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SPECIAL **2022**  
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& BUSINESS

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## EDITORIAL

## MICE tourism takes off again, but with new challenges

The crisis triggered by the COVID-19 pandemic has changed MICE tourism, but the sector has adapted quickly and commendably to the new needs and requirements of safety issues, technology, greater flexibility, and the increasing demand for sustainability at events.

This response has resulted in a swift and robust upturn. Rescheduling of postponed conferences and meetings has created an optimistic outlook for 2022. Sector specialists and studies predict a full recovery between 2022 and 2023, returning to the record-breaking figures of 2019.

In this upturn, hybrid events are the most popular. These events allow for larger audiences, create more impact, offer virtual contingency plans, and increase the return on investment. But more attendees are expected at all types and formats of events. The growing trend of face-to-face meetings is proof that these kinds of events have been missed. Things like making new contacts and the emotional experience of face-to-face events are just not the same at hybrid or virtual events. Companies value these meetings and their great potential for networking and team building.

Looking ahead, the industry will need to keep environmental care at the forefront of events and keep its strategy and innovation sharp in these uncertain times.

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From Spain Convention Bureau's Barometer to the American Express Study, experts agree that the sector is at a turning point

# MICE TOURISM WILL RECOVER IN 2022

Conferences, trade shows, meetings, conventions, and incentives have made a strong comeback in Spain in recent months. Still, however good the MICE sector's high season may be, this year, it will be impossible to equal the record-breaking numbers of before the pandemic, something specialists predict for 2022, with excellent expectations.

**2**022 will be when MICE activity really recovers. If in 2021, 54 percent of Spain's Convention Bureaus will hold less than one hundred events in total, in 2022, 68 percent expect to host more than one hundred in

each of the destinations they represent, a figure that is the average number of events held per year before the pandemic, according to "The Barometer on COVID-19 and its effects on the MICE industry", published by **Spain Convention Bureau**

**(SCB).** The pandemic came at a time when MICE tourism was reporting record figures, with more than half of the destinations holding between 100 and 500 events in 2019. The industry wants and hopes to generate more than 6,000 million euros

per year and return to growth rates of fifteen percent per year.

The destinations that are part of the **Congress Cities Network** constituted within the Spanish Federation of Municipalities and Provinces (FEMP) were asked to take a survey, and the president of SCB and mayor of Las Palmas, Augusto Hidalgo, summarises for Hosteltur what it has revealed: the Barometer has given us very encouraging data that confirms MICE tourism is making headway, but logically, it is doing so at a slightly slower pace than leisure tourism because it involves a lot more prior organisation. Nevertheless, the forecasts for 2022 are very promising.

At the beginning of summer, 75 percent of MICE venues had opened in 70 percent of our destinations, and now in autumn, these numbers have increased.

## PENT-UP DEMAND

In most destinations, instead of cancelling events that could not be held due to the pandemic, organisers decided to postpone them.

SCB's Barometer shows that 90 percent of events postponed in 2020 have been rescheduled: 63 percent will be held during the second half of 2021, 26 percent at the beginning of 2022 (before April), and 11 percent are still pending a specific date.

## AN OPPORTUNITY FOR IMPROVEMENT

The COVID-19 crisis has also been perceived as an opportunity for MICE venues. With programmed events coming to a halt, it was the perfect time to revamp venues and improve the industry's profitability. The Barometer reveals that 80 percent of venues have modernised their facilities, 42 percent have improved relations between companies and partners, 23 percent have increased their information and communication channels, and 19 percent have organised training sessions adapted to the needs and requirements arising from the pandemic.

Hidalgo explains that, although tourism was already immersed in the process of modernisation, this has only happened in MICE tourism in recent months: "Our destinations have overcome three great challenges: the acceleration of digitalisation, the introduction of new safety and security standards and sustainability", he stresses.

He explains that "destinations have used this time to revamp their venues and set them up with new technology. They have also made a commendable effort to adapt trade fair grounds, auditoriums, and other venues to safety and security protocols that give users a real sense of being in a safe place. There has also been a "qualitative leap" in applying

**Statistics are encouraging and confirm that MICE tourism is making headway: the outlook for 2022 is reassuring", says Augusto Hidalgo, president of SCB**

sustainability criteria when organising and staging events." There are already many examples like the concept of zero kilometre products (100% local products), carbon footprint compensation, and electric mobility, and these concepts are now an important part of what MICE destinations are currently including in their proposals", he explains.

## A NEW ERA

The Global Meetings and Events Forecast Study published by **American Express Meetings & Events** also points to optimism and growth for 2022: 67 percent of respondents believe that the number of face-to-face events will return to pre-pandemic levels.



The 7th Medical Laser Congress Top 100 was hosted at Kursaal in September. Picture APCE.

demical levels within one to two years.

Face-to-face meetings and events will increase in 2022, when 81 percent of all events are expected to have some level of face-to-face participation, according to the annual report published by **American Express Global Business Travel (GBT)**. In addition, 64 percent of event professionals worldwide also cite an increase in budgets for the coming year.

By region, event professionals in Europe are cautiously optimistic for

ents predict a slower recovery than in other regions, 86 percent are confident that the number of in-person attendees will return to pre-pandemic levels within five years.

Among the top five destinations in Europe, urban destinations stand out, with Madrid being the third most popular and Barcelona the fourth, in a ranking led by Athens, followed by Paris.

The Senior Vice-president of GBT's Value Development and Global General

that the optimism, ingenuity, and innovation we have seen in the industry during the last two years will lead us into a new era of responsible, innovative, and insightful events", he stresses.

This forecast study indicates that companies increasingly understand the importance of internal meetings, and these kinds of meetings together with training sessions are expected to see the strongest growth by 2022.

Caring for the environment will be a priority for most event programmes in 2022: 83 percent of respondents indicated that their organisations will consider sustainability when planning meetings and events. Among the most cited sustainability practices for meetings in 2022 are minimising the use of paper and implementing energy-saving and waste reduction measures.

### 83 PERCENT FOR 2023

According to a Wakefield and SAP Concur report on the global business traveller last June, 96 percent of corporate travellers were keen to travel this year, and 80 percent were concerned that not being able to travel would hurt them "personally and professionally". Without increased travel, 33 percent were concerned that they would not be able to move forward in their careers, and 18 percent even feared losing their jobs. Another relevant finding is that 42 percent of those who travel on a regular basis for business believe that after the pandemic, they are now more aware and responsible for their own health and safety when travelling.

**McKinsey** has estimated that in 2020 corporate travel plunged 52 percent due to the pandemic. Their study puts overall recovery in 2022-2023, but in the case of business travel, they estimate that in 2023 the market will have only recovered by 83 percent.

At the corporate level, the study identifies four types of travellers: those who started travelling again as soon as restrictions were lifted (accounting for 15 percent of total spending); those who are waiting to see how the pandemic evolves (5 percent of spending), mainly companies and public bodies in relatively low competitive sectors; those who fear being left behind, companies in highly competitive sectors (accounting for 60 percent of spending); and those who will not travel again (20 percent of spending), mostly digital natives and those that have made cutbacks. ■



The recent Smart City Expo World Congress 2021.

**Of all the events that could not be held in Spain due to the pandemic, 63 percent will be have been held in the second half of this year, and 26 percent have been rescheduled for the beginning of 2022**

2022: on a scale of 1 to 10, 59 percent show a level of optimism of 8 or more, the lowest among the four regions surveyed. However, 48 percent of European events in 2022 are expected to be face-to-face only, the second-highest forecast after North America. And while all respond-

**Professionals anticipate a new era in responsible, innovative, and insightful event strategies based on the lessons learnt these last months**

Manager of **American Express Meetings & Events, Gerardo Tejada**, explains that despite the "great enthusiasm to return to previous levels of demand of meetings and events", he believes that "recovery is not going to be a steady path and we are not going to get there by simply repeating what we have done in the past".

Looking ahead to 2022, we hope



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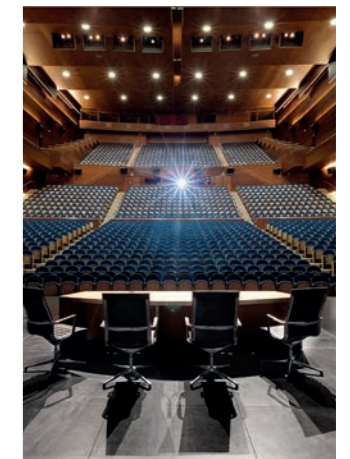


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The pandemic has consolidated the technological transformation that was already reigning in the congress and meetings industry

# GOING BACK TO FACE-TO-FACE

Activity coming to a forced stop because of the pandemic has demonstrated the importance of being able to attend meetings and conferences in person, live, and in person. Industry experts point to the great value of face-to-face attendance as well as the advantages that technological improvements have brought to the sharp increase and consolidation of hybrid events.

**According to figures from the World Economic Forum, 82 percent of face-to-face meetings are more productive than those held online**

Even now, in autumn, when face-to-face conferences, meetings, and trade fairs have already been held for months, almost every event begins with a comment from someone saying how eager they were to see everyone again.

2021 began with virtual events, which later became hybrid, and ended

with 100 percent face-to-face meetings, with the option of also following them online. But although the year began with some events still completely online, the first hybrid conferences and meetings had already been held with great success and were consolidated in the spring when face-to-face events also started to make a timid comeback.



In October, the 41st Congress of the Spanish Society of Family and Community Medicine gathered 2,500 professionals in Palma.

With the upturn the industry is seeing this autumn, its high season, in-person meetings and events are now the general trend.

We have also seen a shift from a large majority of regional and, above all, national events to a strong return of international events, and this has all unfolded in just under ten months.

While for months, the unavoidable worldwide obligation to hold hybrid and even virtual-only events has proven to be effective, most in the industry caution that there are meetings and professional gatherings that only bear real fruit if they are face-to-face and where technology is the ideal complement.

A diversity of formats characterise Post-COVID events. According to the "Barometer on COVID-19 and its effects on the MICE sector" carried out by the **Spain Convention Bureau**, face-to-face meetings accounted for 95 percent of pre-COVID events, and now only 40 percent of the Convention Bureaux surveyed say these types of events are the most popular. For 30 percent, hybrid events predominate, and for the other 30 percent, both formats are equally common. The **SCB** predicts that events will continue to be both hybrid and face-to-face after the drastic modernisation of venues.

**THE ADDITION OF TECHNOLOGY**  
Technology has played an important role

**The coexistence of hybrid and face-to-face events will continue after the significant modernisation of the venues, according to representatives of the SCB, who point out that face-to-face events predominate, with 40 percent of events**

in making hybrid events successful and in guaranteeing safe events by helping to minimise contact with objects, control capacity limitations, deploy 5G connectivity, improve the visibility of event attendees and offer unique experiences, and widespread the use of augmented reality and the internet of things.

Improvements in recording and broadcasting technologies have also become widespread, turning venues into real film sets. There have been times when events were almost entirely virtual, and conference centres acted as production centres for events that were being broadcast. Despite all this, APCE points to technology as a temporary and

circumstantial substitute and now an accessory to in-person events.

## A GLOBAL AUDIENCE

While congress centres and trade show grounds were well prepared because they were already hosting events with streaming services before the pandemic, hotels and other venues dedicated to the meetings segment had to adapt more and start using technological solutions they had never used before.

Thanks to technology, audiences of face-to-face events have grown, speakers from all over the world can attend, and the audience spectrum has broadened. Therefore, according to the professionals surveyed worldwide for the latest **American Express Meetings & Events Study**, virtual and hybrid formats will continue to play a key role despite the increase of face-to-face events and meetings. Hybrid meetings will continue to gain traction because they help to reach more audiences, create integrated virtual contingency plans and increase the return on investment. However, more attendees are expected in all kinds and formats of events.

## FACE-TO-FACE IS BETTER

Face-to-face meetings generate higher returns for companies than those hosted on digital platforms. Specifically, and according to the World Economic Forum figures, 82 percent of face-to-face meet-



Málaga Trade Fair and Conference Centre. Tourism of Andalusia.

ings are more productive than those held online.

Industry specialists have told Hosteltur that virtual events lack the “networking” component that is highly demanded by companies and one of the main reasons for attending congresses, conventions, and trade shows. They say exhibitors value in-person attendance

and live meetings much more than digital events in almost every aspect: from networking to making new contacts, to the “total experience” of the event, to the possibility of generating business and closing deals. The inability to replicate “networking” in digital environments was the main problem the industry had to face during the months of hiatus, they add.

Precisely, the *raison d'être* of organisations, congresses, events, and incentive trips is to a large extent to make new contacts, motivate professionals, generate team building, make training experiential, do business, share thoughts and bond emotionally, elements that to a large extent call for face-to-face meetings.

### THE REUNION

A good example of the spirit that pervades most professional meetings that are taking place in these months of lively reactivation are the titles and slogans chosen for the events. “Face-to-face, essential” (“*Lo presencial, imprescindible*”) was the slogan chosen for the 33rd **OPC Spain** Congress in May, and the title of the **MICE Forum** in September was “La rentrée”. Other illustrative examples were “The reunion” (“*El reencontro*”), used by the **Spanish Confederation of Hotels and Tourist Accommodation (CEHAT)** for their Spanish Hoteliers Congress held in Oviedo in November, or “Let’s meet-up to listen” (“*Troben-nos per escoltar*”) for the 6th Summit Barcelona Oberta. **Iker Goikoetxea**, president of **APCE**, the association representing most Spanish conference centres, sums up this feeling by stating that “clients are eager to return”. ■



Meliá has launched their “Let’s make the world spin once again because together we are unstoppable” campaign.

# MICE – BASQUE EVENTS

The MICE tourism sector in the Basque Country is professional and internationally acclaimed. Basque tourism as a whole employs 100,000 professionals in the Basque Country and contributes

6.4 percent to our autonomous community’s GDP. It is evident that the pandemic has had a greater impact on this segment, which, before COVID came into our lives, hosted more than 2,000 events per year, with 400,000 attendees and had an average satisfaction rate of excellent (9.6 points out of ten) in the surveys taken by attendees rating their experience. However, despite all the difficulties of these last two years, the Basque professional MICE sector has adapted to the circumstances of recent months, offering safe, professional events for all those attending and stepping up its efforts to achieve the objectives set by the organisers.

It is now time for a comeback, and the Basque Government’s Tourism Department is firmly committed to boosting Basque MICE tourism. It is an essential part of our tourism strategy given its extraordinary ability to attract tourists. Twelve per cent of those visiting the Basque Country do so for professional reasons, and we want this segment to continue to grow because it favours a double seasonal adjustment: bringing visitors during the week and throughout the year. The preferred month for conferences in the Basque Country is June, with 29 percent followed by September and October, each with 22 percent of the total. Moreover, MICE tourism is vital because of its capacity to be converted into leisure tourism.

In brief, the Basque Country believes in the MICE sector, and to encourage and boost the organisation of events, it offers a tool promoted by the Department of Tourism and all three of its capitals’ Convention Bureaux (Bilbao, San Sebastián and Vitoria-Gasteiz) together with the sector’s professional associations. This tool, the [www.basque-events.eus](http://www.basque-events.eus) platform is a reflection of the Basque Country’s great ability to attract profes-



Javier Hurtado, consejero de Turismo.

sional events.

« With Basque-Events – states Javier Hurtado, Regional Minister for Tourism – we are bringing together all the potential of the Basque Country’s MICE sector under a single platform.

We are looking to attract events that promote the dissemination of knowledge related to sectors in which the Basque Country is an international leader. You know you are betting on quality, sustainability, and creativity when choosing us. This is our commitment to conference tourism, an activity that improves the positioning of our destination

and is a driving force for business opportunities, provides benefits to the general economy, promotes the dissemination of knowledge and boosts innovation and creativity. Each event in our region helps to project the potential of other relevant sectors in the Basque Country and provides added value”. ■

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Activity is gradually getting back to normal in the sector

# An explosion of trade fair business set to consolidate itself

@angelesvargaspe

By **Ángeles Vargas**

In a statement made by **Xabier Basañez**, president of the **Association of Spanish Trade Fairs (AFE)**, to HOSTELTUR, he pointed out that "As we predicted last year, 2021 is a year of transition. Business activity made a comeback at the end of March, and Spain was one of the first European countries to start recovering. Before the summer, around fifty trade fairs, including some of international scope like Fitur or the Mobile World Congress, were successfully held in different cities".

According to data from the association, "more than 200 trade fairs have been scheduled from September to December, and so far, results are very encouraging", say the organisers.

Respecting guidelines and capacity limitations "is not preventing participants – exhibitors and visitors – from attending trade fairs, but on the contrary, and this is a clear example

of how there is an obvious interest for this kind of activity and face-to-face meetings. This results in many trade shows being held in just a few months". Despite not always reaching pre-pandemic figures, the trend is positive: "We believe that these events being held smoothly and without any problems bodes well for the coming year".

"If there are no setbacks due to the health situation, we are confident trade fair activity will be fully back on track throughout 2022. We are optimistic for the coming year when trade fair programmes are expected to be back to normal. Once international mobility restrictions have been eased in general, we will also be able to host several international trade fairs that had to be postponed to guarantee their success", he explains.

In the coming months, the sector hopes for safety and preventive measures to disappear gradually and

for trade shows to be staged as before, returning them to their full potential as indisputable marketing tools for business activities".

## GETTING BUSIER

"2021 has seen the entire industry return to in-person trade show activity", says **Constantí Serrallonga**, general director of **Fira de Barcelona**. Before the summer, we hosted MWC Barcelona, Integrated Systems Europe (ISE), and BTravel, among other shows at the venue. It was a tough start, and the trade fairs had to adapt in format and size to the current situation of the pandemic, but these have been very significant and encouraging first steps".

After the summer, "things have been getting quite busy" with the organisation of professional trade fairs such as Expoquimia or the Barcelona Gastronomic Forum as well as other bustling shows. "We can safely say that



In May, Fitur marked the return of face-to-face events at Ifema.

we have left the most difficult times behind us and that we have started a new stage marked by the eagerness of companies, professionals and the general public to meet up again and go to trade shows and face-to-face events. We are now approaching the final stretch of the year with iconic international shows like the Smart City Expo World Congress or IBTM, he points out.

2022 looks set to be a year full of major international events for Fira de Barcelona. "The great challenge for the sector in 2022 will precisely be to get as many companies and professionals as possible to take part in leading trade shows". To achieve this, the reactivation of international mobility and the global economic recovery will be key. "The role of trade shows as drivers of the economy for this much-needed reactivation will be of great importance", he stresses.

**Belén Mann**, Director of Conferences at **Ifema**, states that Ifema Madrid resumed face-to-face activity in May. However, it had already hosted smaller events following all the relevant restrictions in place before that. "Fitur was the first major show to be organised, and it was followed by other trade fairs that had been postponed like ARCO and Almoneda". The 1st ESTRO Congress was held in August with 3,000 attendees in person, and "it was the first Congress to be organised in Europe since the start of the pandemic". "From September onwards, our venue's usual trade shows have been organised, and congresses and corporate events that had to be postponed have also returned", she explains. Business activity from October to December is frenetic, and things are looking like they did before the pandemic". She agrees that "2022 will be the year things will gradually get back to normal, unless

external circumstances prevent this from happening, as they have already scheduled multiple corporate events, trade shows and two important congresses: Heart Failure and EAGE, among other smaller ones".

**In 2022 in general, in terms of the number of trade and exhibition fairs, exhibitors and visitors, and occupied floor space, AFE expects figures close to those of 2019**

Iker Goikoetxea, president of the Spanish Association of Conference Centres (APCE), representing 31 different venues

## “WE CAN SENSE THAT CUSTOMERS ARE EAGER TO COME BACK AND THAT THEY REALLY NEED TO MEET IN PERSON AGAIN”

MICE tourism in Spain is recovering swiftly and strongly, explains the president of the Spanish Association of Conference Centres (APCE), Iker Goikoetxea, who stresses the importance of going back to in-person events.

### **H**ow are conferences making their comeback at APCE venues?

Swiftly and strongly. Things started gradually at the beginning of September. After summer, as restrictions started to ease and even be lifted regarding capacity limitations and so on, our venues really started to notice how business was bouncing back. Everything has contributed to a strong recovery, even in terms of international activity that we have always known would take more time to recover. National

conferences are the most popular, but international activity is also growing. After some challenging months, we sense that clients, whether companies or associations, are eager to return and have a great need to meet in person.

### **To what extent are face-to-face events being revived, or are hybrid events being promoted more?**

Based on what we are perceiving from returning clients, I must make a strong plea for the relevance of face-to-face meetings. The events we host within

our walls seek to motivate people and teams, teach, excite, make them reflect together, and bond emotionally. And with virtual events, this isn't easy. These elements have a lot to do with the human component, so with face-to-face meetings that are making a strong comeback, we can look each other in the eye and feel close to one another. However, the great advance in the use of technology for events means that those that are mainly face-to-face can also have a hybrid factor that will help attract other groups. This technology offers

**“Seeing how autumn bookings are going, we do expect and hope that 2022 will be a year similar to those before the pandemic.”**

new possibilities but in a secondary and complementary sense to the essence of the human component. I can categorically say that, fortunately, face-to-face attendance cannot be replaced by technology.

### **What are the prospects for the coming months?**

Turnover fell about seventy percent across the board. The outlook is positive, with a strong recovery this autumn. We had some misgivings a few months ago, but fortunately, vaccinations have had a great effect. And what we initially predicted months ago, that this autumn would be the milestone for recovery, is now coming true. This does not mean that 2021 will be a good year overall, obviously not. We expect 2021 to be a little less bad than 2020, but it will be bad and, all in all, a year to forget. However, given how autumn is going and the number of reservations that are being confirmed, we do anticipate and hope 2022 will be a year close to those before the pandemic.

### **What measures have conference centres taken to guarantee safety?**

We have taken all those required from us and others that we proactively believed

would also guarantee the safety and security we needed to transmit. There was a time when just talking about face-to-face meetings was taboo. We have overcome this by applying safety measures and demonstrating that there have been no infections or outbreaks at the many events held during the pandemic. Things have been done properly and professionally. Measures applied range from controlling social distancing, limiting the number of attendees, managing flow rates, impeccable cleaning protocols, the use of hand sanitisers and airing, digitalisation to avoid having to touch things, and so on. But above all, keeping users informed at all times, giving them peace of mind, letting them know what measures were being taken, and getting them to take responsibility for those that affected them was also a top priority. Staff and external teams have been trained, and attendees, suppliers and the entire value chain have worked coordinately together”.

### **What role does technology play under these new circumstances?**

Technology has played an essential role in matters concerning safety and security, and it has also led to hybrid events becoming more popular. There have been times when events have been almost entirely virtual, and we have taken on the role of production centres for these events and later broadcast them. Technology has been a valuable accessory and a substitute at certain times responding to the demands of the moment. As a complement to in-person events, if before we were already staging hybrid events, today, these have undoubtedly grown in popularity.

### **What is the situation for Spanish venues compared to other countries?**

Spain could be seen as an example of how to turn such a difficult situation like the one we had not too long ago around. It has also been exemplary in achieving very high vaccination rates. In relative terms with other countries, the situation is good, and we can compete on a level playing field. The situation has been difficult in all countries, and attracting participants to conferences has been challenging for everyone. The pandemic has affected us all, but now that things seem to be recovering in general, the situation in Spain is good. ■



Iker Goikoetxea is the president of APCE and general manager of the Kursaal Centre.

# ILUNION ALCORA SEVILLA

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The **ILUNION Alcora Sevilla** re-opened in July after more than a year of refurbishments. The facilities were renovated almost entirely, to offer our guests new spaces and services.

Following the **ILUNION Hotels** vision of offer spaces that are "designed for all", we have carried out a range of improvements to make the hotel more accessible. The new reception desk, the lobby elevator and the access to the outside pool are just some of the upgrades made for people with reduced mobility.

**ILUNION Alcora Sevilla** is the perfect hotel to organise a professional event in Seville. To make it so, we have refitted the hotel's 21 meeting rooms to adapt them for all types of events, including the Convention Centre, with room for up to 1,400 persons. The space is modular and can be arranged into a series of rooms, depending on customer requirements. There are also simultaneous interpretation booths and other facilities for international events.

We have also upgraded more than 250 of the hotel's 401 guest rooms and brought the total of accessible rooms fitted with all the facilities for people with disabilities up to 12.

The revamped bar-hall, now brighter and more spacious, the buffet restaurant and the fitness room all offer guests an improved, modern, updated experience.

You may not know that the hotel was one of the first to be converted into an emergency medical centre by the Government of Andalusia at the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020. For several weeks, it housed almost 100 elderly people with the disease, transferred from retirement homes not equipped to deal with the situation.

Because of this, the hotel received an award from San Juan de Aznalfarache City Council, at an official ceremony held on 26 February 2021 to thank us for our active role in the fight against the pandemic.

## ILUNION HOTELS: EVERYONE-INCLUSIVE HOTELS

**ILUNION Hotels**, the hotel chain owned and operated by ILUNION, the brand of the ONCE Social Group companies, is leader in social inclusion in the tourism industry. In 2019, it had an average staff of 1,217 workers, 491 of whom were people with disabilities (40.36%).

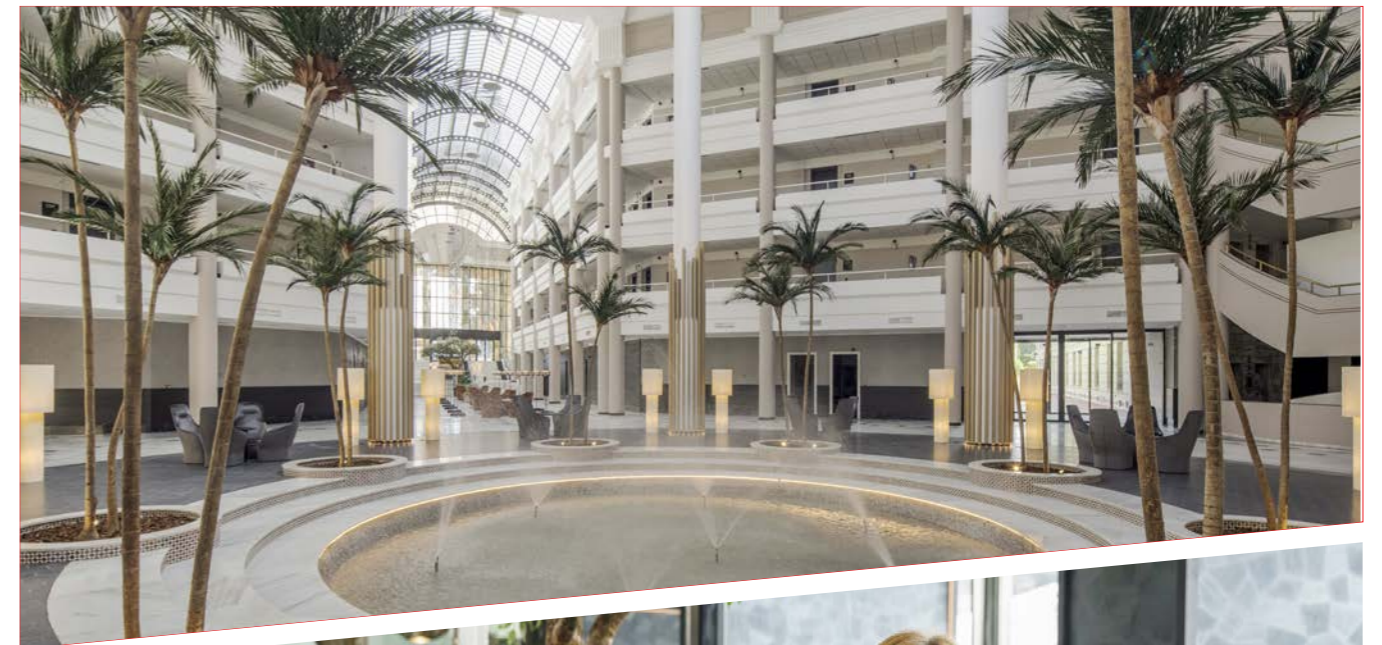
The company was born in 1988 with a clear social purpose, carrying out its operations to achieve economic and social returns. Currently, it has 28 five, four, and three star hotels all across Spain. We are the only hotel chain in Spain with the universal accessibility certification (UNE 170001-2) at all of its establishments and the QSostenible certificate, which certifies the sustainability of its buildings.



Additionally, 11 of our centres are run as Special Employment Centres, meaning that at least 70% of their employees are people with a disability, providing a shining example of labour integration in the tourist sector.

At **ILUNION Hotels**, we will continue to upgrade and refurbish our 28 hotels with the aim of offering all our guests new spaces, designed for all, and ideal for meetings, congresses and more. In 2021 we had a new addition to our chain – the purpose-built ILUNION San Mamés, the first Special Employment Centre in the Basque Country. We will also shortly begin a complete overhaul of another new hotel, ILUNION San Sebastián. ■

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Business trips are now seeing the light at the end of the tunnel

# RISK MANAGEMENT, EFFECTIVE DIGITISATION, AND SUSTAINABILITY, THE THREE CHALLENGES FOR TRAVEL MANAGERS

By **Taiana González**

@Taianahosteltur

The MICE Segment will have to wait until 2024 to return to pre-pandemic figures because companies have replaced non-essential trips for videoconferences. During this new stage, and using technology, travel managers must ensure the safety of employees and keep in line with the new budgets and sustainability policies.

According to a study carried out by **McKinsey**, the upturn of travel will come in 2022-2023, although by the end of 2023, the business segment will have only recovered 83 percent of its market. Full recovery is expected for 2024. Returning to preCOVID figures in Spain means going back to figures of 2019, 12,800 million Euros, and this will require companies reactivating business trips and adapting their budgets. Maintaining flexibility and ensuring the safety of employees will be vital, and "travel managers" will play a key role in this challenge.

Since COVID-19, travel budgets for companies have dropped significantly, and travel managers have had to adapt by taking on new responsibilities and by working more with other departments. In the coming period, technology will be an ally for "the monitoring of expenses, effective negotiations, and traveller's experiences", according to the **Spanish Association of Travel Managers (AEGVE)**. Training for both travel managers and employees in the use of tools that add efficiency will need to be increased.

New outbreaks, capacity limitations, and restrictions in force in differ-

ent countries set the pace for 2021. Still, whenever possible, "the holding of professional events saw an upturn", state representatives from AEGVE, who welcome the fact that "at present corporate travel is progressively increasing and current forecasts estimate we will be seeing the 2019 figures in two years".

## GOALS, CHALLENGES, AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Crises pose immediate challenges that

footprints is a reality".

Cost control and relations with suppliers are at the top of their priorities, but so is the need to adapt services to today's reality. "The drop in revenue and travel spending has meant professionals have had to adjust to new circumstances, taking on new responsibilities in other departments: Human Resource Risk Management, making new kinds of purchases, creating safety and control procedures, and intervening in digitisa-



Corporate travellers are concerned about safety and security, entry requirements for different countries, and personal health management.

we need to learn how to manage and during the enforced hiatus, companies and travel managers took the opportunity to prepare themselves in digitisation and procedures and start-up new sustainability projects.

Representatives from AEGVE state that in the short term, they have three specific objectives, not only at a national level but also at a European level: "Risk management and the protection of travellers so that safety is a priority; an effective digitalisation of corporate trips focused on services and not operators; and sustainability, as a strategy aligned with companies themselves so that the management and control of their carbon

tion projects, explain representatives from AEGVE.

The work of travel managers has been highlighted, and they are now treated and looked upon with the importance they deserve" because, with the pandemic, travel has become a lot more complicated and business travellers -and companies- need "a problem solver".

## THE EVOLUTION OF MEETINGS

Online business meetings have helped companies save money and reduce CO2 emissions. Given the commitment companies have to sustainability, the consultancy company **Braintrust**, believes that in the future, some trips will be replaced

by digital communications. This will impact short-haul travel, which includes a good part of European and domestic travel, between 20 to 30 percent.

Braintrust forecasts that business travel under two and a half hours "will plummet in the next ten years" as it is likely to be replaced by videoconferencing. However, long-haul business trips will increase because they provide an excellent opportunity to expand customer portfolios in the midst of a pandemic-like crisis.

**"With the pandemic, the work of travel managers has been highlighted, and they are now treated and looked upon with the importance they deserve, say representatives from AEGVE"**

Travel managers state that "with videoconferences, we have found a much more effective way of networking and in many cases of avoiding unnecessary trips. But this doesn't mean that the need to meet in person and continue to grow on a personal level has disappeared". "Blended and digital events are here to stay, but personal relationships, in-person attendance, and networking are things we need to base events on.

According to figures published by the **World Economic Forum**, 82 percent of face-to-face meetings are more productive than those held online.

To find a balance, managers must improve planning and organise as many meetings as possible within the same trip. This will also benefit the whole value chain because it could lead to longer stays, explained professionals at the **International Travel Management Summit**, the industry's first face-to-face international event to be held in Europe after the pandemic, precisely intending to kick-start the segment's recovery. ■

The sector has undoubtedly resumed activity, albeit revenues remain low

## OPC

### A RESILIENT AND VERSATILE SECTOR

After a complicated time for all sectors in the conference industry, **Matilde Almandoz**, president of **OPC Spain** and **Foro MICE**, confirms how well the industry has adapted to the new demands that have emerged these last months. "Our sector is resilient and versatile," she tells Hosteltur.



"Foro MICE's La Rentrée" an exclusively in-person event.

During this time, innovation and technology have become key elements for the digital transformation of companies in the tourism sector. "Technological solutions have taken a leading role in recent months because they have made it possible to attract more audiences, avoid isolation, and to keep in contact with clients", explains the president of OPC

**According to OPC Spain, although business is back, "revenues are still far from what they were before the pandemic."**

Spain. Almandoz points out that "ironically, technological limitations have also

come to fore because virtual and hybrid events cannot offer the same experiences as in-person events when it comes to, for example, transmitting emotions and sharing stories.

#### REVIVAL VS TURNOVER

For the moment, the industry is gradually moving forward. Almandoz explains that "in parallel to the evolution of the pandemic, the globalisation of vaccines and each individual's civil responsibility, the industry is experiencing moments of growth with moments of impasse".

Among the advances, she highlights "the undisputed and indisputable upturn of face-to-face activity", with events "like the Mobile World Congress or TIS Seville, as well all the initiatives being held at both corporate and association level". But she also points out that "turnover levels are still very low compared to previous years". "The trend in this aspect is still far from the references we have from previous years", she adds.

#### SUSTAINED GROWTH

Looking ahead to 2022, the message is clear: "We must continue to work on sustained growth, and this will allow us to keep moving forward". "We have a long road ahead, and although we are advancing moderately, as long as the situation and mobility of the moment allow it, we will need support from private and public institutions", claims the president of OPC Spain.

If the 33rd OPC Spain National Congress held in Granada in May helped strengthen the MICE industry, the next one, its 34th edition, which will be held in Santander during the third quarter of 2022, will be a further boost. ◀

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Hybrid events have come to stay

# HOTELS ARE ADAPTING THEIR MICE PRODUCT TO TODAY'S CIRCUMSTANCES

The pandemic has triggered changes that have transformed the tourism industry forever. This is the case of hybrid events that combine face-to-face attendance with the creation of a virtual community that presents a multitude of opportunities. Cost-saving and the interaction of people based in different places are just two of the advantages. And hotels have adapted to accommodate them.

By **Vivi Hinojosa**

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Hotel chains and independent hotels have been working hard to create a specific product that will improve their position in the potential market.

Technology is put at the service of hotels so that they can host these kinds of professional congresses and events in their facilities, offering a hyper-realistic experience that allows attendees to participate immersively, regardless of where they are.

Holograms, augmented reality and the internet of things are the technologies with the greatest potential for development in an increasingly competitive and disruptive corporate world. Proof of this are the so-called **HumaGrams** – human holograms –, which project their messages anywhere in the world simultaneously, thus capturing the attention of attendees and offering an added value.

All experts agree that hybrid events are defining the future of MICE (meetings, incentives, conventions, and events), and hotels do not want to miss out on this opportunity, so they have been working hard to position themselves in this potential market.

## MELIÁ'S HYBRID SOLUTIONS

**Meliá Hotels International**, for example, has reinvented its value proposition aimed at this strategic segment with **Meliá Hybrid Solutions**, focusing primarily on innovation, technology, and safety, essential to lead this new era of MICE tourism. Holograms, virtual settings, and augmented reality are gaining prominence.

Meliá, the best hotel services around, and **Fluge Audiovisuales**, experts in the virtual world and providers of the latest technology, have come to-

## Holograms, augmented reality, and the internet of things are the technologies with the greatest potential for development

gether to offer professional, effective, and interactive solutions that will allow audiences, spread all over the world, to benefit from quality experiences.

In this sense, Meliá recognises that “the personal experience of participating in an event is not easily replaced with virtual sessions, but hybrid solutions that allow many people to connect virtually with a physical space, or to make longer point-to-point connections, are very valid options to keep this business segment alive and thus cover the need of many companies to continue holding this type of event”.

## SETS FOR NH EVENTS

**NH Group** has positioned itself in this promising segment of hybrid meetings with **Hybrid Meeting by NH**. In Spain, they have joined forces with **BMotion Audiovisual** to set up a network of permanent sets at their hotels to host highly disruptive events. The hotel chain offers this initiative with the aim of “bringing people together again in a safe environment and following all the new trends when organising both personal and professional meetings”.

NH and BMotion also offer a range

of technological solutions to broadcast virtual events with fully personalised settings designed with 3D technology to integrate speakers into an immersive digital environment. All this is part of its new **NH+Business Program** with which the hotel chain wants to promote business trips by redesigning its proposal for meetings and events with exclusive benefits for companies.

## A SET AT THE MADRID MARRIOTT AUDITORIUM

Hotels like the **Madrid Marriott Auditorium** also offer clients the latest technology for their tailor-made hybrid events. This venue has spacious multi-functional rooms, including a special set, welcoming both in-person attendees and online audiences. It thereby offers the possibility of holding events without limits, complemented by its own catering service and accommodation in any of its 869 rooms, thus providing a 360-degree experience.

With a floor space of 552 square meters, the venue is set up with sound, lighting, image, closed-circuit television (CCTV), and streaming systems. Its rooms also boast state-of-the-art network electronics and plenty of space to set up stages in addition to the one already in place and designed to suit the needs of organisers.

The versatility of their facilities and excellent services are a great starting point for hotels to attract this highly potential market, as, without a doubt, hybrid events are definitely here to stay. ◀

Airlines are launching flights and services for business passengers

# AFTER TWENTY MONTHS, BUSINESS TRAVELLERS HAVE NOW STARTED FLYING AGAIN

By **Diana Ramón Vilarasau**

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According to Investopedia, the coronavirus pandemic has had a devastating effect on corporate travel, particularly affecting airlines with business and professional travellers as their most strategic customer: they accounted for 12 percent of their passengers, but 75 percent of their revenues. Despite pessimistic forecasts, companies believe that the recovery of business and corporate travel has begun.

In fact, Iberia continues with the recovery of its flight network by boosting business travel.

Specifically, it has increased its Madrid-Barcelona Air Shuttle availability by 50 percent, and it now offers around seventy weekly frequencies. This means eleven flights in each direction from Monday to Thursday, which are the busiest days for customers. There will be flights in both directions from 7 a.m. to 9 p.m. so that travellers can make the most of their

bility to change their flights on the company's App as many times as necessary and free of charge.

At the same time, it is also increasing its flights to other national and European destinations with a significant business segment component.

## A BETTER ON-BOARD EXPERIENCE

**Carsten Spohr**, CEO and president of **Lufthansa Group**, has stated, "We can clearly see that business travellers are coming back". The German airline has enhanced the travel experience with an innovative modern cabin design on its Airbus 321neo, which it uses for short and medium-haul flights, including several to Spain. It has more comfortable seating, 40 percent larger baggage compartments, and an innovative on-board lighting concept that adapts to passengers' biorhythms. Swiss, Brussels Airlines and Eurowings will also use this new cabin on their new Airbus 320 aircraft with similar features and amenities. "Regardless of the crisis, we continue to focus on a Premium product for our passengers", points out **Heike Birlenbach**, Head of Customer Experience at **Lufthansa Group**.

After this long break caused by Covid-19, "responding to growing demand," two of the German group's subsidiaries are also launching new business routes across Europe. **Eurowings**, which has also reopened ten VIP lounges at major German airports and **Brussels Airlines**. According to **Jens Bischof**, CEO of Eurowings, Business class tickets have sold out on many flights for the first time since the pandemic began. ◀



Iberia continues to recover its network by boosting business travel and increasing operations on the Madrid-Barcelona Air Shuttle.

The president of **Iberia**, **Javier Sánchez-Prieto**, states that business travel is already recovering in the domestic and European markets. However, it will still take some time to get back to pre-pandemic levels in the long-haul market due to the companies' dynamics and the restrictions that are still in force in several countries.

day in each of the cities. Those continuing on to other destinations will also be able to benefit from more efficient connections. And, in partnership with Aena, it has recovered several services related to this product: at El Prat airport, counters, security controls and a VIP lounge; and in Madrid, VIP parking. In addition, Iberia offers its Air Shuttle customers full flexi-

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All eyes set on the international markets

# CORPORATE AGENCIES SEE RECOVERY PROCEEDING APACE

By **Ángeles Vargas**

@angelesvargaspe

**Now that the UK and the United States have reopened their borders, information we have on enquiries and bookings “shows that there is latent demand and that international travels, particularly to nearby places, are on the road to recovery,” explain representatives from GEBTA**

**T**he general manager of **GEBTA, Marcel Fornis**, tells **HOSTELTUR** that in 2021, different issues concerning the pandemic and things like “a lack of standard rules and regulations within the European continent and complications when travelling have led to recovery being a lot slower than what was hoped for. Companies have focused mainly on the domestic market.

He also adds that “the complexity of all the different rules and, the ever-changing travel regulations have significantly increased how much needs to be done when booking a trip, and this has consequently also affected the

indirect costs of each transaction”. From an operational point of view, “the use of self-booking applications has dropped significantly since most enquiries are now made through offline channels. This situation has called for a huge effort from TMCs and agencies specialising in corporate travel, who have also had to deal with the challenge of providing solvent information to companies and corporate travellers with far fewer staff than usual,” he explains.

There are notable differences among the volumes of activity in the industry's subsectors. While the car rental sector is at 2019 levels, the airline sector is far behind. “As far as urban

accommodation is concerned, things seem to be looking very good, and we can see that during these last three months of the year, small meetings are making a strong comeback”, says Fornis.

## AN ONGOING RECOVERY

“2021 will come to an end with a volume of around fifty percent of that recorded in 2019. Activity has increased greatly over the last few months, and the number of domestic trips is almost the same as before the pandemic”. This is not the case for international trips, which are still much fewer due to restrictions and countries taking longer to open their borders, especially in long-haul markets like Latin America or China, which are very important customers for corporate travel.

For his part, the Managing Director of **Travel Advisors, Juanjo Cabello**, explains: “Considering how bad the pandemic hit the sector, we are relatively satisfied with the current situation. We are still a long way from pre-pandemic figures, but we are enthusiastic with how

things are going, especially in business travel and in the vital start-up of the high-end holiday and MICE sectors”.

During these months, the association has worked on improving digitalisation and implementing sustainable policies, “key aspects to vigorously tackle the challenges of a sector that is clearly changing”, says Cabello, who also states that “unity has been key to the survival of the agencies”, made apparent by the fact that the association has not only kept its members, but it has also attracted more.

“We are very optimistic, and all our agencies are working well and have been receiving a lot of enquiries these last few months. We are on the road to recovery, but sales will not reach 2019 levels well into 2023, and that is if everything continues at this pace and there are no more setbacks”, he sums up. “The outlook for corporate travel is good, and we hope to attract more international MICE business gradually. There is without a doubt, a great desire to travel, and at TAG, we are ready to offer the best of services”.

## A CHANGE IN TREND

Concerning the current situation, representatives from the **Corporate Travel Department of Viajes El Corte Inglés** point out that “the general assessment has been very positive, and despite not all the different types of MICE business recovering the same, the change in trend, especially since September has been notable”.

“Confidence in a controlled health situation has led us to not only be able to restart business but also to get back to face-to-face events, essential for our recovery”, they explain. So, 2021 is laying the foundations for a take-off that will be consolidated between 2022 and 2023.

“The MICE sector is emerging slowly from the crisis, but it is coming out strong. Although in the short-term, events are going to be smaller and national in scope, we hope that from 2022 the situation will be very similar to that of pre-pandemic times. We believe face-to-face events will return, that these will increase in size and in the number of destinations”. ◀



Getting back to face-to-face events is essential for this sector. Participants at the ISTM held in November in Córdoba.

The sector has seen an upturn in autumn, with many postponed events being held

# Andalusia once again boasts a packed calendar of events

By **Ángeles Vargas**

@angelesvargaspe

**This autumn, FYCMA has become a testing ground for new digital tools that are used to enhance the experience for participants: facial identification devices at the entrance and an innovative platform to make sure the capacity of the venue is not exceeded**

Andalusia has highlighted its efforts to stand out as a safe destination, and good proof of this is the great number of events it has been hosting, especially during the last three months of 2021. The **Andalusian Regional Government** has a "strong interest" in promoting this segment, and how "the Region has managed to position itself firmly in such a competitive international market should be noted", stresses **Manuel Alejandro Cardenete**, vice-president of Tourism, Regeneration, Justice, and Local Administration, during the ISTM international Summit held in Cordoba.

In the case of the Seville FIBES Conference and Exhibition Centre, the Tourism Innovation Summit TIS2021 held in November was the icing on the cake for an upswing that was already underway. The event attracted 37 different

nationalities, 5,286 attendees in person and 4,711 via streaming services, and 163 exhibiting organisations and companies. The Spanish Government praises the merit of the summit for having already been a key event in 2020, proving it was possible to hold safe events. **Antonio Jiménez**, manager of Fibes, pointed out that "this second edition has been what has consolidated international business as eight more have been confirmed, the next one from 26 to 28 October 2022. It has been the largest event to be hosted by Fibes since the beginning of the pandemic, but the conference centre has forged ahead, especially since this autumn when it hosted the 1st Turespaña Convention in October.

For its part, the **FYCMA Convention and Trade Fair Centre** is approaching its high season with activity at levels close to pre-pandemic times.



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The improvement of the health situation, together with a firm commitment from public bodies, companies, and business organisations to recover in-person attendance, is leading to a busy autumn calendar with more than fifty events planned.

FYCMA representatives tell HOSTELTUR that "this upturn would not be possible without the message conveyed by the sector through the implementation of rigorous protocols and security measures". FYCMA has been a pioneer and benchmark in these issues since June 2020, when it was presented with the award for "The Best Health Security Protocol", granted by AMETIC.

to entirely face-to-face events during the last three months of the year when many of the events that could not be held in 2020 or early 2021 have been or will be held.

A key factor has been the great effort made by hotels to offer more space and rooms for events, coupled with the recovery of connectivity. The corporate segment is reviving, and events are now being confirmed fifteen, thirty, and forty-five days in advance.

**PACKED AGENDAS**  
**Manuel Marciás**, director of the **Seville Congress & Convention Bureau**, states that "business has been

airport, the planned opening of forty new hotels from now until 2023, major refurbishments, and new venues like Factoría Cruzcampo, Primera Vuelta al Mundo, and NAO Victoria or the new immersive 12K technology space in Las Setas.

From the **Cádiz Provincial Tourist Board & Convention Bureau**, **Ignacio Santiago** says that "this November, Novo Sancti Petri is once again in the spotlight as a top-level conference tourism location". Volkswagen chose the resort for the worldwide presentation of a new model attracting 5,000 people from different countries, which lasted for a month. Events that had to be rescheduled have also been held these last few



As the year has progressed, increasingly ambitious events have started to be held. Picture of the Turespaña Conventon in Fibes.

Safety and security have been a priority, explains **Francisco Quereda**, advisor to the Málaga City Council for the Management of Conferences and City Promotion at the **Málaga Convention Bureau**. The testing campaign for workers in the tourism sector "transmitted a lot of security," and all the events that were held were a great success. "We went from virtual events at the beginning of the year to hybrid events in spring, and we have gradually gone back

picking up" and that "events that were put on hold or postponed due to COVID-19 have started to be held from September onwards". "At the same time, requests for 2022 have also increased notably, and optimism has returned to the MICE sector, although we are aware that full recovery will take some time".

Seville presents "notable developments and novelties that arouse the interest of the market". Examples are the expansion and modernisation of the

months, especially pharmaceutical and medical conventions.

Activity has been increasing notably at the **Córdoba Convention Centre**, so much so that in November and December, the venue's programme is almost fully booked with conferences and events. Activity has been favoured thanks to the **Ambassadors programme** that is helping to invigorate the city's cultural, economic, and social scenes. ■

Regions in Northern Spain are ready for the revival of MICE tourism

# Redoubling their commitment to a key segment in their tourism strategy



In autumn, San Sebastián's Kursaal, saw 50 percent more conference activity than that recorded in the same period of 2020.

Business tourism is making a strong comeback in regions of Northern Spain. They are presenting outstanding innovations to recover such an important activity for their respective economies.

According to data from 2019, the MICE segment represents 17 percent of all tourism in the **Basque Country** and accounts for more than 87 million euros. To boost this activity, the **Basque Government's** Tourism Department, together with the Convention Bureaux in Bilbao, San Sebastián, and Vitoria-Gasteiz, and different professional associations, has launched the **Basque Events** platform. This platform includes a list of tourism resources and a guide on organising events in the Basque Country.

The aim is to recover levels prior to the pandemic, a goal that different institutions are progressively working towards. From September to December 2021, the Kursaal Conference Centre and Auditorium in San Sebastián will host a total of eight congresses, five trade shows, and 34 conferences and meetings, which means 50 percent more events than in autumn 2020, a year that came to an end with a drastic drop in the level of activity, with 152 events and 96,349 attendees, 52 percent less, and a fall of 64 percent in turnover.

On the other hand, Kursaal's team has also taken over the management of the emblematic Miramar Palace in San Sebastián. A building declared an Asset of Cultural Interest that will host all kinds of meetings and events.

As a sign of its corporate commitment, Bilbao's Euskalduna Conference Centre and Concert Hall renewed its "Healthy Workplace Model" and "Specific Certification Reg-

ulation" in October. AENOR issues these certifications to companies that implement management systems to protect the safety and well-being of workers and sustainability in the workplace.

**BRINGING SUPPLY TOGETHER**  
**In Galicia, in April 2021, A Coruña Convention Bureau** was launched with the aim of bringing together all of A Coruña's companies, professionals, and event organisers to make the city a benchmark destination in the MICE scene. More than fifty entities have joined the Convention Bureau, including institutions, travel agencies, hotels, catering businesses, members of the scientific and medical community and meeting venues, among others.

**GOOD PROSPECTS**  
The outlook for **Navarra** in 2022 is good. The Baluarte auditorium in Pamplona will host seventeen national and international congresses, a figure that had not yet been reached to date, according to the announcement made by the Regional Minister of Culture and Sports, Rebecca Esnaola, and the Managing Director of NICDO, Moncho Urdiáin.

Recovery could not have started better in **La Rioja**. After playing a strategic role as a vaccination centre during the pandemic, the Riojafórum Conference Centre has scheduled an extensive programme of major events during the last weeks of 2021. An example being the first in-person conference held in Logroño since the health crisis, gathering almost 800 midwives from all over Spain in October. ■

Promoting measures to reduce carbon footprints

## Zaragoza enhances its commitment to ensure the sustainability of events

After more than a year and a half without hardly any MICE activity due to the restrictions put in place to stop the spread of COVID-19, last September saw the return of business tourism to Zaragoza. Face-to-face meetings have been held both at the Conference Centre and at Feria de Zaragoza (the trade fair grounds). Some thirty events, including three health forums that will attract more than one thousand attendees each, have been scheduled for before the end of the year.

The Aragonese capital is one of Spain's most popular destinations for MICE tourism, an essential segment for the capital's economy. In 2019 the year prior to the pandemic, it hosted 530

events attracting 128,000 attendees and accounted for an estimated impact of 100 million.

For the city to maintain its outstanding popularity as a MICE destination, **Zaragoza Congress Bureau (ZCB)** has not stopped working and innovating all this time, and they have launched a new product: Corporate SCB, focused on local companies that are not directly related to this activity. Their goal is threefold: to gain the support of these companies to promote the city, offer them information and collaboration in the organisation of events, and establish synergies with the firms linked to the MICE market.

With this initiative, they seek to "involve the city's companies in creating

a stronger destination and gain the symbolic backing of the business community", said **Miguel Ángel Argente**, director of **Zaragoza Congresos**. By the end of September, six months after its launch, 58 companies had already registered. In addition, throughout 2021, eighteen more companies have joined ZCB, bringing the total number of member companies to 141 by the end of the summer.

### CLEANER MEETINGS

Beyond their economic impact, ZCB considers it vital for the meetings held in the city to follow sustainability criteria, in line with the United Nations 2030 Agenda Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). To this end, the organisation has implemented the "Eventsost key" to help event organisers design customised plans.

Among other things, this new tool helps meetings reduce their carbon footprint and promotes the use of "zero-kilometre" products (local and non-industrial). It includes a resource and product database, a list of sustainable suppliers, a dashboard to manage sustainability indicators related to MICE tourism, and a carbon footprint calculator.

As part of its strategy, in recent years Zaragoza Congresos has also promoted other initiatives like a "Best Practice Manual". And together with the **ECODES Ecology and Development Foundation**, it has created the Bosque Zaragoza Congresos, a forest in the Del Agua Park where those attending events can plant trees to compensate for CO2 emissions. It has also recently joined the "Bosque de los Zaragozanos" (the People of Zaragoza's Forest) project, set up by the City Council with the aim of planting 700,000 new trees, one per inhabitant. ◀



With the positive evolution of the health crisis, trade shows and conferences are gradually returning to Zaragoza.

# ZARAGOZA LOVES AND WELCOMES YOU

PR

Its excellent geographical location, rich history and current prosperity, attractive all-year-round cultural programme, vast and sophisticated facilities, incredible hotel and culinary offerings, the quality of its services, the easiness of moving around, and its hospitable atmosphere make Zaragoza the perfect place for any event.

Zaragoza is strategically located. It is the epicentre of a 25 million population. It boasts a great motorway and road network that makes it easy to move around the city and the province. Its international airport is only nine kilometres from the city, and it has an excellent railway system upgraded with a high-speed train linking it to Madrid and Barcelona and their respective airports in just over an hour.

As well as a range of different kinds of venues, like congress centres, municipal premises, hotel rooms and halls, museums, and other unique locations ready to adapt to the needs of any meeting, it also boasts two Conference Centers, different in style, location and design, set up with all the necessary technical resources for any event.

Zaragoza offers quality no matter the budget. It is the perfect combination of a large city and a convenient location, where quality, adaptability, hospitality, and professionalism all come together. Zaragoza endeavours to offer visitors its very finest. It strives to provide bespoke solutions and adapts to the needs and requirements of each organiser.

Zaragoza Congresos, Zaragoza's Tourism Department specialising in the meetings market, has a great team with extensive experience in supporting the organisation of events and promoting the city as a meetings destination, and the 130 MICE sector companies part of Zaragoza Congresos work together to promote Zaragoza as a meeting place.

To this end, it provides a series of free services to help make event planning a lot easier. As one of these services, it

now also offers the possibility of drawing up Sustainability Plans for each specific case using the Eventsostkey platform.



Parque metropolitano del Agua. © Daniel Marcos

Zaragoza Congresos has been firmly committed to sustainability for over a decade and carries out different initiatives to this end. One of these initiatives has been to plant three forests in the city, one for each of the areas that make up its structure: ZCB partners, ZCB Corporate (a new way of working with companies in the city), and ZCB Hosts (event organisers).

Zaragoza is the perfect place for your next event. It surprises you and wins you over. It feels like home. ▶



**Zaragoza  
CONGRESOS**

• info [www.zaragozacongresos.es](http://www.zaragozacongresos.es)  
+34 976 72 13 33  
[zcb@zaragoza.es](mailto:zcb@zaragoza.es)



Parque del Agua. © Daniel Marcos & Félix Bernad

With full recovery drawing nearer

# Asturias gradually consolidates an upward trend

BY **Ángeles Vargas**

@angelesvargaspe

“Activity has been picking up throughout 2021”, explains **Daniel Martínez Junquera**, director of **Gijón/Xixón Turismo** to HOSTELTUR. Although, as in all other places, it has not yet reached the levels of 2019 “neither in the associative nor in the corporate segments”.

Several face-to-face meetings were organised during the second quarter of the year. “The number of attendees depended on the health measures in place at the time”. May saw the return of small business meetings with no more than ten people. In June, national meetings were organised, still in hybrid format, but with more people attending in person than what was initially expected, in some cases attracting 300 people from all over Spain.

“This trend reached its peak in autumn”, states Martínez. Some of the meetings hosted were initially planned for 2020. Attendees are returning to face-to-face events eagerly and in increasing numbers. The 38th Hospital Engineering Seminar, originally scheduled for October 2020, was held at the end of this October. “This meeting, already a major event, has broken its own records: from an average 800-900 registered attendees in prior years, this year it welcomed 1,100, and from eighty companies that usually had a stand, this year, numbers increased to 123”.

Business meetings in hotels are also picking up again, albeit with a much shorter booking window and “still tightly controlling capacity limitations”. Uncertainty has been affecting the organisation of international meetings the most, but hybrid formats have helped to compensate for this shortfall.

## THE HORIZON OF FULL RECOVERY

“We hope this upward trend continues.



Picture from an event recently held at Gijón's Conference Centre.

**Professionals are noticing a growing interest in going back to entirely face-to-face attendance, but this is still complicated for certain international events**

2022 could be, if not the year of full recovery, an essential year to definitively establish 2023 as such”, says the director of Gijón/Xixón Turismo. This upswing is especially noticeable in national meetings, “while international ones will recover more slowly and perhaps even restrict the number of attendees depending on their countries of origin”.

“What is clear to us and what our clients are telling us is that face-to-face meetings will be essential in 2022. The goal will indeed be to attract more people using technology, but there is an evident

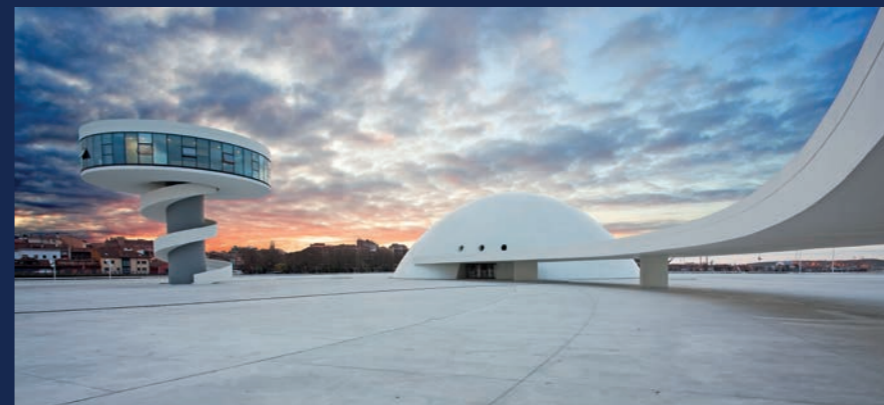
need for people to see each other and share experiences at working sessions, coffee breaks, and lunches.

For his part, **Heriberto Menéndez**, general coordinator of the **Avilés Chamber of Commerce**, points out that from May, this destination started to rocket, to such an extent that although we cannot yet say we are in a similar situation to that before the pandemic, we can confirm we have recovered a good part of the market”.

Galas, conferences, sporting events, and business meetings are some of the sectors to have awakened. The outlook for 2022 shows very positive signs. “Next year, we hope to see the same results as before the pandemic and even perhaps surpass them”, he says. The Duathlon World Championship, trade union conferences, and the recovery of practically all trade fair activity have marked 2021. The Spanish Athletics and Duathlon Championships have been confirmed for 2022, and trade fair activity and the organisation of congresses look to be back on track. ■

# ASTURIAS

AN IDEAL SETTING FOR ANY EVENT



Centro Niemeyer. © Turismo Asturias.



Sala de Pinturas Laboral. © SPGPTCPA.

Whatever the size or type of meeting, in Asturias, you will find your dream spot. To its large venues, the region adds unique settings and engaging activities to give the social side of conferences a touch of colour or serve as the basis for incentive trips that will enhance and unite teams.

The region has two large conference centres that can cater for up to 4,500 people with a score of multipurpose rooms, two trade fair grounds covering over 170,000 square meters of floor space and a large auditorium that can seat up to

3,000 attendees. It also has two spacious cultural centres that are fully fitted out for all kinds of events, and countless options offered as one-of-a-kind venues, as well as more than 350 rooms set up with state-of-the-art technology in Asturian hotels.

As a bonus, and thanks to it being rather small, with its three main cities that form a perfect triangle, all being near to each other, it is an ideal place for those attending conferences to extend their visit and add cultural and culinary experiences as well come into contact with nature, and enjoy the most exclusive locations and landscapes.

The triangle made up of the region's three main cities, Avilés, Gijón/Xixón and Oviedo/Uviéu, all less than twenty minutes from each other, means that by choosing one of these cities to hold your event, you will be offering attendees a shared, modern and distinctive urban area to enjoy, with a whole range of the best infrastructures and services.

Among the most emblematic venues, the following stand out: the Niemeyer Centre in Avilés, the Laboral City of Culture in Gijón/Xixón and the City of Oviedo's Congress and Exhibition Centre designed by Santiago Calatrava in Oviedo/Uviéu, all authentic cultural and architectural icons. Other outstanding places are the Magdalena Congress and Exhibition Centre, the Luis Adaro Trade Fair Grounds and the Principe Felipe Congress Centre, without forgetting other unique venues like the Railway, Mining or Fernando Alonso Museums, the Jovellanos Palace, the Gijón Aquarium or the Atlantic Botanical Garden.

And if what you are looking for is a successful incentive trip, the range of proposals is endless, from those that include exploring natural Biosphere Reserve sites such as Somiedo or Fuentes del Narcea to learning, first-hand, how cider is made or helping blacksmiths working in their forges. Asturias, is without a doubt, your best option. ■

**+ info** [www.turismoasturias.es/web/infoasturiasempresas/congresos-reuniones-e-incentivos](http://www.turismoasturias.es/web/infoasturiasempresas/congresos-reuniones-e-incentivos)



Palacio de Exposiciones y Congresos. © Noé Baranda.

After the most difficult year in its history, conference tourism is reviving in Cantabria

# Santander stands out as a safe destination for professional events

Santander had a good tourist season in the summer of 2021, and from September, meetings, conferences, and incentive trips began to recover. Major conferences are not back yet, but the sector hopes to recover them in 2022 because, in addition to the COVID-19 vaccine rollout, the city also boasts a wide range of premises to host these meetings and a plan to make sure they are safe.

“Santander has surpassed itself in a very difficult year and has proven to be a very resilient city with excellent facilities and services for conference tourism. Accounting for an annual impact of 40 million euros, the whole of society

benefits from this economic activity”, said the mayor, Gema Igual, in October at the opening of the Iterferry 2021 conference. The Cantabrian capital beat out other outstanding candidates to host

this meeting, the world's oldest event in the maritime sector. It marked the reactivation of the Conference and Exhibition Centre after the summer and attracted 300 representatives from forty different countries.

## Santander City Council offers professional organisers, venues, and locations the “Safe Events” initiative to help attract meetings in today’s new circumstances

Also in October, this city hosted the Top Fuel 2021 Conference, the most important forum on nuclear fuel in the world. The second time this event was held in Spain after being held the first time in 2016 in Salamanca. It attracted 150 in-person attendees and as many through digital platforms. Those attending represented electricity companies, nuclear power plants, and fuel suppliers from all over the world, as well as universities and high-profile laboratories.

Among the events scheduled for 2022 is the 34th edition of the Spain OPC Congress, which will gather Spain's most important stakeholders in the congress and corporate events sector. Cantabria's candidacy was endorsed by the City Council of Santander and the Regional Government of Cantabria, who have been collaborating with Santander's Convention Bureau for years.

## BUILDING TRUST

To build trust among event organisers and those attending conferences and meetings, the organisation has launched the “Safe Events” initiative that provides professionals with medical devices for antigen testing and Safety kits, among other measures. Specific training sessions for the organisation of safe events will also be available. And a guide to safe events has also been published.

This specific measure is part of their second shock plan, “Santander A Punto” (Santander is ready), a social support and economic reactivation project that aims to help enhance the city's image as a safe MICE destination and attract events in this new scenario.

## FORO MICE

Last April, Santander and Foro MICE signed a collaboration agreement to promote and consolidate the city as a MICE-destination. Santander is the first tourist destination to become a member of Foro MICE.

The agreement, which will last for one year, aims to boost joint projects together with other organisations, associations, and professional colleges. It also aims to organise and participate in training and informative sessions that will help to disseminate the importance of MICE tourism for the city will also be organised.

The mayor said that “it is very important for Santander to participate and be represented in the sector's most im-

portant forum. It provides significant exposure as Santander is the first national destination to sign an agreement with the association.

## NEW VENUES

On the other hand, to diversify and expand their offering, the **Regional Ministry for Economy and Internal Revenue**, together with **OPCE**, the association that represents companies and professional organisers of events and conferences in Cantabria, have shown their willingness to turn the Comillas Campus into a great location for corporate events and conferences.

## INCENTIVES

According to the mayor Gema Igual, after the pandemic, cities with smaller populations, like Santander, “are going to be more exclusive”. It should also be noted that “the city has other great strengths like innovation, culture, and its natural environment that set it apart when organising events”.

In addition, and thanks to the great diversity of the unique experiences Cantabria has to offer, sector professionals believe that the organisation of incentives will be one of the city's most important activities in the coming years. Among its attractions are the Cabárceno Nature Park, the Soplao cave, routes and excursions through different regions, health and beauty programmes, team building activities and golf in beautiful natural areas. ◀



Santander has bolstered its cultural offering with the Botín Centre, an interesting complement to MICE tourism.



Before the pandemic, conference tourism brought some 40 million euros a year to the city and attracted 63.000 conference attendees.

# SANTANDER

A SAFE PLACE TO GO



Cantabria and its capital, Santander, have everything you need to hold events in safe conditions; a place where professionalism, friendliness and authenticity come together in a stunning natural setting.

To bolster this, the City Council has put in place different measures aimed at promoting MICE activity in safe conditions.

New solutions for new needs and requirements. In the times in which we are living, knowing how to adapt is a must. Santander and Cantabria face this new post-COVID stage as a new challenge and also as an opportunity for the region to position itself as a safe destination.

The size of the region, its natural and scenic richness and local idiosyncrasy make it an ideal place where you can easily organise meetings and incentives that will surprise guests.

The natural and scenic treasures found in the region's little more than 5,000 Km2 include the sea, mountains, green meadows, charming villages, and urban areas such as its capital Santander. This contrast of landscapes in such a small area, where we can find high mountains and cliffs less than 100 kilometres away, is one of the region's hallmarks.

There are all kinds of different places to stay throughout the region: hotels, spas or manor houses and palaces converted into hotels, perfect for holding meetings with a certain degree of independence and in a natural setting.

Unique venues and locations also provide a contrast and variety of settings. In addition to conventional buildings for large conferences such as the Santander Exhibition and Conference Centre or Cantabria's Festival Centre, there are also charming buildings like the Magdalena Palace, avant-garde places like the Botín Centre, modernist architectural gems like the Comillas Pontifical University or old industrial architecture buildings such as the Torrelavega Trade Fair Centre.

Its natural surroundings allow for outdoor activities linked to local traditions: trainera rowing regattas in the Bay

of Santander, surfing in the Cantabrian sea, different traditional games such as bowling/skittles, the "salto pasiego" or the famous "palas" (bats), very popular on beaches all over the region.

Gastronomy will also provide endless possibilities for all those interested in immersing themselves in local traditions: learn about the artisan process of making Cantabrian anchovies, visit bakeries that sell sobaos (small sponge cake) and quesadas, markets, local farmers, and artisan cheese factories... to continue with a cooking workshop where you can put everything learnt into practice. Let yourself be carried away by different gastronomic routes or visit any of Cantabria's five Michelin-starred restaurants, boasting seven stars between them.

The Santander Convention Bureau has made a great effort to ease the organisation of MICE events despite the restrictions, regularly updating the sector on regulations and working with event organisers at all times.

Santander City Council has included within its "Santander a Punto" Shock Plan a specific initiative to activate the MICE sector in safe conditions; its "Safe Events" initiative offers specific training for venues and grants to adapt municipal venues; both event organisers and venues are also offered health devices to help them coordinate access to venues in safe conditions and/or the possibility of conducting antigen tests. And finally, all those attending MICE events in the city will receive a safety kit: a toiletry bag with hand sanitiser gel, a mask and a mask case. The "Safe Events" initiative will be in effect until the end of the year or until its budget runs out. ◀



+ info [www.santanderconventionbureau.com](http://www.santanderconventionbureau.com)

# SANTANDER

ORGANIZE YOUR EVENT IN A

## Safe Destination



Santander reinforces security when holding congresses and meetings through the "safe events" measure, which offers:



Sanitary devices to perform antigen tests and coordinate the access to the venues.



Security kits for MICE events attendees.



Get **100€** DISCOUNT to enjoy the city

Get 33% discount on your accommodation and touristic experiences in Santander. Sign in to [santanderbonoturistico.com](http://santanderbonoturistico.com) for your voucher until 10th April 2022.

Cámara Cantabria

SANTANDER CIUDAD

SANTANDER CONVENTION BUREAU

Destino Turístico Inteligente



# Castilla y León strengthens its position

The newly created **MICE Castilla y León brand** was presented in June 2021. The **Regional Ministry of Culture and Tourism** intends to use this brand to implement an annual marketing plan in coordination with the convention bureaux and MICE departments in the region's nine capital.

This segment is making headway, says **Juanjo Pastor**, managing director of **Fórum Evolución Burgos**: "2021 has been a year in which activity has gradually increased every quarter, ending with conference and cultural activity comparable to pre-pandemic levels". With the easing of capacity restrictions, postponed or cancelled events have been re-scheduled, and "new clients have taken the opportunity to present their innovations with face-to-face events".

2022 will be a very special year because it will be the 10th anniversary of the opening of the Auditorium and Conference Centre. "During the first half of the year, there are no more available dates for cultural activities and only a few left for conference activity. Prospects are similar for the second half of the year", which means Fórum will see figures similar to those of 2019.

On its part, **Feria de Valladolid** resumed activity in June with the FINE Wine Tourism Expo, "a highly specialised and international event", says its general manager, **Alberto Alonso**. "It was quite a challenge to host this event at a time when there were still many restrictions on international mobility in place, but it was possible. The safety protocols worked, and everything ran smoothly", he adds.

The trade show and conference calendar has been set, and in the final stretch of the year, there is a succession of professional events. 2022 shows good prospects. "In-person attendance continues to be the best format for the MICE sector", and we can confirm that "events are a major driver of economic recovery".



Presentation of the new MICE Castilla y León brand in Burgos.



The Regional Government supports the sector with grants and incentives

# Castilla-La Mancha invests in MICE to make it a strategic segment

Castilla-La Mancha's extensive MICE offering has recently revived and become an important part of the region's tourism and economic recovery.

In Castilla-La Mancha's 2020-23 Strategic Plan for Tourism, the MICE sector has been included as one of the region's most important products. This plan includes initiatives to promote the region's reputation "as an attractive, competitive, and accessible destination for meetings. A destination with modern infrastructures, a diversity of creative leisure proposals and an attractive offer in cultural and natural heritage".

The region has decided not only to support already existing convention bureaux but also to offer its support in creating other local or provincial bodies that will help promote it and differentiate promotional activities depending on the type of event. All this within the strategy put in place to help recover from the pandemic. The Regional Government has supported the tourism sector with grants and incentives and created a tourist voucher, used by companies to give customers discounts and attract travellers again.

This region boasts six major venues for the MICE sector:



El Greco, Toledo's Convention Centre, has a floor space of 12,000 m².

El Greco Convention Centre in Toledo, the City of Albacete's Convention Centre, Ciudad Real's Trade Show and Conference Pavilion, and the Trade Fair and Exhibition Grounds of Albacete, Talavera in Toledo, and La Hípica in Cuenca. Other special venues are, for example, the Castles of Belomonte, Los Condes de Orgaz, and the Caves of Hércules.



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This year the Government of Catalonia has launched its Catalonia 2021 reStart Tourism Plan

## Catalonia aims to reposition itself as a benchmark MICE destination in innovation and technology

By **Diana Ramón Vilarasau**

@dianaramonv

The crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic hit the tourism industry particularly hard, and MICE tourism has been one of the most affected segments. Catalonia has set itself the challenge of accelerating the recovery of its tourism sector and getting back to levels of 2019 as soon as possible. To this end, this year, the **Government of Catalonia** launched the "Catalonia 2021 reStart Tourism Plan" to reactivate tourism. With more than thirty action lines and endowed with more than 6.5 million euros, the goal is to maintain and consolidate national and local tourism and recover part of the international market.

This year Catalonia expects to bring in around 13,000 million euros in tourist spending, 40 percent less than in 2019 when it recorded 21,000 million. Bearing in mind that international tourism accounts for half of the tourism the area attracts and contributes between 80 and 85 percent of total tourism revenue, the region's top priority is to "recover as much of this tourism as possible".

In this regard, recovering the MICE segment and the region's international leadership as the best possible location for professional events is also essential. This will be done by implementing the re-ACT MICE Catalonia Plan, coordinated by **Catalonia Convention Bureau** and the **Catalan Agency for Tourism (ACT)**. This initiative aims to highlight how the destination and its offering are changing and getting back in the game. It intends to send a message of trust to nearby international



Catalonia seeks to attract technological conferences (Picture: Agència Catalana de Turisme).

markets conveying that Catalonia is a top MICE destination, fully suited to host "high tech" events, and the perfect place to disconnect from technology and reconnect with nature. The plan includes short and medium-term actions and seeks to position Catalonia as an international benchmark MICE destination in innovation and technology.

### TOURISM DATA SYSTEM MICE

In addition, CCB, belonging to the Catalan Agency for Tourism, together with Catalonia's regional and local convention bureaux, has launched a new digital platform to collect data from the region's MICE tourism. This platform, Tourism Data System MICE, will make it possible to monitor MICE tourism and get a picture of its impact on the destination and the turn-

over it generates. The platform will provide data on meetings, the number of attendees, total number of overnight stays, distribution of events by type of meeting, where attendees are from, the contracting companies' economic sectors, and what countries the organising companies come from.

This information will allow both institutions and companies to plan ahead and define their strategies based on the knowledge generated. The platform, developed by the **Eurecat** technology centre's **Tourism Innovation Department** and financed by Catalonia's Tourism Board, is open to all tourism agents and companies (accommodation, venues, conference centres, and complementary activities) interested in knowing how MICE tourism is evolving in Catalonia. ■

# BARCELONA ES A WHOLE LOT MORE... FOR MICE

PR



Palau de Maricel. © Museu de Sitges

The province of Barcelona, between the Cadí mountain range and the Mediterranean Sea, is a tourist destination full of contrasts that boasts a wealth of historical sites and natural landscapes. Here you will live new, unique and authentic experiences.

### CLOSE TO BARCELONA

Lots of companies and organisations offer venues and services for meetings, conferences, and incentive trips close to Barcelona. Thanks to the local network of motorways, dual carriageways, roads and railways, you can get almost anywhere in just over an hour.

Thus, the province of Barcelona presents itself as a MICE tourism destination that complements the city of Barcelona and offers a wide range of options and landscapes for organisers. With an array of possibilities in terms of venues for business events, accommodation, sightseeing programmes and incentive activities.

Trade Fair venues and conference centres, fitted with the latest technology and all the necessary amenities, guarantee the success of any business meeting. But if what you are looking for is a truly special place where your event will stand out, in the province of Barcelona you will find outstanding venues, including country houses, wineries, castles, monasteries and modernist palaces.

Not forgetting Catalonia's great food, renowned for its creativity and quality,



Mòn Sant Benet. © Fundació Catalunya La Pedrera

which you can enjoy at restaurants or by hiring the services of catering companies run by internationally acclaimed chefs.

And if you need advice to make your professional event a great success, our companies specialised in event organisation will provide you with all the tools and support you will need.

### A TRULY UNIQUE SETTING

For an event to be memorable, it needs to include an activities programme that will help make your stay more enjoyable.

### Meetings among vineyards

Companies specialising in wine tourism organise bespoke activities at the Alt Penedès, Alella and Pla de Bages vineyards: visits to wineries, cycling tours, picnics or culinary workshops. The best way to enjoy this wine-making region in an unforgettable setting!

### Iconic sites

The counties of Barcelona are home to iconic sites such as country houses, castles, monasteries and museums

dating from prehistoric to recent times. You will find magical and peaceful places very close to Barcelona, surrounded by history, perfect for your event.

### A diversity of landscapes

The beauty of Barcelona's counties reflects the great scenic value of the area's natural heritage. It is the ideal setting for all kinds of incentive activities:

- The Beaches of Maresme, Baix Llobregat and Garraf are perfect for water activities after a day's work: sailing, kayaking, surfing, water skiing.... The array of services offered by the ports, clubs and specialised centres along the Barcelona coastline is unbeatable!
- The plains of Vallès Oriental, Osona, Anoia and Vallès Occidental offer different activities so that you can really enjoy the natural parks, forests and trails: routes on foot or MTB trails, hot-air balloon rides.... These are great ways to recharge your energy and vitality and experience intense emotions that will be long remembered.

- If what you are looking for is some action and for participants to really feel nature differently, then the pre-Pyrenees mountains of Berguedà are a paragliding lover's dream.

### HIGH-QUALITY SERVICES

### COMMITTED TO THE ENVIRONMENT

In its commitment to sustainability, the province of Barcelona continues to work towards helping travel and tourism stakeholders improve their sustainable tourism management through the Biosphere Commitment to Sustainable Tourism.

Let the Barcelona Convention Bureau advise you, and whatever the event you are planning, you will get all the ingredients you need to make it unforgettable. ■

**BarcelonaTurisme  
Convention Bureau**

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# Barcelona, ready to regain its place as one of the world's top destinations

Barcelona is working on regaining its leadership as one of the world's top MICE destinations. For the last year, the city has been getting ready to reverse the negative impact generated by the pandemic and reactivate a sector that in 2019 left 1,800 million euros in the Catalan capital. From now to 2025, **Barcelona Convention Bureau** is already in negotiations with 125 events and has already scheduled 100 conferences. During the pandemic, seventeen new enquiries for events that, in some cases, could attract up to 15,000 attendees were made. In 2020, of a total 168 conferences initially planned, 56 were postponed, 72 went virtual, six blended, five were held on-site, and 29 were cancelled.

## THE PLACE TO MEET

For the first time ever, the Barcelona Convention Bureau (BCB) has implemented a video advertising campaign promoting the destination's attributes and showing a range of different attractions the province and city have to offer when it comes to MICE tourism.

Under the slogan "Barcelona, the place to meet", the campaign, published on social media and digital channels, consists of one main four-minute video telling the story of a familiarisation trip to Barcelona, presenting the destination's main attributes and values – creativity, sustainability, technology and innovation-, and three shorter clips promoting each of the different specific segments: conferences, incentives and bleisure. This campaign marked the starting point after a whole year of preparation and work.

The consortium's general director, Marian Muro, highlighted the need to "take a step forward" by including digitalisation in the strategy and exploring new markets like Southeast Asia and Russia that, until now, have not traditionally been priority markets for the MICE sector. The national market represents 50 percent of MICE tourism, while the most important international markets are the United States, the UK, France, and Germany. The new campaign especially targets these markets. Efforts have also been put into improving health safety to regain the confidence of both markets and companies.

## A GLOBAL STRATEGY

On 1 November, **Fira de Barcelona** began managing **Barcelona's International Convention Centre (CCIB)**, and it will do so for the next 25 years, boosting the city's overall strategy for trade shows, conferences and conventions. This institution operates three other venues with a combined offer of nearly 500,000 square meters of exhibition space to organise and attract more professional events.

Covering a surface area of 100,000 square meters, divided into the Convention Centre and the Forum Building, the CCIB hosts around one hundred events a year, and these events attract half a million people. Located in Diagonal Mar, in the urban district between Barcelona and Sant Adrià de Besòs, the CCIB intends to contribute to local development by implementing strategies to support and work with the economic and social communities of the surrounding neighbourhoods. ■



The CCB, under the management of Fira, will promote the city's overall strategy for trade shows, conferences, and conventions (Picture: CCIB).

# EVENIA HOTELS

Evenia Hotels is a hotel chain with over fifty years of experience in the business and with hotels in Spain, Portugal, Andorra and Panamá. Our hotels have excellent facilities for meetings. At Evenia Hotels and Congress Center \*\*\*\*, you can simultaneously host events for up to 2,500 people.

It has fifteen meeting rooms ranging from 76m2 to 833m2, with a total floor space of nearly 4,000m2 for meetings. The complex consists of 793 rooms, 326 of which are specially designed for corporate tourism.

## Total floor space

35,000 m<sup>2</sup>

## Total floor space of the main hall

833 m<sup>2</sup>

## Available outdoor space

4,000 m<sup>2</sup>

## Banquete layout

450 pax

## Cocktail party layout

1,000 pax

## Theatre layout

770 pax

## Number of rooms

15



## EVENTS HELD:

- Italian Thermosanitary Annual Convention: TRIVENETO.
- International Bloggers Conference TBEX Catalonia.
- "Fokus: 2014" - 550 Danish and Swedish Petrol Station Managers.
- Congress on Maternal-Fetal Medicine.
- INTERNATIONAL RADIKAL DARTS championship - 3,000 participants.
- International Master of Mus – 800 participants.
- FETESS 5th Scientific Conference.

 **Palacio de Congresos & EVENIA OLYMPIC PALACE**

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A MICE destination by the sea with everything you will need: excellent weather, venues for conferences, complementary offer, trains, and planes

## Mediterranean Lifestyle for events in Costa Daurada

By **Diana Ramón Vilarasau**

@dianaramonv

Events held in Costa Daurada will become pleasant and successful experiences thanks to its top-quality and large hotels and venues with everything you will need to organise your events right by the Mediterranean Sea. In fact, Costa Daurada is part of Catalonia's consolidated network of MICE destinations. It is also a "bleisure" destination where visitors can enjoy leisure activities during their business trips.

"Like everywhere else in the world, the COVID-19 pandemic brought professional meetings to a stop in Costa Daurada, but we are confident that our assets will help us to get back on our feet quickly", say representatives from **Costa Daurada Convention Bureau (CDCB)**. During the crisis, this institution kept in contact with its clients, and it has been hosting face-to-face activities with its members, who are already 100 percent active since June.

In this sense, professional agents and companies associated with the CDCB offer everything you will need to organise an event or incentive trip: different venues including hotels, conference and exhibition centres, halls for banquets or special locations, ancillary services, complementary activities; and assistance and advice from specialised organisations.

### EVENTS BY THE MEDITERRANEAN SEA

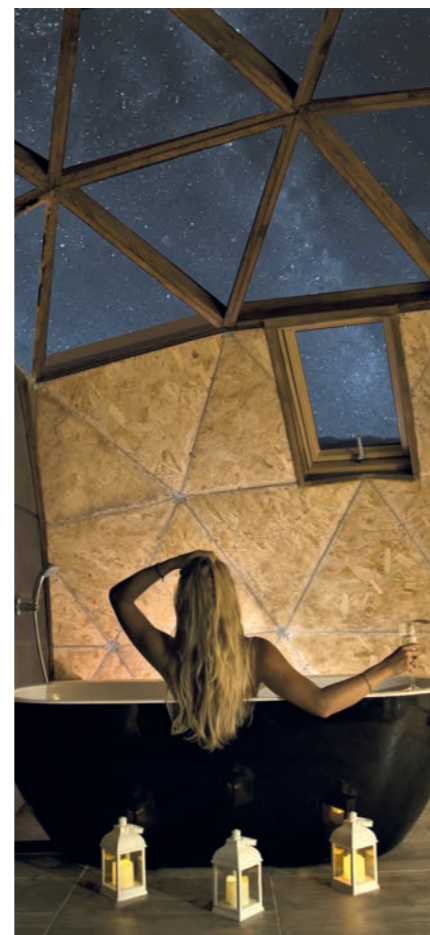
They stress that the pandemic has made people value being able to do things outdoors, enjoying nature, and this is what

Costa Daurada offers, in Mediterranean style: excellent weather with warm summers and very mild winters, perfect for all kinds of different activities all year round.

On the other hand, Costa Daurada has excellent venues for conferences such as **firaReus** and the Conference Centre in Tarragona, two top-level conference centres, and the **PortAventura Business & Events Convention Centre**, right by hotels and golf courses. Other exclusive venues are **Ferrari Land** and **PortAventura Park** or Tarragona's old Bullring, among many other original locations that also offer the latest technology.

**Nautic Parc**, Costa Daurada's nautical services booking centre, proposes an interesting combination of activities: visits to nature parks like **Delta del Ebro** and **Els Ports**, enjoying the starlight skies of the **Prades mountains**, the endless seabed of **Posidonia meadows** that cover the coastline, visits to oyster and mussel breeders, or swimming with tunas. Special attractions like the **Castells**, human towers, are also on the list of great "team-building" activities. Another option is to enjoy shopping and culinary experiences. "Reus and Tarragona are also friendly places where visitors can move around easily on foot in the midst of an endless heritage that is kept alive", they say.

Costa Daurada also boasts an excellent transport network: the High-Speed train station that connects to Barcelona in twenty minutes and Madrid in two and a half hours; the Reus airport,



Enjoy the stars at **Xalet de Prades** (Picture: ©Xalet de Prades Resort Rural).

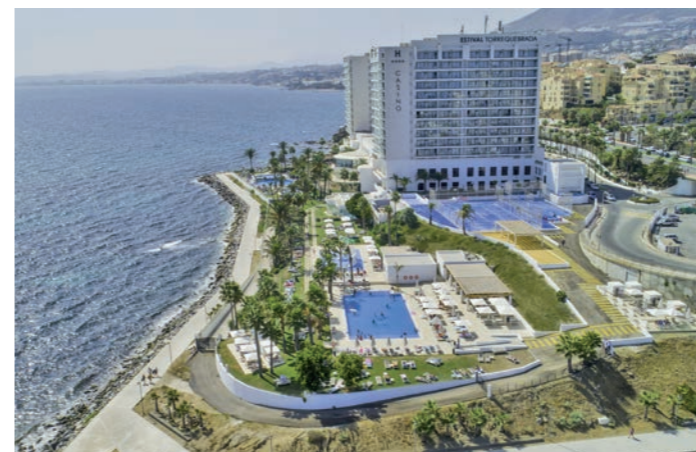
close by, the **Barcelona El Prat** airport, an hour away, and more than 2,000 kilometres of quiet roads. The **Calafat** racing circuit, specialising in motor events, is also in Costa Daurada and is a pioneer in electric engine events. ◀



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Diversity, versatility and the ability to adapt to the sector's new needs with "Hybrid Experience & Real Emotions" mark its offering

## PortAventura Business & Events win back unique events

PortAventura has overcome the stage of uncertainty but is still learning and evolving all the time. During these last months, it has adapted its offering to a fast-changing sector, accelerating the digitalisation process it was already immersed in. As a result, it has come out "stronger" and "ready to welcome 2022, a year focused on face-to-face events", states **Laura Valdeolivas**, director of **PortAventura Business & Events**, in an interview with Hosteltur.

plemented a comprehensive protocol to ensure the purification of ventilation systems, safe people flow management systems, specific cleaning and disinfection protocols, and the use of face coverings. And sustainability also "continues to be a top priority".

Its proposal is defined by the diversity and versatility of its products, with a 360-degree service. "Within our «all in one» concept, we are in a Mediterranean setting that has a large Convention Cen-

to comply with current social distancing rules. Likewise, the large terraces and gardens surrounding the building offer a multitude of options for new outdoor event formats. In view of the renewed interest in face-to-face events, these qualities "make it possible to hold networking activities, expand creativity and present products or novelties in the best possible fashion".

The proximity between PortAventura B&E's different facilities – convention centre, hotels, restaurants, and theme parks – means that people hardly have to move around or travel when events are held, which minimises all risks. "Face-to-Face events are a must and difficult to replace. The emotion and memories you take away with you after an in-person event are like no others, and our resort plays a fundamental role by perfectly combining business and leisure", says Valdeolivas.

As a result of the work carried out amid the pandemic, this department now offers a new service, "Hybrid Experience & Real Emotions", using technology like augmented reality, 3D graphics, interactive presentations, and gamification.

PortAventura went back to face-to-face events in June, and activity has picked up since September, especially in the pharmaceutical, banking, leisure, and consultancy service industries. The outlook is good. Forecasts for 2022 expect greater levels of activity that could lead to recovery, but everything will depend on how international markets react. They will continue to offer "differential services that breathe innovation and that are developed under clear ESG commitments". The focus is on the markets that before the pandemic represented the highest levels of turnover (Spain, the UK, France, and Germany), with special attention this year on Spain and France. ◀



Hybrid events reached their peak when face-to-face meetings had to be limited to very few people, and now the digitalisation of corporate events is here to stay, she says. PortAventura Business & Events was committed to this format from the very beginning: "We believe the combination of face-to-face and virtual events will continue to be in demand, as will safety and hygiene. They will be the norm for some time to come". Among other measures, the organisation has im-

plemented a comprehensive protocol to ensure the purification of ventilation systems, safe people flow management systems, specific cleaning and disinfection protocols, and the use of face coverings. And sustainability also "continues to be a top priority".

One of the advantages of PortAventura Convention Centre in 'the new normal' is the spaciousness of its halls and large open spaces, making it a lot easier



# Events This is the place

## Meet up again on the Costa Daurada

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# Sustainability, a priority for Madrid in its MICE offering

By **Vivi Hinojosa**

@vivi\_hinojosa

Madrid has become the first Spanish destination to create a digital platform to monitor sustainability. PLUS (Platform for Legacy with us) provides specific reports for any meeting being organised in the capital before it is held, helping organisers to minimise their impact from the initial stage of planning and facilitating the effective implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

**P**LUS also seeks to help create a "legacy" strategy by bringing together organisers and local actors such as NGOs, associations, foundations, etc., with the aim of promoting the different positive effects events may have on society from an environmental, social and cultural point of view.

The reports generated by the platform once meetings are over, calculating the CO2 emissions generated, will include, in a second phase, carbon offset proposals that could be carried out in Madrid.

For those interested, **Madrid Convention Bureau (MCB)** provides tempo-

rary access to the platform to organisers and companies responsible for managing conferences and events in the capital. To present the platform's advantages and benefits, MCB will organise free training sessions for its members, especially DMCs (Destination Management Companies) and PCOs (Professional Conference Organisers).

## MICE SUSTAINABILITY GUIDE

This tool complements the **MICE Sustainability Guide**, published by MCB in 2020, including practical information along the same lines of sustainability, legacy and

positive effects. Produced in collaboration with experts in responsible tourism, it includes a thorough analysis of the SDGs related to this tourism segment, specifically those related to special venues, hotels, restaurants, catering services, service providers and event agencies, DMCs, and PCOs.

With the development of initiatives like these, the Department for Tourism and MCB aim to continue consolidating Madrid as one of the best MICE tourism destinations in the world and as a more sustainable, efficient, and responsible city thanks to this industry.

## Madrid, safe and sustainable meetings

Welcoming, lively, cosmopolitan, sustainable, reliable, and safe. Madrid is a leading city in the business tourism sector, and the international awards it has received only serve to reinforce this fact. From *Best MICE Destination 2020 at the World MICE Awards* to *Europe's Leading Meetings & Conference Destination 2020* and the *World's Leading Meetings & Conference Destination 2020*, these accolades are not only proof that the Spanish capital has been working non-stop to secure its position in the MICE sector.

Madrid Convention Bureau (MCB) is a body that works to promote the Spanish capital as a destination for conferences, events and meetings. This year, the two cornerstones that underpin its annual roadmap are **sustainability** and **legacy**. Intrinsically linked, **sustainability** encompasses the fields of **ecology**, the **environment** and social settings, and **legacy** represents the positive footprint that these types of professional events leave on the city after they have been held. That's why Madrid Convention Bureau has launched recently the new tool PLUS.

To these two strategic cornerstones, professionalism, creativity, and high standards must be added. Not forgetting the passion and dedication of the professionals of the sector, whom MCB has stayed in close contact with by means of training courses and promotional activities for its more than 200 affiliate companies.

It goes without saying that, over the past year, this invincible sector has successfully adapted and responded to guests and visitors in Madrid, as a city that has continued to host in-person events and meetings.

Contact:  
esmadrid.com/mcb/en  
info.mcb@esmadrid.com  
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Retiro Park



### PLUS experience

PLUS is the **new digital platform** that Madrid Convention Bureau makes available to any meeting organizer so that sustainability and legacy criteria are included in the design phase.

PLUS allows effective management of sustainability in events in direct connection with the commitments established in the 17 SDG of the 2030 Agenda.

The tool facilitates contact between organizers and local agents for the **implementation of positive impact actions** (social, environmental & cultural) that result in a lasting benefit for the society. The platform is available on demand, contacting the Madrid Convention Bureau's Legacy&Sustainability Department.



Safe meeting



MADRID  
CONVENTION  
BUREAU



MADRID

The findings indicate that they are on the right track. At the first occurrence of the **World MICE Awards**, held last year, the “Best Convention Centre in the World” Award went to Ifema, and the **Hotel Inter-continental Madrid** received the Award for the “Best MICE Hotel in Spain”.

Ifema also continues to work on strengthening its sustainability policies. The latest step taken in this direction was the publication of the first Sustainable Participation Guides, an initiative developed to contribute to the trade fair sector achieving the Agenda 2030 challenges.

The guides bring together a set of recommendations so that anyone attending or taking part in a trade show or event, whether they be an exhibitor or visitor, can reduce their impact on the environment and make it a sustainable experience.

**THE BEST DESTINATION FOR CONFERENCES IN EUROPE**

All this has led once again to Madrid winning the “Best MICE Destination in Europe” award at this year’s World MICE Awards and the same award at its “sister” ceremony, The **World Travel Awards**,



Madrid wants to position itself as a more sustainable, efficient and responsible city thanks to the MICE segment.

considered the “Oscars” of the tourism industry. 2021 saw the Spanish capital recognised as the best European MICE tourism destination for the fourth consecutive year.

Madrid won the most votes at The World MICE Awards, ahead of other cities nominated like London, Paris, Berlin,

Frankfurt, Vienna, Lisbon, Barcelona, Milan, Athens, and Istanbul.

According to the City Council, this award “recognises the great job done by the Council with the Madrid Convention Bureau”. It places the capital at the forefront of MICE tourism and ratifies its good reputation among tourism professionals worldwide. ◀



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Strategically located on Alcalá Street, with an underground stop just 200 meters away. Fifteen minutes to the city centre, ten minutes from the Adolfo Suárez-Madrid Barajas Airport, and six from the Municipal Conference Centre and Ifema. In its 2,000 square metre convention centre, its independent rooms can be opened up and converted into larger spaces perfect for vehicle presentations and other heavy-duty items.

An in-house event coordination service with guaranteed 24-hour response and its own free WiFi system that allows several devices to be connected simultaneously. Two hundred and sixty-one rooms with Wi-Fi and a restaurant. Services for coffee breaks, work lunches, banquets and cocktail parties. A Terrace-Lounge. Car park. ▶

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HALLS	HEIGHT	MP	COCKTAIL	SCHOOL	THEATRE	BANQUET	U-SHAPE	IMPERIAL	CABARET
Gran Vía	2,95	50,29	40	28	44	40	18	18	15
Alcalá	2,94	49,21	40	28	44	40	18	18	15
Gran Vía+Alcalá	2,94	99,35	80	44	75	70	18	18	30
Callao	2,94	49,20	40	28	44	40	18	18	15
Preciados	2,94	50,16	40	28	44	40	23	18	15
Callao+Preciados	2,94	99,15	80	44	75	70	23	18	30
Prado	2,94	49,97	40	28	44	40	23	18	15
Recoletos	2,94	48,85	40	28	44	40	23	18	15
Castellana	2,94	50,70	40	28	44	40	23	18	15
Prado+Recoletos	2,94	98,75	80	44	75	70	23	18	30
Recoletos+Castellana	2,94	99,56	80	44	75	70	23	18	30
Prado+Recoletos+Castellana	2,94	149,38	120	64	102	100	23	18	45
Canillejas	2,93	50,65	40	28	44	40	23	18	15
Barajas	2,93	49,93	40	28	44	40	23	18	15
Serrano	2,93	50,07	40	28	44	40	23	18	15
Goya	2,93	48,61	40	28	44	40	23	18	15
Velázquez	2,93	48,75	40	28	44	40	23	18	15
Atocha	2,93	48,61	40	28	44	40	23	18	15
Cibeles	3,45	441,32	300	220	340	260	54	60	120
Neptuno	3,45	449,85	300	220	340	260	54	60	120
Sol	3,45	436,15	300	220	340	260	54	60	120
Neptuno+Sol	3,45	1.003,27	625	440	680	520	80	68	240
Cibeles+Sol+Neptuno	3,45	1.561,56	1.000	660	1.020	780	N/A	N/A	N/A
Jardin / Garden		1.300	900			680			



## ELBA MADRID ALCALÁ \*\*\*\*

### MICE WITH STYLE

It is an excellent venue with an independent entrance at street level, making it easier to work outdoors with heavy-duty items. Sixteen different sized rooms, fourteen with natural light, where up to 1,000 people can be entertained. An amazing terrace with a 1,300 square-

metre garden in the heart of the city, just a few minutes from the centre, near to IFEMA and well connected to the airport.

Welcome to the Elba Madrid Alcalá Hotel.  
Elba Hotels, unique hotels.

## REDEFINING THE ART OF MEETINGS, AN AMBITIOUS PROJECT OF CURRENT INTEREST

# MICETHIC

With a solid foundation built on decades of experience, Meliá Castilla Hotel is developing a new concept to achieve optimal results by putting people at the centre of all their activities.

With this new approach, this well-established organisation intends to reinvent the art of meetings held in the hotel. This new direction is centred on the three current fundamental pillars of digitalisation, sustainability and innovation.

By integrating technological solutions, Meliá Castilla will offer its clients enhanced options for events ever mindful of sustainability. They will also work with relevant organisations and associations in the destination itself to provide their clients with other positive benefits.

It is an ambitious project, and achieving this goal will require the involvement of their employees in each of the key areas of activity.

In recent years Meliá Castilla has invested in an energy transition to reduce their building's carbon footprint to make meetings more sustainable. They will share this approach with interested clients, and they will offer to analyse their events' environmental impact and suggest options to correct it and compensate for it.

Data gathered will be used internally to evaluate the additional investment required to reduce the facility's carbon footprint.

Other proposed routes to sustainability and positive impacts will be investigated. These will include reuse, recycling, promoting local products and services, and collaboration with other related associations and organisations in the destination.



Other well-being components included in the new concept will stimulate creativity, connect, revitalise and inspire each event's participants.

Working with specialised companies will also help develop content for team building, games and dynamics for each specific client and event.

The aim is to help teams and individuals in the corporate world become more focused and allow the positive outcomes of meetings to endure beyond the duration of the events.

A new priority for safety and security in the evolution of meetings is the installation of CO2 meters in all rooms.

In conclusion, with more than 7000 square metres of multipurpose space, 909 rooms that include THE LEVEL,

an impressive Auditorium with the latest technology, and event catering services that include the famous L'Albufera restaurant all under one roof, Meliá Castilla offers multiple solutions for meetings and events of diverse size and complexity.

It is essential to strategically tackle the enormous challenges of today's complex and interconnected world. And Meliá Castilla is confronting this challenge by putting people at the centre and integrating sustainability into their day-to-day management. ■

+ info [melia.com](https://www.melia.com)

The región has created the Extremadura Convention Bureau Tourism Product Club

## Extremadura brings together its products and services for business tourism

Extremadura has significantly improved its capacity to attract congress and business tourism by bringing together potential products, services and attractions in the Extremadura Convention Bureau Tourism Product Club. This Tourism Product Club provides everything anybody interested in coming to the región to hold an event or incentive trip may need.



**E**xtrmadura Convention Bureau At a time of restructuring and change in the MICE segment, Extremadura is at an advantage when it comes to responding to the growing interest in sustainability, healthy and outdoor events, the search for authenticity and unique venues and experiential meetings. And it boasts five conference centres in Badajoz, Cáceres, Mérida, Plasencia and Villanueva de la Serena and numerous outstanding venues.

The new **Extremadura Convention Bureau Tourism Product Club** has been set up for companies and institutions to benefit from synergies, join forces and generate ideas to create innovative and top-quality tourist experiences. Since its launch a few months ago, 150 companies have already joined. It is the sixth Tourism Product Club to be established



in Extremadura. In this case, it brings together conference centres and other venues used to host professional meetings and incentives, as well as the tourism accommodation sector, professional conference organisers (PCOs), restaurants, companies offering complementary activities and tourism services.

"The aim is to look for influencers and attract clients through a general package with all its components, from venues to the organisation of the event and hiring of services", explains **Antonio Molina**, coordinator of **Centres and Events at the Extremadura Convention Centre**. He tells Hosteltur that the Product Club will offer those choosing the region for their events a complete package. And stresses that Extremadura's strong point is precisely that "offering everything together; conference centres, accommodation, tourism offices, PCOs, catering services, sound and lighting companies, etc. all in a closed package.

New projects include the launch of a new corporate identity for the network of conference centres, with a new website in the first three months of 2022, improvements in digitalisation and equipment, new brochures for each conference centre and a general one including information on the whole network to take to trade fairs, states Molina. The "MICE Extremadura Incentives" guide has also been published, providing information on incentive trips and after-conference activities. It includes sixty proposals on culinary, cultural and active tourism, covering everything from 4x4 Tours to gourmet culinary experiences, the possibility of sleeping among trees

or under the stars, playing golf, spas, magic and laughter therapy among others.

### RECOVERY IS ON THE HORIZON

Extremadura resumed face-to-face events at the end of May when restrictions imposed by the pandemic were eased. Since then, activity has seen a gradual increase, especially since the summer, both for MICE and the cultural sector, "which is recovering faster than the business sector", states Molina.

Events are now more local, with conferences, functions and congresses, mainly attended by people from Extremadura and entirely in-person, although some are also shared via streaming. Events are smaller than before the pandemic and are booked at shorter notice.

Molina also points out other changes in this post-COVID era, such as those organising events want to get to know the facilities and staff in situ. They ask for information on contingency plans and COVID measures set out, and they tend to use venues that are for a lot more people than the number of attendees who will actually be attending. He says of the new demands, "They ask to use alternative settings, larger places than the number of participants and for part of the event to be held outdoors".

He continues, "the pace of events is really picking up." Many small meetings are being booked in the last three months compared to other years. "We are very hopeful for next year, and we believe that it will be in the autumn and winter of 2022 when we will be able to say we are starting to match 2019. An important year for first-class national and international congresses".

### BOOSTING OUR POTENTIAL

For its part, the **City Council of Cáceres** has put the **Convention Bureau Cáceres, Ciudad de Congresos Convention Bureau** back into operation. It is a public-private initiative that aims to promote convention, business and congress MICE tourism in the city. The bureau that was dissolved a decade ago, passing its responsibilities to the Department of Tourism, will now be under the administrative control of the **Extremadura Tourism Cluster**. Its main task is to proactively attract congresses to boost overnight stays in the city and complement leisure tourism also during the week. ■



# EXTREMADURA

## MEMORABLE PROFESSIONAL EVENTS

Functional spaces, a highly specialised sector, captivating cities and villages, unique tourist experiences and excellent food. Everything you need to organise a professional meeting or an incentive trip successfully.

Extremadura is a welcoming, quiet and safe destination where you can reconnect with nature and discover more than fifty protected areas, including the Biosphere Reserves of Monfragüe, Tajo Internacional or La Siberia. A place where you can visit historical cities and monuments of great importance like Cáceres, Mérida and the monastery of Guadalupe, all UNESCO World Heritage Sites. And where you can savour one of the most authentic cuisines in Spain and learn about the origin of products such as ham made from acorn-fed Iberian pigs, olive oil, Ribera del Guadiana wine and its sheep and goat cheeses that make Extremadura famous all over the world.



Balneario de Alange. © Turismo de Extremadura

Hotels, restaurants, and unique venues for professional meetings include castles, wineries, spas, Paradores, Inns, and scientific institutions. The region's MICE tourism sector features functional and modern conference centres in Badajoz, Cáceres, Mérida, Plasencia and Villanueva de la Serena; trade fair grounds in its main cities; tourist guides; companies offering complementary activities and services; and professional conference organisers (OPC).

The Extremadura Convention Bureau Product Club has recently been launched for companies and public bodies

to promote event-related tourism. This new body involves the sector's entire value chain and follows the model of the Product Clubs that already existed in the region: Birding in Extremadura (nature and birdwatching tourism), the Cheese Route, the Olive Oil Route, the Iberian 'Dehesa de Extremadura' Route, and the 'Ribera del Guadiana' Wine and Cava Route.



Ruta del Vino y Cava Ribera del Guadiana.  
© Turismo de Extremadura

The range of activities to be enjoyed after conferences and incentive trips is plentiful and includes everything from wine tourism and culinary experiences to agrotourism, active tourism, nature observation, hydrotherapy, golf and astrotourism. A guide published by Turismo de Extremadura a few months ago brings together sixty experiences for all kinds of preferences and for any time of the year. Dozens of local companies have designed and organise these activities, which can be adapted to the needs of each client.

Would you like to get away from the world in real 'luxury' in Cáceres, stay at a five-star hotel, enjoy a meal at a two-star Michelin restaurant and go on a dramatised visit around medieval towers and palaces? Would you like to go on safari in a dehesa to discover the origins of the very best ham made from acorn-fed Iberian pigs? How about learning business strategies following the model of the Roman legions in Mérida, capital of ancient Lusitania, or discovering the secrets of the Templar Knights in Jerez de los Caballeros, their last stronghold in Spain? All of this is possible in Extremadura. ■

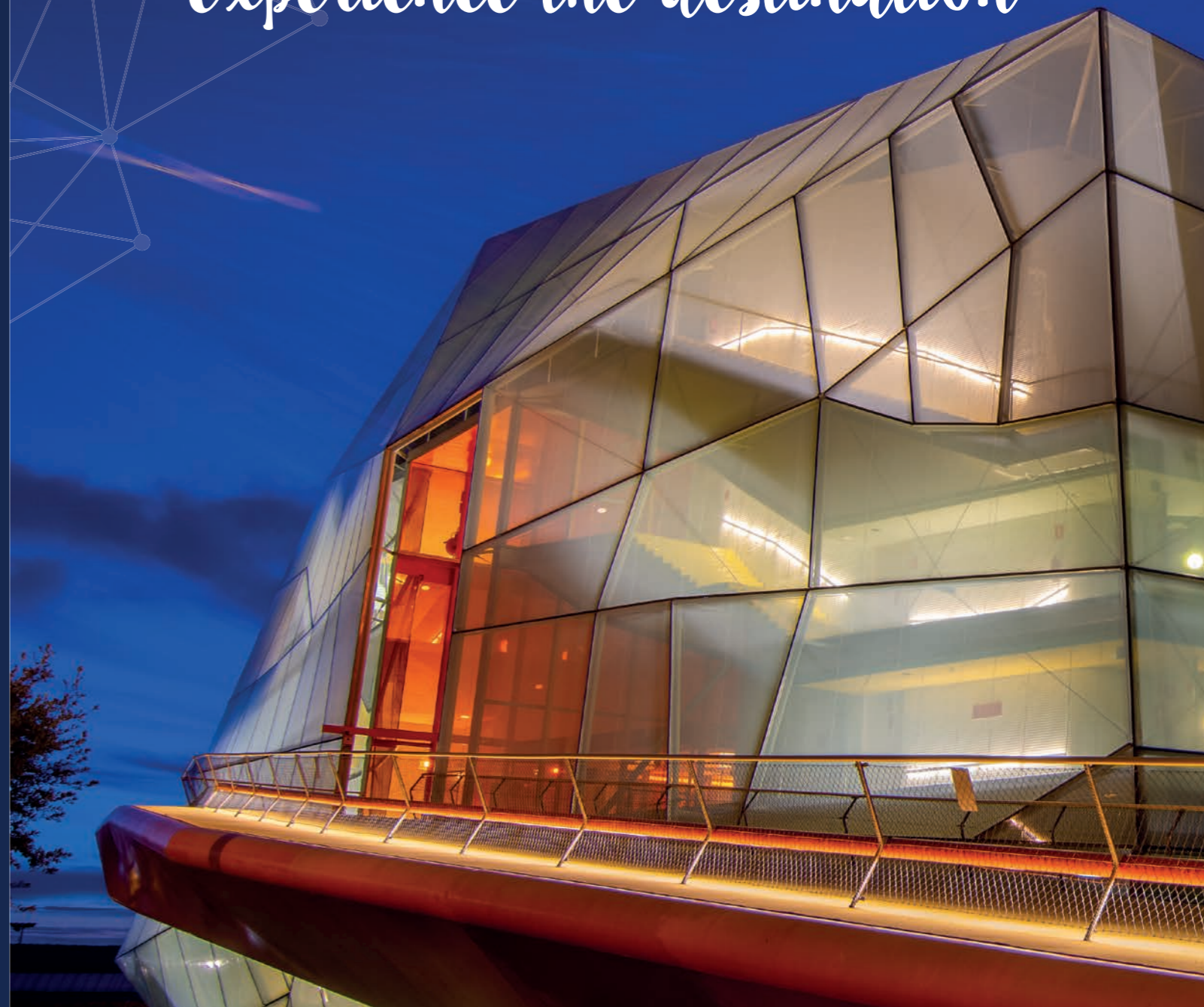
  
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# Extremadura

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JUNTA DE EXTREMADURA

2022 will mark the beginning of the segment's upturn

# Maintaining air connectivity and supplier flexibility will be key for MICE tourism in the Balearic Islands

The organisation of events and conferences in the Balearic Islands follows the trend of travel bookings: they are last minute and the national market is the most active. The sector hopes MICE tourism will start to recover in 2022 and stresses the need to maintain connectivity and focus on promoting what really sets the islands apart from anywhere else.

**T**he need for face-to-face meetings to win back customers, present products, do business, strengthen teams, and be trained is propitiating the return of MICE tourism, but despite this, it is still lagging behind other segments. Experts agree that it will be the last segment to return

to pre-COVID-19 figures.

Things are looking good in the Balearic Islands, and there is optimism because figures from this summer confirm that protocols are working, that there is a good complimentary offer, that the hotel and health infrastructure is prepared and that the entire value chain

has staff trained and ready to act in the event of an incident.

For business, 2020 was nonexistent, but the islands and companies dedicated themselves to implementing protocols to guarantee safe premises. The vaccination roll-out was the turning point to start growing, and the stars of

By **Taiana González**

@Taianahosteltur



Palma Convention Centre kicked off its programme in June and hosted a face-to-face event with 1,000 people on site and 3,000 connected remotely.

**Despite the pandemic, the luxury hotel offering has improved: Four Seasons is opening a new hotel in Mallorca, and the Six Senses and OKU Ibiza hotels have opened in Ibiza**

MICE in 2021 were national events. Most international events have been postponed to 2022 or later. Next year "will be positive, but still a year of transition until uncertainty is completely overcome", believe representatives from the convention bureaux in the Balearics.

At this time, when activity is still starting to "get back on its feet", the fact of Mallorca being chosen by the **International Congress and Convention Association (ICCA)** to hold its annual meeting confirms the islands have potential.

## THE ADVANTAGES OF INSULARITY

Being islands is sometimes a handicap. Still, at the moment, "it means arrivals and departures are a lot easier to control, and we have the data to show that this has been one of the destination's greatest strengths", says **Ramón Vidal**, president of the Convention Centre and **Mallorca Convention Bureau**.

Another great competitive advantage "which must be maintained" is the islands' connectivity with Europe. They are a very attractive destination because of their strategic location, an hour's flight from national cities and between two and three hours from the main European capitals. He adds that United Airlines direct New York - Palma flight, starting in June 2022 will be a huge turning point for businesses with the highly lucrative American market and individual customers with high purchasing power.

During the pandemic, the islands have highlighted their cultural and gas-

tronomic offer and various unique experiences corporate groups can enjoy, allowing them to rediscover the Balearic Islands in a very genuine way. Much of the promotion has focused on the islands' natural heritage, the wealth of the archipelago. Menorca, which has been a UNESCO Biosphere Reserve for almost thirty years, is an excellent example of sustainability and care of heritage, an important consideration in the MICE segment.

## IN SPACIOUS VENUES

For a long time during the pandemic, **Palma Convention Centre** offered its facilities to help support the public health service, but in June of this year, it kicked off its events programme with important business events and four major national congresses. One of these congresses was organised by the Spanish Society of General and Family Doctors (SEMG for its initials in Spanish), the first to be organised in Spain, with 1,000 attendees in person and 3,000 online.

"Bookings are now usually last-minute, and events are small to medium-sized, national and in some cases, when restrictions allow, international, but with attendees coming from a single European country. Events that attract attendees from different countries have been moved to later dates, waiting for COVID restrictions to be eased across the board", explains Vidal. This is forcing on-site suppliers to be very flexible when negotiating contracts and deposit, amendment and cancellation clauses.

For indoor meetings, organisers are looking for spacious venues and food and drinks in outdoor locations where it's easy for attendees to keep social distance. Concurrently, streaming services are here to stay. Practically all events are requesting them, especially for those who cannot travel because of their schedules, travel restrictions, or for live access to international speakers who cannot be at the event in person. Streaming also broadens an event's audience.

Corporate events that are seeing a good upturn on the islands are national ones and those organised by sectors that have been less affected by the pandemic, such as technology and food. According to Ibiza Convention Bureau, there is now a greater demand for internal meetings with a team-building and communication dimension. After so long working from home, companies need their teams to reconnect.

## RENOVATED AND SAFE FACILITIES

Due to their geographical and historical characteristics, the islands boast islets, fortresses, ancient manor houses, modern rooftops, and other ideal outdoor locations for meetings and incentives. Hotels are expanding, building and upgrading their venues for events. International luxury brands are starting to open properties on the islands, and major investments are also being made in high-end complementary leisure venues. ■

Hybrid events have helped to reactivate MICE business

# The Canary Islands attract event organisers with sustainability and digitisation

By **Taiana González** @Taianahosteltur

The Canary Islands are popular in the MICE segment because they offer quality hotels, services, and technological infrastructure. In the new COVID-19 scenario, they have efficiently implemented health protocols and instilled confidence by offering free insurance against possible quarantines due to infection.

American Express Meetings & Events According to the latest **American Express Meetings & Events** report, the COVID-19 pandemic is changing demand across the whole travel industry. In most of 2022's meetings and events programmes, protecting the environment

will be a top priority. Tourist destinations already focused on sustainability, including an offer linked to nature, will have an obvious advantage. Today, a top priority of event organisers is to convey a sense of confidence. The **Canary Islands government's** introduction of a travel insurance policy is in their favour.

Before the pandemic, the MICE segment injected around 178 million euros into the archipelago's economy. They know this segment will not be easy to win back. However, **Promotur Turismo de Canarias** plans to intensify promotion by attending major events and organising professional MICE conferences.



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With its Arabic-style dome and numerous refined details, Seaside Sandy Beach\*\*\*\* is reminiscent of its proximity to the Moroccan coastline. 256 spacious bedrooms form an oasis of peace and relaxation, just a few steps from the nightlife centre of Playa del Inglés.

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**Seaside Los Jameos\*\*\*\*, Lanzarote**

The Seaside Los Jameos\*\*\*\* comprises 530 light-flooded bedrooms, set amidst 55,000 sqm of sumptuous tropical gardens. Apart from two conference rooms, there are numerous sports facilities such as tennis courts and a squash center on the premises.

[www.los-jameos-playa.com](http://www.los-jameos-playa.com)  
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Hotel	Salon	m²	Theatre	Class room	Boardroom	U Shape	Banquet
Seaside Grand Hotel Residencia****GL	Bridge Salon	12	-	-	8	-	-
	Library	35	18	14	-	-	-
	Piano Bar	40	20	-	10	-	-
Seaside Palm Beach****	Conference Room 1	156	100	75	-	30	-
	Conference Room 2	19	12	-	8	-	-
	Sala Naranja	19	12	-	8	-	-
	Esencia	76	80	60	-	25	65
Seaside Sandy Beach****	Conference Room	76	80	50	-	30	-
Seaside Los Jameos Playa****	Lanzarote	156	90	60	-	25	50
	Fuerteventura	244	180	90	-	35	100



The archipelago boasts venues for events that are an authentic experience in themselves. Jameos del agua is a volcanic tunnel with caverns, one of which has been converted into an auditorium.

“When proposing our island to professionals for their events, two of the things they really value are our easy to implement safety measures and our tax advantages, as we are a VAT tax-free destination”, explained representatives from the **Gran Canaria Convention Bureau**. A third asset is the Government’s free travel insurance, “implemented as a possible protection measure in the case of visitors having to go into quarantine because of a positive COVID-19 test”.

By autumn, 84 percent of the Canary Islands population had already been vaccinated. Since the pandemic’s beginning, it has been one of the less affected destinations in Europe. Its health care services and highly qualified professionals guarantee maximum safety and comfort for visitors.

**SUSTAINABLE AND HYBRID EVENTS**  
This year, the **Canary Islands Trade Fair Institution** (Infecar) has started to move towards normality, adapting to the scenario posed by COVID-19. It has organised different face-to-face, 100 percent virtual, and hybrid events with streaming services using the island’s technological infrastructure. Throughout 2021 eleven events with 195 exhibitors and more than 21,400 in person and 26,000 online attendees have been held.

The **Gran Canaria Convention Centre** has held 78 events with 25,096 attendees.

“Sustainability and digitalisation are the two most repeated words when talking to meeting planners”, say Gran

**The Canary Islands have three clear virtues: they have efficiently implemented protocols, they have an insurance policy against possible COVID quarantines, and they offer tax advantages**

Canaria Convention Bureau representatives. They highlight that the destination is fully committed to transforming the sector, and nothing will stop them because “if the future of MICE is not sustainable, it has no future”.

The AMEX report confirms that companies already consider sustainability when planning events and meetings. **Amongst other things, in 2022, they will be looking for more green-certified hotels and venues and ecological menus made with local produce.**

*Canarias Destino* is developing a unique digital platform for public bodies and companies to measure their carbon footprint and plan for and set up their carbon offsetting projects.

**DISTINGUISHING SCENARIOS/ STAGES**  
The Canary Islands’ Convention Bureaux understands that groups have had to be made smaller. They recognise that a thing of great value that “brings peace of mind” is that outside events

**A total of eleven events were held at Ifecar this year. These included on-site, hybrid and virtual events, with a total of 195 exhibitors and more than 21,400 on-site and 26,000 virtual visitors**

can be organised thanks to the excellent weather conditions on the islands. The islands boast locations that are unique experiences in themselves. From organic coffee plantations, a volcanic tunnel with caverns, a carpentry workshop transformed into a coworking space, to the house where Christopher Columbus rested before he voyaged to the New World. It is also possible to organise events on a heart-shaped island and at a high-speed circuit.

**CONNECTIVITY, AN ADDED ATTRACTION**  
Before COVID-19, the islands were connected with flights to 153 airports and 27 countries on 770 scheduled routes operated by 58 airlines. The outlook for the coming months is positive, based on the scheduled flights for winter, which is already nine percent above 2019-2020. Routes have been opened with new markets and next year it will be possible to fly from New York to Tenerife. ◀



ECAR - Palacio de Congresos Gran Canaria



Palacio de Congresos de Canarias - Auditorio Alfredo Kraus



Centro de Convenciones Expomeloneras

# LAS PALMAS DE GRAN CANARIA

ATLANTIC SOUL, MICE CITY



One of the world's best tenors, Alfredo Kraus, welcomes those attending the conferences that take place all year-round in the Opera House that bears his name in Gran Canaria's capital city. He does so from the 10 metres high bronze sculpture made by Víctor Ochoa, commissioned by Alfredo Kraus' native town council. The Madrid-born artist captured and froze the universal opera singer's movement and gestures as he was singing one of his arias. And thus, with his hand raised in the air, one can almost hear his everlasting song to the sea, while conferences go on about all kind of topics.

With this warm welcome, and close to Las Canteras Beach, the Conference Centre of the Canary Islands, located at the Alfredo Kraus Opera House, is one of the infrastructures that the city offers to MICE visitors: a total occupancy of 3,400, distributed in fourteen halls and rooms. But this is not the only high-quality facility



that MICE visitors may use in this Atlantic city, which makes up the long distance with first-class air connectivity and a wide range of routes and frequencies.

Institución Ferial de Canarias (Infecar), located uptown, is an iconic venue that played an active role in enhancing the relationships with our neighbour continent, Africa. Halls and rooms of different sizes are distributed on a vast area, also including a Congress Centre.

Besides, the island's capital city not only enjoys the capacity to organize

and manage large meetings, but also has a proven track record as one of Spain's Pioneer destinations. The city's Major is currently the chairman of Spain Convention Bureau, consisting of the 57 Spanish cities with the largest capacity to organize conferences and meetings for large attendances.

The city's own history is nothing but a succession of encounters of different cultures along the last five hundred years. And Las Palmas de Gran Canaria is still increasing its convening capacity, with more encounters of more relevance, taking advantage of its geographical position as one of the main urban destinations in the Mid-Atlantic. ■



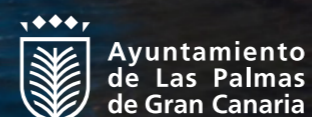
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Levante looks to the post-COVID era with optimism

## MICE destinations trust that conference tourism will soon return to pre-crisis levels



The Region of Murcia gets back in the game as a popular conference destination with its new "Ready to Meet You" brand.

Conference tourism is finding it more difficult to recover from the effects of the health crisis than the leisure segment. Although there is still uncertainty about the evolution of the situation, the progress in vaccination programmes invites the sector to be optimistic.

### THE REGION OF MURCIA

The cities of Murcia and Cartagena hosted a total of 1,334 events before the pandemic, attracting 182,682 attendees, figures the regional government intends to exceed. "If in 2019, the Region of Murcia was able to host more than 1,300 events, with the upgrading of the airport, our goal must be to double these figures," said the regional minister of **Presidency, Tourism and Sports Marcos Ortuño**. With this objective in mind, we have launched the promotional brand "**Ready to meet you**". This promotional brand was created to differentiate a product aimed at profes-

sionals and not tourists.

Among the advantages that make Murcia an ideal destination for MICE activity, the minister highlights "the size of the city, very comfortable and manageable for groups, its first-class infrastructures, hotel facilities that are continuously being upgraded, and a team of highly qualified professionals for events". In addition to a network of urban and coastal hotels and a wide variety of unique locations ready to host events, the region has convention bureaux in Murcia and Cartagena, three convention centres (Victor Villegas Auditorium and Convention Centre in Murcia, El Batel Auditorium and Convention Centre in Cartagena and the Infanta Doña Elena Auditorium in Águilas), and three trade fair grounds (Ifepa in Torre Pacheco, Ifelor in Lorca and the Furniture Trade Fair Grounds in Yecla).

### OPTIMISM FOR 2022

After a gradual recovery of business tour-

ism in the last months of 2021, the city of Valencia is looking to the new year with optimism and confidence. According to **Silvia Andrés, director of Valencia's Convention Centre**, 2019 was "the best year in history", and if the pandemic does not hamper our plans again, it looks like 2022 will also be "brilliant". She explained that they have already scheduled 31 conventions, almost as many as the year before the pandemic when 50 percent of all events were international and more than 60 percent of attendees came from abroad.

The **City Council of Valencia and the Spanish Association of Business Travel Managers (AEGVE)** have signed an agreement to raise the city's profile as a destination for organising events and conventions. Among other initiatives, the agreement includes hosting training sessions on travel management.

"Consolidating MICE tourism is one of the most important goals included in the city's tourism strategy because it would help to reduce seasonality, an objective being worked towards from various angles. And it would also help improve the capital's product and market diversification", said the councillor for **Tourism and Promotion, Emiliano García**.

MICE tourism is also being reactivated in Alicante, with six events in the final stretch of 2021. For next year, the **Alicante Convention Bureau** has already confirmed two conferences that will attract 1,000 attendees and be held at the ADDA Provincial Auditorium: the Spanish Society of Outpatient Pediatrics Congress and the Lares-EAN International Congress. A new location reinvented for conferences that will also be available next year will be the Bullring, transformed into a multi-purpose venue. ◀



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