos	190	-	-	-	70	120
Monsacro	400	325	200	75	-	350
Monsacro 1	185	130	90	36	-	170
Monsacro 2	70	60	36	27	-	60
Monsacro 3	70	60	36	27	-	60
Monsacro 2+3	140	110	70	35	-	120
Peña Avis	150	140	85	36	-	-
Consejo 1	25	-	-	15	-	-
Consejo 2	23	-	-	12	-	-
Consejo 1+2	48	-	-	27	-	-
Enclave 1	72	70	50	20	-	-
Enclave 2	65	60	40	20	-	-
Enclave 3	25	-	-	15	-	-



Palma's Palau de Congressos uses Apps for virtual site visits and to see what setups will look like with a 3D tool.

“The islands expect activity will initially come back to life with individual business clients, followed by national congresses. International events will come with tests and safe corridors

the Mallorca Convention Bureau.

For the Palau de Congressos, 2019 was “a year of transition”: it hosted 280 events, had a turnover of more than 14 million euros, and the direct impact on the entire company represented 25.2 million. Despite the outbreak, it “continues to stage a significant amount of events”. “But, we have also received requests to postpone other events until 2022”, he points out.

Recovery will begin with individual business clients; due to proximity, national events and congresses will follow and the international ones.

The Fomento de Turismo Foundation to promote the island of Menorca explains that “Being a destination many DMCs and companies do not even think about, 2019 was a very appealing year for incentive trips and small congresses. “That is where our market is”, they point out. They anticipate that in the new scenario, their clients will “come in small groups”.

Rapid tests to reactivate demand

Without a vaccine and without getting the pandemic under control, “the market is up in the air because companies and associations are hesitant to book”, says Vidal, and that is why we need to offer “flexibility and safety and security”.

Vidal believes that “Safe travel corridors would generate enough confidence to reactivate small groups for incentives and meetings, and this would be a crucial step to start bouncing back”. The ‘traffic lights’

system and rapid tests at airports “would benefit the movement of people and help to relaunch the segment”.

Protocols, guidelines and measures

In an industry especially known for how it takes great care of its clients, the implementation of protocols has been a common thread throughout the chain. As an example, The **Palau de Congressos de Palma** has introduced the “Stay Safe with Meliá” programme, implementing measures to ensure social distancing; using new equipment and products for cleaning and disinfecting and making changes to how food is presented and served. They have also installed screens and designed QR codes to avoid contact between people, and they are boosting the use of digital applications with meeting planners so that they can conduct “virtual site visits and see what different setups would look like using 3D tools.

The islands' advantages

Visitors want to feel safe, and the Foundation for the Promotion of Tourism in Menorca reminds us that the island is a Biosphere Reserve “highly reputed for its natural environment, health and well-being”; three fundamental features in this new normal, which are also shared with other destinations like Ibiza for example.

The islands' great advantage is their size “making it a lot easier to manage and monitor both the destination and its visitors”. ■



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Pedro Homar, Managing Director of *Fundación Turismo Palma 365*

“We now have a wider tourism offering. Palma is

AN UNBEATABLE TOURISM DESTINATION”

Palma has completely changed its promotional strategy, and in just eight years, it has established itself as an urban tourism destination. The city’s wide range of resources attract holiday tourists and travellers visiting the Mallorcan capital to attend conferences and other professional events all year round.

The strategy launched in 2012 to turn Palma into an urban tourism destination has been very successful, and today it is a bustling city all year round. But, how has the health crisis affected this strategy?

It has affected the way but not the focus. We are still working on the strategy we launched in 2012 to reposition and establish the city as a weekend urban holiday destination. In 2020 we have had to change our marketing strategy twice to adapt to the new situation. But, we have also used this time to speed up a change that, being a tourism promotion body, was overdue: the move towards technology and data, Customer

Relationship Management, Smart Tourism and so on. In 2021, it will be market intelligence that will drive the strategy and work plan.

What changes have you made in 2020 to adapt to the new circumstances?

We have had to stop all in-person activity. Since we started redefining the city’s positioning, we focused a significant part of our strategy on using the media to spread our message ‘what it is we want for Palma’ and every year we have welcomed numerous journalists from different countries, visiting us every two or three weeks. But this year, this has all faded away.

We have changed how we conveyed our message and moved onto online formats. We have also moved all our promotion onto digital platforms.

What will be Fundación Turismo Palma 365’s strategy in 2021?

The strategy for 2021 is divided into three major areas. On the one hand, we have a branding campaign, that will be an umbrella strategy involving different promotional activities focused around four major linchpins: connectivity, to recover the connections we have lost; the promotion of Palma as an urban destination; Playa de Palma, associating it with sports and family tourism; and tour operators.



Pedro Homar defends the great value of public-private partnerships, because “that is our essence”.

We also have ‘Plan Impulsa Palma’ which includes ten projects linked to new technologies. It provides for improvements in the coverage and speed of all the different WIFI hotspots deployed around the city and in the commercialisation of the city’s tourism product. At the end of January, we will launch a new B2B and B2C transactional website. A third project is a technological platform called ‘Welcome Palma’, and it is like a tourist ‘watchdog’. By using artificial intelligence and heat maps, we will be able to see how tourists are interacting with the destination. By using this platform, we will also be able to interact with tourists.

Also related to smart tourism, different external sources are going to provide us with destination and market intelligence, and this will help us to define our promotional activities. Another project aims to build-up Palma’s Smart Office with more staff and giving it more control over procedures. And there is also another strategy related to UNE standards.

All of this is ‘Impulsa Palma’, a three-year, one-million-euro project. A third of this is paid by the Secretary of State for Tourism, a third by the Government of the Balearic Islands and another third by the City Council of Palma.

“

We are going to take the leap and go long-haul; if we cannot return to this project in 2021, it will be a must in 2022”

As regards to the markets, an objective foreseen for 2020 that could not be carried out due to the outbreak was a campaign targeting long-haul markets, especially focused on the American market. Will this be resumed?

If we do not get back to this in 2021, we most definitely will in 2022, because making this long-haul leap is a must.

Given that we are talking about a short-stay model, what are the expected stayovers for this market?

In the mid and low seasons, tourists visit us for the weekend or three-day stays, and we have an occupancy rate of seventy to eighty per cent. Except for when there are school holidays in other European counties, occupancy drops during the week because it is highly related to business tourists. However, Americans tend to come

in summer as part of tourist circuits. So, at the moment, it is not really important for us to have direct flight connections with the USA. But, we do need them with Europe. The strategy we had in mind for America was geographically segmented. We were only going to conduct promotional campaigns in Chicago, New York and Miami, where there are already connections with Europe and also Spain.

MICE activity is essential to offset the seasonal effect of tourism. What role does it play in Palma’s positioning as an urban destination?

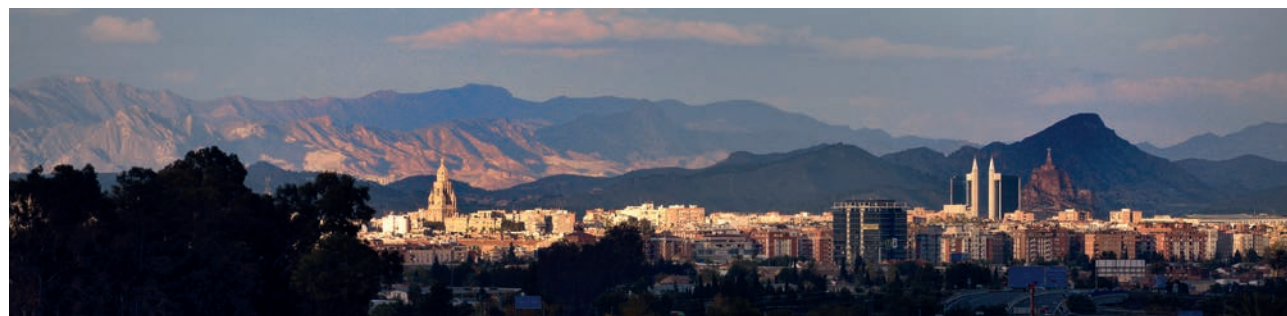
MICE tourism is a crucial product to help make tourism less dependent on the high season, and, in fact, it was an essential part of what was missing in the repositioning strategy we started in 2012, Reasons being: on the one hand, the type of customers, who travel all year round helping to guarantee good mid and low seasons. And on the other hand, it is impossible to be seen as an important competitor in this segment if you have positioned yourself as a beach, and not a city destination; this becomes an impediment when being chosen for an event. After a hard day’s work, it is ‘after-congress time’, a whole lot better in a city where opportunities are countless.

To be able to make this quantum leap in the MICE segment, we needed to focus on becoming a city destination. We now have a wider tourism offering. As a destination for Congresses, Palma is unbeatable because it has good connections with the whole of Europe and new and modern facilities that meet the needs and requirements of this sector, and also because it is a city that offers participants everything they are looking for once their hard day’s work is over.

LEV

The eastern part of Spain is committed to the reactivation of a key sector

The region's MICE product will play a decisive role in the recovery of the tourism industry



Murcia's Convention Bureau has launched "Murcia adapted to you" that provides information on what measures need to be taken when hosting events.

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In 2019, with the domestic market as its most important, the Region of Murcia hosted 1,318 events catering for a total 183,652 attendees. After an unprecedented drop in congress activity in 2020 due to coronavirus pandemic – 80 per cent in Murcia and Cartagena and 79 per cent in Águilas – The **Region of Murcia's Institute for Tourism (Itrem)** is now firmly committed to the MICE sector and helping to reactivate it with specific actions.

The organisation proposes the creation of an umbrella brand that will integrate everything the region has to offer in terms of congresses. And to position the Costa Cálida-Region of Murcia's MICE product and boost the destination with corporate customers and agencies, it has also designed a marketing strategy creating specific national advertising campaigns for specialised media and websites.

The strategy will include events presenting its MICE product to national buyers, a market seen as more accessible. Later, and depending on the evolution of the pandemic,

they will target international markets that have direct flights to the Región de Murcia International Airport. Itrem will also work together with the different convention bureaux in Murcia and Cartagena and the region's local companies to define a joint promotion and marketing strategy. At the same time, they will also implement protocols that will guarantee security against COVID-19, and this will help to position them as a safe destination in terms of health as well as being a well-connected, competitive and professional destination, adapted to new technologies.

The **Convention Bureau in Murcia** has launched the "Murcia adapted to you" campaign, that provides information on what measures need to be taken when hosting events in the city. It recommends hybrid events, a format that has also been welcomed by the **Convention Bureau in Cartagena**, as the most interesting option for this segment.

Souvenir marketing

Turismo Comunidad Valencia foresees a seventy to eighty per cent drop in congress activity this year due to the pandemic. Nonetheless, they

perceive a latent demand for the MICE product that, "in the medium and long-term will play a decisive role in tourism recovery".

In Fact, they are working on new approaches and tools adapted to the new reality. "We have refocused our 2020-2021 Marketing Strategy to boost participation in online events and trade fairs, and to promote 'souvenir marketing', highlighting the confidence and security Castellón, Valencia and Alicante provide in their tourism venues", they point out. Within the frame of public-private partnerships, together with the region's convention bureaux and sector associations, they plan to design a joint online and offline promotion strategy for Spain and Europe.

Turismo Comunidad Valencia states that this difficult period has left us with certain future challenges and positive outcomes, examples being the acceleration of the sector's digitalisation transformation, opening the doors to new possibilities for blended hybrid formats and the introduction of hygienic and health conditions that will continue to play a decisive role in the organisation of events. ■

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