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SPECIAL **2024**
MICE
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MICE TOURISM INNOVATES AND GROWS



H10 CROMA MÁLAGA

EDITORIAL

Taking off

The MICE sector is leading the way. Tourism for congresses, meetings, incentives, and events is one of the fortunate tourism segments that, to a great extent, had already regained pre-pandemic figures by 2022. As we approach the end of 2023, the available data remains positive and robust despite inflation, uncertainty, and geopolitical challenges.

As an example, Spanish conference centres, the vanguard of activity, boasted more attendees in 2022 than in 2019. Meanwhile, international associations like AIPC and UFI anticipate the complete recovery of pre-pandemic activity in 2023. Trade fair calendars have also reverted to normal earlier than in many other countries in the area.

Business is gaining momentum for MICE professionals, and the corresponding revenue is increasing in tandem. In 2024, attendee numbers are expected to continue their upward trend, prompting companies to seek external experts to maximise the potential of their events.

The effectiveness of in-person meetings is unquestionable, and the surge in face-to-face gatherings that ensued after the pandemic, often referred to as the "uncorking effect", persists. The demand for flexibility and the capability to tailor services to customer needs is also enduring.

Furthermore, technologies are continually advancing, forcing the sector to remain vigilant and adaptable. Following the digitisation of bookings and the widespread integration of technology in areas such as access, communication, broadcasting, and security, the next wave of technologies is emerging. These include the increasingly influential artificial intelligence, robotics, and data analysis. These technologies are also making strides in personalising meetings through features like event apps and gamification-based content, among other possibilities.

Beyond the statistics, innovations, and a positive outlook, most meetings are conducted with a shared theme that adds substance. In addition to serving as meeting hubs, business opportunities, and learning environments, the events and congresses hosted in Spain are evidently sustainable and increasingly oriented towards a purpose, aspiring to leave a lasting impact. This distinguishing feature is expected to also set them apart in the promising landscape of 2024.

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MICE TOURISM REMAINS STRONG AND IS HIKING

Experts forecast that total expenditure on meetings will rise by 2.8 percent in Europe in 2024 after growing by 3.2 percent in 2023

MICE tourism is in good health, and according to analysts, it is expected to grow this year and next. There is an unwavering commitment to sustainability, and professionals will have to face challenges such as integrating more technology, including AI and robotics.



Palma Convention Centre hosted the 19th Congress of Spanish Hoteliers in November.

Meetings, Incentives, Conferenc-
es and Events (MICE) tourism is
set to grow in both the number
of meetings and attendees by
2024, according to an analysis carried out
by **American Express GBT Meetings &**

Events. Their 13th annual "Global Meetings
& Events Forecast", based on over five hun-
dred surveys conducted on professional
MICE organisers and a dozen in-depth
interviews, found that there will be an in-
crease in both the number of meetings and

attendees, even amidst uncertainty over
inflation and extreme weather conditions.

An increase in all types of meetings
is expected in 2024, with the strongest
growth in internal meetings, client meet-
ings and advisory board meetings, fol-



Barcelona was the world's second-top city for international congress attendees in 2022, with 135,000, according to ICCA.

lowed by incentive travel, small and simple meetings, product launches, trade shows, conventions, and conferences.

And, an outstanding fifty-nine percent of meetings globally will be in-person (twenty percent hybrid and twenty-one percent virtual), with North America and Europe above that percentage and reaching sixty-three percent of in-person events.

SEVENTY PERCENT SURPASS PRE-PANDEMIC FIGURES

Twenty-eight percent of professionals say that events have already reached or exceeded pre-pandemic attendance levels, and forty-two percent of respondents expect to reach that target by 2024. As for those lagging, for whom numbers have not yet fully recovered, this is due to rising costs (in forty-seven percent of the cases), attendee health issues (forty-one percent) and attendee safety concerns (forty percent).

Sixty-seven percent expect an increase in the MICE tourism budget by 2024, and of these, thirteen percent estimate that the increase in spending

Total spending on MICE tourism in Europe will rise by 2.8 percent in 2024, slightly less than the 3.2 percent increase recorded in 2023, according to American Express GBT Meetings & Events

will be over ten percent. In Europe, total spending on meetings is expected to increase by a modest 2.8 percent in the region, compared to 3.2 percent in 2023, while respondents expect a 4.9 percent increase in both group hotel rates and group airfares.

Out of all types of events, small meetings will be those to incur the lowest costs per attendee, with an estimated USD 514 per attendee and day (excluding

flights) in Europe. Incentives are the type of meeting expected to cost the most, at USD 876 per person per day.

Faced with budget drops, European meeting planners indicate that they would first cut down on the number of nights (24 percent), additional off-site activities (14 percent), and food and beverage (13 percent). If budgets were to increase by ten percent in 2024, twenty-nine percent of meeting organisers would spend more on enhancing the destination experience, while seventeen percent would increase their use of technology.

What has not yet recovered is the lead time for contracting, although the report indicates that lead times are expected to be slightly longer than in 2023, although they are still considered to be too short and unpredictable for most. For forty-five percent, lead times remain the same and for twenty-seven percent they are shorter than last year, mainly due to delays in obtaining budget approvals, which means that clients may be missing out on advantageous rates, dates or venues by waiting too long to confirm an event.

The study also highlights that Barcelona and Madrid are among the most sought-after destinations in Europe, behind only London and with higher demand than Amsterdam and Paris.

AI BURSTS ONTO THE SCENE

"All signs point to 2024 being a dynamic year, characterised by substantial growth and the adoption of next-generation technology," says **Gerardo Tejado**, vice president of professional services at **American Express GBT**.

According to Tejado, "Among the key trends identified in the report, the growing value placed on in-person meetings remains, and others, such as the widespread adoption of technology and enthusiasm for automation, artificial intelligence (AI) and robotics, are highlighted. There is also a greater commitment to sustainability, a renewed focus on small and simple meetings and the strengthening of partnerships within our industry". The study found that internal meetings and customer advisory boards



The 12th ASEBIR Congress gathered more than six hundred assisted reproductive treatment professionals.

are continually growing and are expected to be the most common meeting types in 2024, followed closely in popularity by small and simple meetings.

In terms of challenges, the study points, in addition to global inflation, to the fact that meeting planners face hurdles such as the current shortage of

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skilled staff, high attendee expectations and the increasing need to show they are sustainable. Offering sustainable and locally sourced food and beverages (zero-kilometre products), minimising disposables, reducing waste, and prioritising certified sustainable suppliers are the most common sustainability practices. This is along with post-event impact measurement and calculation and creative ideas to offset environmental footprints.

Meeting planners must effectively leverage available technology tools to automate certain administrative tasks and swiftly conduct data analysis, so they can spend more time on creativity. Tejado stresses that, in addition, "Technology is poised to help planners track and manage sustainability objectives to align them with corporate goals". All signs point to 2024 being a dynamic year, characterised by substantial growth and the adoption of next-generation technology.

10 435 MILLION

Among the consolidated data, business

trips and trips to go to congresses, fairs and conventions recorded in Spain in 2022 were 2 227 615, a figure twelve per cent lower than the over 23 000 000 reached before the pandemic, according to aggregated data from Frontur and Familitur of the **National Statistics Insti-**

The MICE industry had an economic impact of 10 435 million euros in 2022, Thirty-five percent above forecasts, according to the Spain Convention Bureau, which anticipates that turnover will almost reach 2019 levels by the end of 2023

tute (INE). Of the total number of trips, in 2022, Spaniards made 14 511 879 business trips, in addition to another 1 304 843 to attend congresses, fairs and conventions. As for foreigners who travelled to Spain for business purposes, 2022 registered 4 410 893.

As for business travel expenditure, it amounted to 5 468.73 million in 2022, with an average expenditure per person of 1 240 euros, a daily average spending of 203 euros and an average trip duration of 6.1 days.

The financial year 2022 closed with an economic impact of the meetings industry in Spain of 10 435 million euros, thirty-five percent above forecasts, according to the **Spain Convention Bureau.** The industry's strong performance significantly exceeded the predictions made at the beginning of the year, bringing the sector closer to a full recovery expected to be achieved in Spain by 2024, when the economic impact could reach 13 230 million. Turnover in 2023 is expected to close at 12 086 million, almost at 2019 levels.



Grazing table with local produce organised by the chef and food stylist Eva Haussman at the Tanit Ibiza Congress. Picture: Peter Marconi.

According to the **SCB**, MICE tourists numbered 7.98 million in Spain in 2022, 23.1 percent more than the previous year, and tourism expenditure in the

MICE segment grew by eighteen percent, reaching 335 euros per person. This figure has now surpassed pre-pandemic levels, in line with the international infla-

Sixty-seven percent of professionals expect an increase in MICE tourism budgets by 2024, and of those, thirteen percent estimate that the rise in spending will be over ten percent, according to Amex GBT

tionary context.

Another compelling indication of the sector's robust health is the list from the **International Congress and Convention Association (ICCA)**, recently released after a two-year hiatus. In this list, Spain stood out as the world's



One of the keys to sustainable events is waste management. Picture from the BWW 2023.

in f



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second most significant destination for meeting tourism in 2022, trailing only behind the United States. The ranking, which specifically considers international conferences rotating among at least three countries with a minimum of fifty delegates, reveals that Spain hosted 528 such events. Moreover, Barcelona claimed the fourth spot globally, hosting 133 conferences and securing the top position in terms of delegate volume, with an impressive 135 000 attendees. Madrid also made a notable mark, ranking sixth in conferences with a total of 128.

This year, it appears that the data will also show positive trends. The Official Calendar of International Trade Fairs for 2023 indicates that by the year's end, Spain will have hosted 105 international fairs in cities including Barcelona, Bilbao, Elche, Madrid, Málaga, Silleda, Valencia, Valladolid, and Zaragoza.

11947 MILLION

A recent study by the consulting firm **Braintrust** on outbound tourism in Spain

Sustainability is the rule at meetings. Measures include offering sustainable food and beverages, minimising disposables, reducing waste, prioritising certified sustainable suppliers, and calculating the environmental impact

projects a total expenditure of 35 460 million euros for this year. Two-thirds of this amount is attributed to leisure tourism, while one-third is allocated to spending on corporate travel and MICE tourism. Spe-

cifically, within the business travel sector, the momentum of the increasingly robust MICE segment is expected to compensate for the decline in business class travel, reaching a combined figure of 11 947 million euros, slightly below 2019 numbers.

José Manuel Brell, Head of Studies and Quantitative Models for the Tourism and Leisure Industry at Braintrust, highlighted the "significant increase in business trips, which are increasingly purpose-driven and offer a high return on investment." He pointed out that these travels offset the decline in individual corporate trips, which are largely constrained by the use of technology in one-on-one interactions and influenced by corporate social responsibility due to the significant impact of carbon emissions. This takes on added importance in light of the objectives outlined in the 2030 Agenda for Europe. Brell stated, "Our forecasts remain optimistic, anticipating successive growth in the coming years unless geopolitical factors hinder it." ◀



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11:40	TENERIFE	N AF 4828	516	532	10:40	CDE EMBARQUE
11:45	ROMA	FCO AZ 061	401	403	11:05	CDE
11:55	MUNICH	OS 7452	415	419	11:20	CDE
12:20	PARIS	CDG K0A3965	427	431	11:40	CDE
12:30	ATENAS	A3 701	409	411	11:50	CDE
12:40	BRUSELAS	SN 3722	404	405	12:00	CDE
12:50	IBIZA	AF 4810	516	532	11:50	CDE
13:00	FRANKFURT	LH 1113	415	419	12:20	CDE
13:05	AMSTERDAM	KL 1702	427	431	12:25	CDE

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SENATOR HOTELS LAUNCHES ITS NEW WEBSITE FOR THE MICE SEGMENT

A Conversation with Berta Crespo, MICE Director at Senator Hotels & Resorts

Senator Hotels & Resorts has unveiled its new website, designed to cater for the MICE (meetings, incentives, conventions and events) segment. With this website, they are responding to the unique needs of business tourists. As stated by Berta Crespo, Senator Hotels & Resorts MICE director, in this interview, the website is crafted to be a new highly effective, simple and useful tool”.



Berta Crespo is MICE Director at Senator Hotels & Resorts.

What sets the new MICE website apart, and what goals does it aim to achieve?

Recognising the need to consolidate our MICE offerings, we have identified the importance of centralising all relevant information in one accessible space. We aim to provide specialised agents in this segment with easy and efficient access to our services and products.

Are the forecasts for this segment optimistic, and do you aspire to consolidate your position as a relevant player for MICE customers?

With exceptional venues and a wealth of experience in providing top-notch services, we boast an outstanding MICE product that is already thriving, and we aim to strengthen its success further.

In the aftermath of the pandemic, have the requirements of MICE customers changed a lot? What aspects do you now prioritise more than before?

The MICE clientele places a premium on the responsiveness, flexibility, and adaptability of establishments to cater to the specific needs of each event. A close and personalised service remains indispensable, particularly in this segment.

What does MICE look like for 2024?

The MICE sector is growing, expanding not only in traditional places like Parque Central in Valencia or Playadulce in Almeria but also flourishing in diverse destinations across the board.

Well-kept facilities

The Senator Hotels & Resorts establishments stand out for their meticulous attention to detail. These venues boast state-of-the-art technology, making them ideal for hosting a diverse range of professional meetings. Beyond functionality, the design and decor of common areas and inviting accommodations are showcased on a new website. This platform offers clients comprehensive information and convenient booking options for these spaces.

Companies are no longer only looking for city destinations to hold their events, but the burgeoning trend of bleisure (business+leisure), whereby more and more business tourists complement their business trips with time dedicated to leisure, means that hotel chains such as Senator Hotels & Resorts and their thirty-three city and holiday establishments are emerging as the ideal destination for this growing demand. ◀



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The emergence of artificial intelligence in the realm of conferences and the advancement of mobile applications are two crucial pillars for achieving a distinctive proposal

EVENTS ARE COMMITTED TO EMBRACING TECHNOLOGIES AND TOOLS THAT ENHANCE THE OVERALL EXPERIENCE FOR PARTICIPANTS



Face-to-face meetings have made a comeback. In 2023, several Spanish cities hosted conferences with over 5 000 participants in a single event.

Meeting rooms and conference halls are experiencing a resurgence in attendance. In the post-pandemic era, human contact is highly prized, yet the profile of attendees is changing as activity evolves. There is now a demand for personalised and unique experiences. To address these evolving needs, organisers are turning to techniques such as gamification, the creation of mobile applications, and innovative technologies like artificial intelligence.

The Meetings, Incentives, Conferences, and Exhibitions (MICE) sector is enjoying a favourable period following the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. It has shown a robust recovery, and the forecasts for the upcoming years are highly optimistic. In this context of improvement, the significance of human contact is once again fundamental.

Face-to-face events have made a comeback as the preferred choice for most companies when selecting a format for their meetings. In the age of digitalisation, these in-person gatherings remain a valuable asset, even more cherished in the aftermath of the distancing measures imposed by the pandemic.

In 2023, Spain hosted events that gathered thousands of people, including the congress organised in October in Valencia by the Spanish Society of Primary Care Physicians (Semergen), which garnered over 5 000 participants. Similarly, the World Parkinson's Congress held in Barcelona in July attracted the same number of attendees but with the distinction that participants hailed from various corners of the globe.

Trade fairs also experienced significant attendance, exemplified by Fitur (International Tourism Trade Fair), which,

in its 2023 edition in Madrid, successfully gathered 222 000 attendees—nearly twice as many as the year before.

However, this new phase unfolding in the MICE segment does not exclude virtual formats. While there is a resurgence in face-to-face meetings, digital ones are not being abandoned. A blend of both is increasingly prevalent—hybrid events that combine the physical and virtual realms. Organisers affirm that this approach will persist as a tool to enhance connectivity and sustainability.

Despite a lower return rate than face-to-face events, hybrid events provide an effective solution to increase attendance. Online environments facilitate access for individuals who, due to various circumstances, cannot physically attend a meeting. Additionally, hybrid events allow companies to connect with a broader audience and tap into new customer profiles, enhancing their ability to internationalise and overcome geographical constraints. Noteworthy advantages include cost reduction and increased flexibility for event organisers in both the planning and delivery of events.

The **World Tourism Council (WTTC)** emphasises the significant potential of the MICE segment in attracting high-spending visitors to a destination

Hybrid events are a good solution to boost attendance and provide an opportunity to connect with a broader audience

and extending the tourism season. However, there has been a notable shift in how companies and the industry approach the design of their events and corporate experiences. Recognising that the objective is not only to inform but also to connect and inspire, event organisers are working to adapt to these new demands.

IMMERSIVE EXPERIENCES

Corporate meetings and congresses are evolving toward greater personalisation and sustainability. Technologies that enhance real-time communication are increasingly valued to enhance attendees' experiences. This shift makes events more interactive and participatory because audiences want to be actively involved rather than be mere spectators.

New tools have been integrated to streamline management and provide



Technology is changing how industry professionals work, from destination research to event communication.

immersive experiences, adding a new dimension to product presentations, services, and training. These technologies encompass the development of mobile applications, aiding participant registration and guiding them through various activities. Additionally, virtual and augmented reality tools, facial recognition, radio frequency identification (RFID) systems for attendee registration, and artificial intelligence are employed.

APPLICATIONS

The most recent edition of the annual 'Global Meetings & Events Forecast' report, presented by **American Express GBT Meetings & Events**, indicates that technology will spearhead significant transformations in how industry professionals work. This includes processes ranging from destination research to event communications and the automation of registrations. The report highlights that as well as artificial intelligence used to craft personalised communication

Meeting attendees seek interactive communication and more services that they can manage directly from their mobile devices

streams with attendees, mobile apps continue to be a fundamental component of the industry.

Today, meeting participants seek two-way communication and services they can directly manage through their mobile devices. They value a continuous relationship with organisers and suppliers, such as hotels, not just before the event but throughout the meeting and

even after its conclusion.

In this regard, applications provide a direct, real-time communication channel with attendees, offering them instant access to all relevant information and streamlining fundamental aspects like event registration and access. Simultaneously, these applications provide the organisation with valuable insights into the attendees.

ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

The latest revolution stems from artificial intelligence, which can be used to improve planning, marketing, people flow control, security and data management, among other things. AI proves instrumental in automating repetitive processes that may be cumbersome for staff. It can identify behavioural patterns and collect data about event attendees to establish their preferences and thus provide personalised experiences.

This tool presents a significant opportunity for destination managers

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and companies in the sector. It optimises procedures, facilitates quicker decision-making based on data, and transforms the traveller's stay into a unique and enhanced experience.

GENERATIVE AI

Within this technology, a more advanced

to plan, book, and manage their travel more swiftly and efficiently using natural language. **Amadeus**, the travel technology provider, is collaborating with **Microsoft** and **Accenture** to develop these integrations for its travel and expenses platform.

active participation among attendees, which can be achieved through exciting activities and games.

Gamification, which is the use of gaming techniques to engage attendees, plays a pivotal role in this context. It serves as an ally in promoting participa-

Artificial intelligence presents a significant opportunity for businesses in the sector and destination managers as it enables them to optimise work processes

tion, loyalty, motivation, and even brand recognition. Furthermore, with the support of technology, efficient gamification tailored to each objective can be implemented.

The dynamics of games can contribute significantly to idea generation, communication, collaboration among participants, and fostering learning and training. The success of these endeavours often depends on the prior information one may have of attendees and striking a balance between the skills of the participants and the time available.

WELL-BEING

On the other hand, a noteworthy trend in the field of MICE tourism is the integration of activities that promote physical and mental well-being, such as yoga and meditation. Some events now include designated spaces for attendees to relax and unwind during events, featuring comfortable seating, soothing music, and even massage services.

Healthy eating is also gaining prominence in the event landscape. Menus are being designed to offer nutritious and balanced food, providing options for vegetarians, vegans, and people with food allergies. ◀



Artificial intelligence stands as the groundbreaking technology set to revolutionise the organisation of events and redefine attendee engagement.

step is generative artificial intelligence. This is used to generate original content from existing data. By employing sophisticated systems and algorithms to learn from images and texts, it can create new content and ideas, like conversations, pictures, or videos.

The digital travel assistant is one of the solutions that generative artificial intelligence will drive. This assistant will be able to engage with corporate travellers in a conversational manner, providing them with the most suitable travel options or itineraries based on their preferences and company policies. The chatbot will seek clarifications, make suggestions, and ultimately propose the most fitting travel options or itinerary.

Business travellers will experience enhanced benefits through new integrations driven by generative artificial intelligence. These solutions will enable them

"The new digital assistant, powered by generative artificial intelligence, will provide an enhanced method for booking business travel. It will transition from a conventional sequential display with predetermined filters to a dynamic and interactive conversational interface powered by ChatGPT. Once fully implemented, business travellers will have a more streamlined and time-saving experience when booking travel," stated **Rudy Daniello, Executive Vice President of Amadeus Cytric Solutions**.

GAMIFICATION

There are alternative approaches to creating immersive experiences and hosting memorable MICE events. One option is to leverage diverse spaces and design themed, personalised environments, incorporating sensory elements like sounds and aromas. A second option is to foster

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All this is possible with Meetings & Events by H10 Hotels, with a selection of 42 establishments specialised in the organisation of meetings and events, located in 21 destinations in Spain, Italy, the United Kingdom, Germany, Portugal and the Caribbean.



H10 Atlantic Sunset, Tenerife.

H10 Hotels' establishments stand out for their prime location, fine cuisine, high-end facilities with multipurpose spaces, and a meticulous interior design carried out in collaboration with renowned studios. Events organised in the chain's hotels are personalised to the needs of each customer, always overseen and guided by a professional team specialised in the MICE sector that will coordinate the event and see to every detail.

The hotel chain promotes a sustainable event organisation experience by applying specific measures from its Stay Green sustainability plan, in order to protect the environment where its establishments are located.

IDEAL SPACES FOR HOLDING EVENTS

H10 Hotels offers a wide variety of facilities designed to hold all types of events, whether in urban destinations, where the hotels are located in the city centre, well-connected for easy access by attendees, or in idyllic seafront locations, with panoramic views of the coast.

All the establishments have perfectly equipped spaces, state-of-the-art technology and everything you need to ensure

the success of your event. All of them can be adapted to the needs of each event, and can host different numbers of attendees and guests in maximum comfort. Particularly notable are the outdoor locations, such as terraces, gardens and rooftops with views that will turn the event into a celebration with an added air of exclusivity.

The latest H10 Hotels to open in Europe offer an exceptional MICE proposition. Located in the heart of Tarragona, the H10 Imperial Tarraco features three spacious meeting rooms with natural light and views of the Mediterranean. The largest room can hold up to 430 people, and the impressive Caelum Rooftop Bar offers views of the Roman amphitheatre and the sea.

In the centre of Rome, the H10 Palazzo Galla offers two meeting rooms and the magnificent Traiano Rooftop Bar, with 360° views of the city, the perfect setting for private cocktails and coffee breaks. Its most recent opening, the H10 Croma Málaga, also stands out for its three naturally lit meeting rooms, which can hold up to 160 people. And for an idyllic open-air terrace on the top floor, which boasts the best panoramic views of Málaga. All of them offer fine dining options for special events and celebrations.



H10 Croma Málaga.



H10 Casa de la Plata, Seville.



The One Palácio da Anunciada, Lisbon.

ENVIRONMENTALLY SUSTAINABLE EVENTS

Every event organised at H10 Hotels promotes a sustainable experience that takes into account the measures laid out in the company's Stay Green sustainability plan.

The hotel chain's commitment to contributing to responsible tourism has led it to define a specific strategy in the MICE area, with meetings with no single-use plastics, food offerings based on local products, and the implementation of renewable energy technologies to help reduce its carbon footprint.

More specifically, the actions implemented include efficient lighting in meeting rooms; providing customers with filtered local water and organic coffee; efficient waste management and efficient control of food waste from buffets and coffee-breaks. The chain also encourages its customers and partners to take an active stance by making them aware of sustainable initiatives. ◀

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Responsible tourism

REGENERATIVE AND SUSTAINABLE EVENTS: ACTIONS AGAINST GREENWASHING

Taiana **González**

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Corporate meetings and travel are indispensable because they enhance business operations and foster company culture. Organisations are challenged to strike a balance between economic growth, social well-being, and environmental protection. Consequently, the emergence of green events has become a notable trend. To ensure a genuinely positive legacy, specific steps must be conscientiously taken.

It is now widely acknowledged that sustainability should be integrated into the tourism industry. This is not only due to growing customer demand but also because companies increasingly recognise the urgency of the climate crisis. There is a genuine risk of depleting resources and overburdening destinations. Across various sectors, businesses are embracing more holistic approaches, incorporating green initiatives into the organisation of events, fairs, and meetings.

With the MICE segment having a substantial economic impact of 10,435 million on the Spanish economy, as reported by the **Spain Convention Bureau**, beyond the economic repercussions, every meeting, trade fair, conference, or corporate trip leads to unwanted consequences. Amid the surge in regenerative and responsible tourism, the trend towards sustainable events is becoming increasingly prevalent.

The definition of a sustainable event, according to the **United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP)**, is one that has been meticulously designed, organised, and developed to minimise adverse environmental, social, and economic impacts. Moreover, such events aim to leave a positive legacy in the host community.

SUSTAINABILITY, AN INESCAPABLE RESPONSIBILITY
American Express GBT Meetings &

Events highlights a noteworthy detail in its yearly "Global Meetings & Events Forecast" report: a substantial seventy-eight percent of companies should attain carbon neutrality by the end of 2024. What does this mean? They will have to face challenges involving corporate travel and events, including the identification of certified suppliers and the measurement of impact, involving the calculation of post-event carbon dioxide (CO₂) emissions.

Beyond corporate objectives, there is an increasing global consciousness regarding the social and environmental impacts of tourism. This awareness is compelling meeting attendees to seek more environmentally sustainable events. Communicating the fulfilment of one or more of the **seventeen Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)** outlined in the United Nations (UN) 2030 Agenda adds value to these efforts. It not only demonstrates commitment but also serves to raise awareness.

The **Spain Convention Bureau** acknowledges that in response to the demands of participants and companies, organisers—particularly from North America and Europe—are increasingly recognising the importance of the host city's sustainability positioning. A call to action for destination managers.

The **Catalan Tourism Agency (ACT)** and **Catalunya Convention Bureau** have collaborated on a guide providing tools for the efficient use of resources

Organisers in Europe and North America are already factoring in the sustainability of cities when selecting destinations for their events

at events. In this document, they emphasise that to integrate sustainability, it is crucial to recognise that organisational efforts extend beyond the event day. The commitment should span the entire life cycle, involving both preliminary and subsequent tasks following environmental and social criteria.

GUIDELINES FOR A GREEN EVENT

Ifema Madrid outlines five consequences of organising events without taking sustainability into account: exponential waste generation; high consumption of natural resources (energy, water, paper, and food); safety risks for participants; noise and light pollution; and a negative economic and social legacy. Mitigating these footprints requires commitment across the entire value chain.

The first step involves selecting the city for the event, taking into account the proximity of participants' residences or workplaces and opting for locations with strong public transport connections. Mo-



According to Amex, seventy-eight percent of companies would need to attain carbon neutrality by the end of 2024. Source: AdobeStock.



More and more companies are determined to leave a positive legacy within the communities where they host their events. Source: AdobeStock.

bility plays a pivotal role, and some companies include the use of electric cars as a condition in their travel policies, although this practice is not yet widespread.

When the time comes to choose a venue, **Santiago Quiroga**, Ifema's Director of Quality and Corporate Social Responsibility, recommends inquiring about how the venue manages waste or what measures it takes to reduce CO2 emissions, among other considerations. Certifications such as ISO 20121 contribute to the assessment process.

A third aspect to consider is the choice of responsible hotels for attendees. According to a survey conducted by **Accor** among its corporate clients, fifty-four percent consider carbon emissions their primary Corporate Social Responsibility concern. Additionally, the "sustainability performance of suppliers for hotel sourcing and selection in 2024" is deemed very important in their booking decisions.

Similarly, it is advisable for green events to incorporate circular practices

and aim for zero waste during the design, setup, and dismantling phases of the premises. Efforts should be made to diminish environmental impacts associated with the transportation of individuals and materials. Establishing agreements with entities for the use of materials helps minimise negative footprints. Additionally, selecting venues within a fifteen-minute walking distance from the chosen accommodation or providing spaces for bicycle parking and other sustainable mobility vehicles is encouraged.

At sustainable events, it is crucial to prioritise the consumption of seasonal, locally sourced products and minimise waste. According to Quiroga's remarks, featured on the BBVA blog, foresight is paramount, given that between twenty and fifty percent of catering products are discarded at events. Positive alternatives include donating to food banks, collaborating with foundations, or using apps that facilitate the sale of left-over food at reduced prices.

In social matters, emphasis should

be placed on engaging local suppliers who adhere to environmental policies, and there is even a push to promote labour integration by involving groups at risk of social exclusion. Simultaneously, ensuring accessibility and equality is of paramount importance. **Roberto Rosanes**, BDM at **Ilunion Hoteles**, states, "In the future, we will not be able to talk about sustainable events that do not take into account the human aspect of sustainability."

PARTICIPATING IN THE RECOVERY PROCESS

This year, 2023, the **Madrid Convention Bureau** has launched the digital platform "Plus," designed to help organisers efficiently oversee the sustainability and lasting impact of their events, aligning with the seventeen Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). This platform generates detailed reports for meetings held in Madrid, offering recommendations to diminish environmental and social footprints. Additionally, it calculates the CO2 emissions generated and plans to incor-

porate compensation proposals in a subsequent phase.

In 2022, Asturias made strides towards establishing itself as a MICE destination. Event planners considering Avilés, Gijón, or Oviedo now have the opportunity to enhance their events with nature immersion activities. For this, Asturias developed a 'Catalogue of Ecotourism Experiences,' featuring four options, each involving collaboration with a species recovery project within the autonomous community. Concurrently, businesses can sponsor a Corporate Social Responsibility initiative or enter into an agreement with one of the local conservation foundations.

Meliá Hotels International has recently launched the "**Road to Net Zero Events**" programme, aiming to measure emissions stemming from accommodation, meeting rooms, and food and beverage consumption during events hosted at select hotels in Europe and the Caribbean. This initiative simplifies the process of obtaining UN-certified carbon credits, with the credits supporting projects in developing countries.

CWT is another company that offers a carbon footprint calculator tailored

for meetings and events. It can be used for events from 200 up to 50,000 people. This tool supplies details on both individual and collective delegate emissions and waste data throughout the entire lifecycle of the event. It pinpoints specific stages where optimal sustainable solutions should be pursued.

A GROUNDED EXAMPLE OF SUSTAINABILITY

The sustainable practices implemented during **Coldplay's** "Music of Spheres" tour, seen in Barcelona, are a great example of how to organise festivals, commercial events, mass fairs, and even corporate meetings.

BMW provided the tour with forty recycled BMW i3 batteries, each boasting a maximum capacity of 1,600 kWh. They are rechargeable batteries that use renewable energy sources like wind or solar photovoltaic panels. At the concerts, fans were able to use bicycles provided by the organisation to pedal and generate clean electric power, and a kinetic floor was installed, harnessing energy from audience members jumping, thus also contributing to the sustainable energy supply.

In the organisation of green events, it is crucial to use the seventeen Sustainable Development Goals of the UN's 2023 Agenda as a guide

The shows were designed to be inclusive, featuring vibrating waistcoats that conveyed the rhythm of the songs for deaf people, along with the use of sign language. A tree was planted for every ticket sold, and with a specialised app, concert-goers were given the opportunity to calculate their travel-related carbon footprint for the band to offset. Those who pledged to use low-carbon travel received discount codes.

Indeed, while these initiatives require significant budgets, there are others that can be replicated at a smaller scale, contributing to the journey toward regenerative tourism. ■



Sustainability should extend across the entire life cycle of an event, even after it is over. Picture: AdobeStock.

HESPERIA WORLD

UNIQUE SPACES FOR UNFORGETTABLE EVENTS



More and more companies are looking for spaces in which to hold their corporate events or work meetings in an exclusive environment to indulge in impeccable experience. Hesperia World, management company from Grupo Inversor Hesperia, knows well how to provide the best service to its clients and satisfy the needs of business travelers. Featuring a wide portfolio of hotels located in strategic locations of the Spanish geography, Hesperia World boasts some of the most privileged spaces focused in the MICE segment, accompanied by the best of comforts, an incredible offer of leisure and gastronomy at simply unforgettable destinations.

YOUR CORPORATE EVENT IN PARADISE

If you are looking for an environment where you can breathe the tranquillity and peace of nature, **Grand Hyatt La Manga Club Golf & Spa** hotel is your definitive destination. Located in the heart of the resort in a natural enclave of region of Murcia, offering views of the Mediterranean Sea and the Calblanque Natural Park, it is the perfect setting to inspire creativity and productivity at meetings and events. For large events of up to 400

people, the hotel offers eight flexible meeting rooms in a space of more than 1,200 square meters. In addition, its elegant Grand Ballroom of 400 square meters stands out, which can be divided into four independent rooms of different sizes. In addition, the idyllic and exclusive natural environment surrounding the resort is ideal all types of team building activities to be carried out to encourage collaboration between teams.

And for hosting meetings and incentives, is there anything more memorable than a luxurious stay at an adults-only beachfront retreat? Located 15 minutes from Lanzarote International Airport, **Secrets Lanzarote Resorts & Spa**, in addition to enjoying a dream destination and a privileged climate, is the ideal option to host meetings of up to 300 people and banquets for 250 people, on top of different meeting room options. Without a doubt, a destination where you will find the perfect balance between work and fun.

TWO EXCLUSIVE SPACES IN THE HEART OF MADRID AND BARCELONA

If there is something that distinguishes Hyatt Regency hotels, it is their incredible facilities for holding events, which makes them reference destinations for the MICE



segment. The **Hyatt Regency Hesperia Madrid** hotel, located in the heart of Paseo de la Castellana, in the most exclusive area of the capital, offers spaces for holding meetings, including a large room with capacity for 500 guests, which together with its strategic location make it a preferred destination for social and business events.

And in the city of Barcelona, the iconic 105-meter-high, 29-story tower that makes up the **Hyatt Regency Barcelona Tower** hotel awaits you, which does not go unnoticed in the urban landscape of Gran Vía de L'Hospitalet de Llobregat. This hotel is positioned as the largest business and conference center par excellence in the city, thanks to its 4,100 square meters of useful space adapted to several rooms with a maximum capacity of 1,800 people, and an auditorium with capacity for 500 people. In addition, it has a 27 x 7 metre LED wall screen in the lobby, the largest in Europe located inside a hotel.

Whether in the middle of the earthly paradise of the Canary Islands, in a natural enclave of the Region of Murcia, or in large urban environments, you will be guaranteed success whatever the type of your corporate event. ■



SECRETS LANZAROTE



HYATT REGENCY BARCELONA TOWER



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The calendars for 2024 point to the expansion of important events and the sector's burgeoning with new proposals

TRADE FAIR VENUES CONTINUE TO SET NEW RECORDS

Ángeles Vargas

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When analysing the statistical data for 2022, we confirmed that the trade fairs held that year showed very significant growth compared to 2021, with figures similar to those of 2018 and 2019 in the main indicators. **Xabier Basañez Llantada**, president of the **Association of Spanish Trade Fairs (AFE)**, shared this information with HOSTELTUR. Awaiting the year-end review, but seeing the tally of trade fairs conducted in 2023 thus far and according to the testimonials from the organisation's members throughout the year, "the overall outcome remains optimistic, with notable instances of record-breaking figures for exhibitors and attendees in specific cases."

"Undoubtedly, trade fair schedules have returned to normalcy, even before many other countries in our vicinity, with the recovery of the most emblematic events. This responds to the needs of sectors that traditionally use trade fairs for commerce and marketing. In-person presence at our events has reaffirmed itself as an unquestionable value for clos-

"Trade fair calendars have reverted to normalcy, even ahead of many other countries in our vicinity, and the great iconic events have been successfully reinstated," explains the president of AFE

ing business deals and connecting with potential clients," he adds.

"For many trade fairs, equalling pre-pandemic figures is considered a success. Additionally, organisers and exhibitors are making a great effort to enhance the visitor experience by introducing more and improved activities during the events: live demonstrations, exhibitions, workshops, conferences, tastings, competitions, fashion shows, etc., turning the

fairs into true experiences for those who participate in them," highlights Basañez.

"We observe a growing presence of digitisation and sustainability, not only in the organisation of fairs but also among the stakeholders involved in their development. This includes the use of reusable or recyclable decorative elements and efforts to minimise food waste, among other initiatives. These practices aim to respond to the demands of society," he adds. The sector has grappled with increasing inflation, leading to higher supply costs and the renegotiation of contracts in certain cases. Additionally, there has been a focus on searching for and retaining talent within some of our organisations."

CONSOLIDATION AND INNOVATION

Looking ahead to 2024, the president of AFE says, "Having adeptly navigated uncertainty and overcome challenges, we look to the future with optimism. Barring any unforeseen international conflicts altering the current political and economic landscape, we envision a year that will be,



In view of the events confirmed, 2024 looks to be as positive or even more so than previous years, according to the Spanish Trade Fair Association (AFE).

at least, as positive as 2023." He elaborates that preliminary assessments of trade fair calendars for the upcoming year indicate a trend toward consolidation, coupled with innovative proposals. "The trade fair sector, holding significant sway in MICE activities in Spain, can be confidently declared to have returned to a state of normalcy and is in an excellent situation at the moment."

In 2022, the members of AFE orchestrated an impressive display of 422 fairs that drew in nearly six million visitors and 49 300 exhibitors, generating an impact of thirteen billion euros. **Ifema Madrid**, which hosted 105 trade fairs and congresses, marked a record-breaking turnover of 187.7 million euros and can boast an EBITDA of 20.4 million. For 2023, Ifema anticipates maintaining this momentum with 109 trade fairs and congresses.

Fira de Barcelona concludes a spectacular year on a high note, capping off an impressive run with the successful execution of over one hundred events. These gatherings spanned a diverse range, encompassing trade fairs, congresses, and diverse activities across the iconic Montjuïc and Gran Via venues and the Barcelona International Convention Centre (CCIB) during the autumn, solidifying the institution's standing as a premier trade fair institution and showcasing events focused on health and technology.

Feria de Valladolid reflects on 2023 as a prosperous year in the realm of MICE while simultaneously incorporating new tools to enhance their operations: The venue expresses optimism about the future, emphasising the importance of these tools in sustaining growth across both professional events and in the realm

of leisure and entertainment, a trend that is gaining increasing prominence across exhibition venues in general. Looking ahead to 2024, Feria de Valladolid anticipates an exciting start, marked by a significant event—the Goya Awards Gala of the Spanish Film Academy. Described as both a challenge and a magnificent opportunity, this high-profile occasion will showcase the venue's versatility and capability to host a diverse range of large-format events and congress activities.

For the **Bilbao Exhibition Centre**, which concluded 2022 with a notable economic impact on GDP amounting to 135.3 million euros, 2023 unfolds as a year of strategic evolution. The centre has bolstered its technological-industrial profile by introducing innovative events such as Empack, Logistics & Automation Bilbao, and World Maritime Week. ■

According to the Spanish Association of Conference Centres (APCE), despite uncertainty, bookings for 2024 are encouraging

CONGRESS CENTRES HAVE DRAWN THE CURTAINS ON A STELLAR YEAR IN 2023

Following 2022, which exceeded expectations and surpassed pre-pandemic levels, the Association of Spanish Conference Centres (APCE) venues are enjoying a highly successful 2023 and are ready for an encouraging 2024.

In statements to Hosteltur, Iker Goikoetxea, the president of the **Association of Spanish Conference Centres (APCE)**, expressed that 2023 has proven to be an exceptionally positive year, and the association anticipates it coming to an end with highly favourable results.

APCE venues successfully returned to pre-pandemic activity levels in 2022, witnessing a substantial surge in the number of congresses and events compared to the previous year. Despite grappling with capacity restrictions at the outset of the year, the total number of events reached 96.4 percent of the 2019 pre-pandemic levels. Astonishingly, attendance surpassed the figures from 2019, registering an increase of 5.7 percent. Throughout 2022, APCE member venues hosted 5 712 events, drawing a crowd of 7 437 229 people, increasing by 47 and a remarkable 167 percent, respectively.

422 congresses were held (up from 238 in 2021), attracting 506 961 attendees. The number of conventions increased to 223 (up from 84 in 2021), with 297 268 participants. A total of 1 153 conferences took place, compared to 712 in 2021, and drew audiences of 324 149 attendees. 1 865 concerts, compared to 1 346 in the previous year, captivating 2 163 772 attendees. There were 234 trade fairs (up from 118 in 2021), with an attendance of 3 132 268 people. Forty events (up from twenty-seven in 2021) attracted 186 533 attendees. A diverse range of 1 775 events falling outside the above categories were held (up from 1 367 in 2021), with a cumulative participation of 826 267 people.

Of the 422 congresses held, fifty-three percent were national, thirty-four international, and thirteen percent regional. Fifty-two percent of registered attendees came from interna-

tional locations, and forty-eight percent from our country.

BETTER THAN EXPECTED

As the months unfolded, the year solidified the resurgence of the MICE industry, demonstrating a strength and vitality that surpassed initial expectations. According to Iker Goikoetxea, the president of APCE, 2022 proved to be "objectively, and considering the activity levels of the venues, both in terms of revenue and the number of events and attendees, a positive year; in fact, it exceeded expectations significantly and marked a return to the robust levels of activity seen before the pandemic."

The significance of the data becomes apparent when considering the global landscape of the industry. Esteemed organisations like **AIPC (International Association of Conference Centres)** and **UFI (Global Association of the Exhibition Industry)** anticipate a full recovery of pre-pandemic activity by 2023. Notably, the cities of Barcelona and Madrid have reclaimed their esteemed international positions, securing the fourth and sixth spots, respectively, in the **ICCA (International Congress and Convention Association)** ranking list for international events hosted in 2022. As a whole, in 2022, Spain clinched the second spot worldwide, only behind the United States.

This confirmation underscores that the Spanish events industry has successfully navigated an unprecedented "stress test." It instils confidence and a sense of



Turespaña Congress, recently held in San Sebastian.

security in the industry's future. The data demonstrates that the success of events is intricately linked to the in-person attendance of audiences and that MICE activity stands out as a crucial driver in research and development and innovation ecosystems. This sector catalyses activities with high added value, playing a fundamental role in the optimal development of the economy and society at large", states Goikoetxea.

AN UNAVOIDABLE PRIORITY

Looking ahead to 2023, Goikoetxea notes that the year is shaping up to be outstanding across all sectors, with particular strength observed in the realms of con-

gresses and corporate events. "We are surpassing the successes of the previous year, which itself was commendable for congress centres as a whole," asserts Goikoetxea confidently. Without hesitation, he declares that activity in 2023 is poised to outpace that of 2019, a record-setting year for many congress centres.

The industry is witnessing a rising preoccupation among event organisers regarding the "legacy" that events imprint on their host destinations. There is a growing awareness of the enduring impact that events can have on the locations where they are held. It is no longer just about the temporary influx of income; events are recognised for their potential to create a

In a notable contrast to international trends, the sector in Spain has demonstrated resilience and recovery. The APCE conference centres notably surpassed their pre-pandemic activity levels, with an increase of 5.7% in attendees

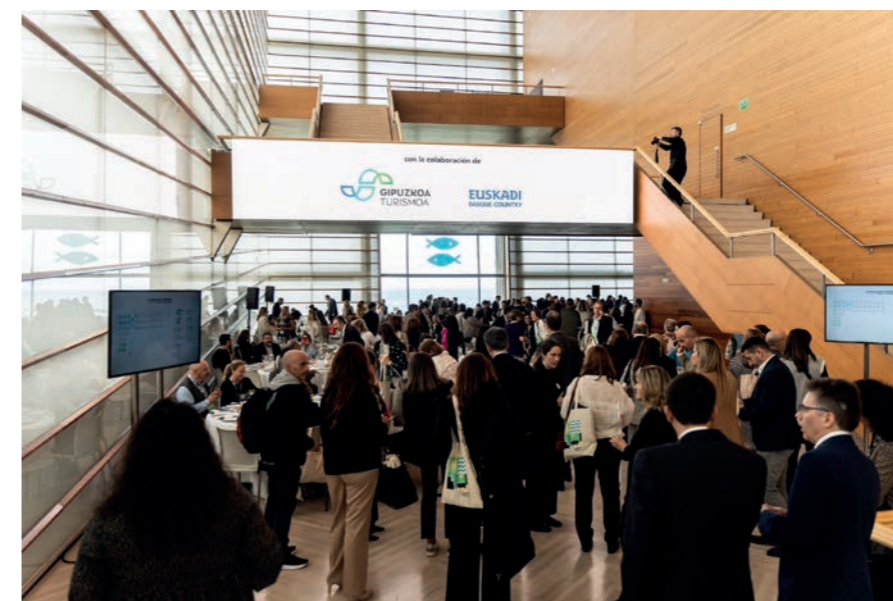
lasting legacy with far-reaching consequences—be they social, economic, environmental, or a fusion of all three. This consideration emphasises that an event's influence can extend well beyond its immediate timeframe.

Organisers are increasingly focused on crafting sustainable events that yield enduring benefits, reflecting a heightened awareness of the social responsibility inherent in event management and its potential to impact local communities positively. As noted by APCE, the concept of "sustainability" has become an unavoidable priority in the realm of event planning.

Those attending conferences and congresses are displaying a growing concern for the lasting impact they leave on the host venue. This impact goes beyond the event itself and encompasses various social aspects. Attendees are increasingly interested in contributing to charitable causes or disseminating knowledge within the local community, for example, by means of talks and workshops open to the general public.

CAUTIOUS OPTIMISM

The president of APCE paints an encouraging picture for the upcoming year, in view of bookings: "We anticipate sustaining this elevated level of activity and revenues," he asserts. However, he underscores the importance of caution in light of the prevailing macroeconomic conditions. Concerns arise from monetary policies geared towards combating inflation, which could potentially negatively impact both the economy and the industry. Uncertainty is high. He tempers the outlook with caution while maintaining an optimistic stance in the current forecasts for the next year. ■



APCE venues hosted 5 712 events, with 7.4 million participants in 2022.

A LANDMARK YEAR FOR THE MICE SECTOR

ILUNION Hotels is no stranger to the growth phenomenon currently happening in the MICE sector. The ILUNION Group's hotel company has grown by 30% in 2023 compared to the previous year. With these figures, ILUNION Hotels can confirm a 50% growth from 2019.



ILUNION Alcora Convention Center.

ILUNION MALAGA AND ILUNION BARCELONA ARE THE HOTELS THAT CONTRIBUTED MOST TO THE MICE SECTOR.

ILUNION Hotels is a hotel company that not only focuses on urban and holiday tourism, but also on business tourism. In fact, the urban hotels, especially those located in large cities, are a major attraction for holding conventions and business meetings. In this respect, the hotels that contribute most to this type of travel are ILUNION Malaga, ILUNION Barcelona, ILUNION Alcora and ILUNION Pío XII. Each of these hotels generates more than 20% of its revenues from this business sector.

THE UK, UNITED STATES AND FRANCE ARE THE STRONGEST SOURCE MARKETS.

France, Great Britain and the United States are the markets that have contributed the most to MICE sector performance.

Thanks to the events generated by these markets, and other more minority markets, the company has seen very positive growth compared to 2019.



Forum ILUNION Málaga.

A great example of such events was the Europe Congress held at ILUNION Alcora, a hotel that received a lot of praise from the organisers: "We could not have chosen a better hotel location, a better partner or a better team than the ILUNION Hotel Alcora Sevilla. The EC team would like to thank you all for your support and for a wonderful event".

WHY CHOOSE ILUNION HOTELS FOR MICE EVENTS?

Clients hold their MICE events at ILUNION hotels for a number of reasons, including: the spacious facilities and the large number of meeting rooms, all of which are full of natural light and have adapted access for family or business meetings. What's more, the hotels are located close to the main passenger transport hubs, such as the María Zambrano AVE high-speed train station in Malaga, or Chamartín station in the case of ILUNION Pío XII. ◀



THANKS TO YOUR TRUST IN US,

our MICE sector has seen a 30% growth in 2023

30
Hotels

14
Destinations

5112
Rooms

+13.000m²
Meeting Rooms

Madrid, Barcelona, Valencia, Málaga, Bilbao, Huelva, Cádiz, Menorca, Extremadura, Girona, Seville, Zaragoza, San Sebastián and Lanzarote.



Matilde Almandoz, president of OPC España

“THE OUTLOOK FOR 2024 IS VERY PROMISING”

Representatives of large and medium-sized destinations agree that activity has rebounded in 2023, and there is optimism that 2024 will be a good year. The president of OPC Spain is confident that “MICE will continue to advance, unaffected by the potential slowdown on the horizon.”

How did 2022 close for professional congress organisers?

If we were to characterise 2022 in a single word, it would be "intense". Following a highly promising first half of the year, concerns and economic analyses emerged, predicting a challenging second half, with some even mentioning the possibility of a recession. We contended that this macro-level analysis did not ac-

curately represent the state of the meetings and events sector. We forecasted a very active and positive final quarter for MICE, and indeed, that has proven to be the case.

Are the participant numbers from before the pandemic showing signs of recovery this year?

In 2023, the recovery of professional

meeting activities has solidified. Although in the immediate aftermath of the pandemic, there was much talk about in-person attendance numbers remaining low, attendance levels have stabilised. Currently, the emphasis is shifting towards recognising that attendance is contingent on the organic evolution of event formats.



Matilde Almandoz is the president of the Spanish Federation of Associations of Professional Congress Organising Companies.

Is Spain regaining its attractiveness as an international destination?

Spain has maintained its allure as an international event destination, even throughout the pandemic. Despite mobility restrictions, it remained an aspirational location and a focal point for event promoters and organisers. The country's positive reputation for professionalism and security played a significant role in sustaining its appeal.

What type of gatherings are performing best?

In the realm of professional and corporate associations, all regular professional gatherings organised by associations and bodies, including congresses and periodic conferences, have experienced a resurgence. Moreover, various new types of meetings have been established, and additional entities have been formed to generate new kinds of meetings and events.

Which Spanish destinations are the most popular?

As the latest **ICCA** report indicates, Madrid and Barcelona remain prominent players in international meetings. How-

"In 2023, activity recovery in the professional meetings sector has been solidified."

ever, notable emphasis should be placed on the advancement of medium-sized destinations, including Valencia, Bilbao, Seville, Malaga, Granada, and San Sebastian. And let's not forget that MICE and professional meeting activities are also thriving in other arenas, where we find added value, destinations specialising in specific sectors. Destinations such as Santander, Zaragoza, Santiago de Compostela, and Girona contribute to a diverse array of destinations offering professionalism and unique experiences.

What new trends and demands must PCOs address?

For the upcoming 36th PCO congress in February, the committee has selected a slogan that encapsulates the current zeitgeist: "360° Engagement." This trend reflects a commitment to Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), fostering

public-private partnerships, and embracing the three pillars of sustainability. Mere labelling of good intentions is insufficient; greenwashing is not enough. This aligns with societal expectations, and our focus is on integrating this 360° vision throughout the entirety of the organisers' professional activities.

What are the industry's prospects for 2024?

In recent meetings, we have collectively expressed optimism about the industry's outlook in 2024. Consolidation is deemed crucial for SMEs in our sector to recover from the business challenges inflicted by the pandemic. During the Mice Forum's Rentrée in Barcelona last October, the lineup of confirmed congresses and events was truly impressive. Additionally, in Madrid, the challenges of securing available spaces at specific times of the year suggest that 2024 holds significant promise for our industry.

Large and medium-sized destinations are in agreement with this positive outlook, and we have confidence that the MICE sector will continue to advance without being hindered by an anticipated slowdown. ■

Once activity levels return to pre-pandemic levels next year, the sector will experience more moderate growth, say representatives from IBTA

CORPORATE TRAVEL IS BOUNCING BACK AND IS SET TO CONTINUE GROWING IN 2024

The corporate travel sector has accelerated its transformation, placing a strong emphasis on technology, sustainability, and innovative experiences. In 2023, it has successfully regained pre-pandemic figures.



Forecasts from the **Global Business Travel Association (GBTA)**, of which the **Iberian Business Travel Association (IBTA)** is a member, suggest that the corporate travel sector in Spain will nearly recover pre-pandemic levels this year, reaching an expenditure close to \$25 billion, a nineteen percent increase from 2022. Globally, 'business travel' spending is expected to reach \$1.3 trillion (a 32 percent increase), fully recovering pre-COVID levels by next year, two years earlier than anticipated in 2021.

For 2024, the outlook remains positive, according to statements made by IBTA to Hosteltur. The association believes that the sector will continue to

grow, albeit more moderately, in line with major European countries.

For IBTA, 2022 marked the first year the sector returned to normalcy after the pandemic. However, it did not reach the volume of travel or the activity levels prior to a crisis that, besides affecting figures, also spurred an acceleration in the transformation of the corporate travel sector. This transformation is particularly evident in digitisation and has also impacted "business models and operational models involving corporate clients and their suppliers."

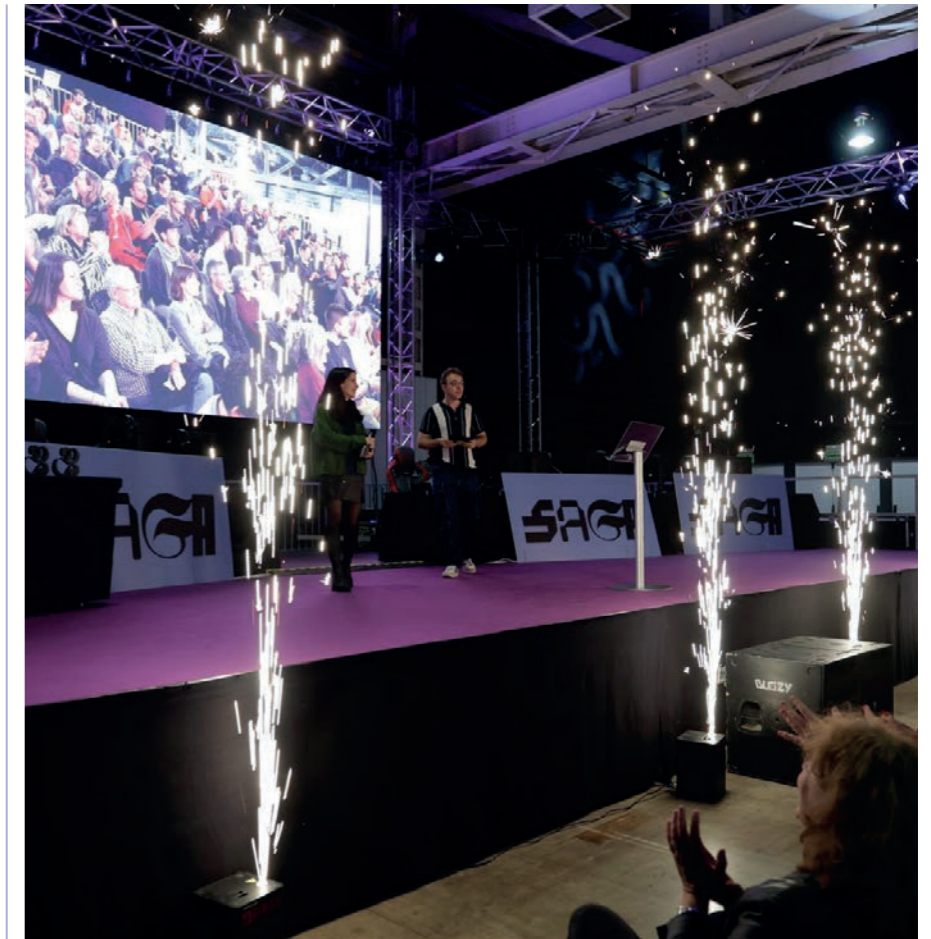
IBTA points out that the increased costs associated with travel and events (flights, hotels, car rental, etc.) are proving to be quite a challenge for corporate mobility departments. This challenge is compounded by the necessary introduction of travel policies that take into account the sustainability and environmental footprint of corporate travel. "This concept is gaining increasing importance when choosing suppliers, means of transportation, or assessing the benefits of trips."

Moreover, corporate clients are also impacted by the "exodus" of tourism industry professionals to other sectors. "Beyond potential operational inefficiencies or customer service issues, in-house clients are of the most affected. Corporate travellers' satisfaction levels may suffer during their trips, affecting the smooth progress of their work and, therefore, directly impacting the ROI of the journey," they emphasise.

A THIRTY PERCENT INCREASE

The report from the **GBTA Spain Observatory** (Guild of European Business Travel Agents) notes that corporate travel in the first three months of 2023 reached 87 percent of the volume of movements in the same period of 2019, before the pandemic.

The data reflects a dynamic and widespread market, with international travel recovery already approaching normalcy. Short-haul trips have seen the highest growth at 88 percent, while long-distance travel has increased by 85 percent and medium-haul travel by 83 percent. This trend may be attributed to strikes and incidents in transportation



Corporate mobility departments are grappling with rising costs and the need to implement travel policies that take into account sustainability and environmental footprints

recorded at that time in France and Germany, two key destinations for Spanish companies, which could have led to the postponement of certain trips.

The **Travel Advisors Guild (TAG)**, specialising in corporate travel and MICE, has also observed that the recovery of business travel, which began in 2022, has solidified in 2023, with growth exceeding

thirty percent in the billing of transportation, hotels, and car rental services.

They note some uncertainty due to the rise in fuel prices and the global geopolitical situation. The situation in Israel now compounds the conflict in Ukraine, and this is influencing travel decisions.

MORE EXPERIENCES

Regarding the changes facing the sector, the **Association of Agencies Specialising in Incentive Travel (iDEMICE)** notes an increasing involvement of participants and promoters in the programme of their trips. There is also a growing interest in immersive and innovative experiences linked to shopping tourism, cultural and nature activities, and gastronomy. They also observe a rising commitment of the sector to sustainability, which is prominently featured in the organisation of such trips, and a willingness to explore the possibilities of artificial intelligence (AI) and other emerging technologies. ◀

MICE BY HOTELES ELBA



In the city, amidst the tranquility of a unique resort, or right on the beachfront, at Hoteles Elba they know how to create events, without a doubt. Whether they are customized, themed, or open to collaborations and partners, with the possibility of audiovisuals, simultaneous translation, DJs, animation teams, and entertainment, they are always professional events that leave no one indifferent.

Elba hotels are located in the most important and best-connected tourist and business destinations in the country: Madrid, Mallorca, Motril, Almería, Estepona, Cadiz, Lanzarote, Fuerteventura and Gran Canaria. They have always been able to incorporate modern and technological facilities, free high-speed wi-fi and very high standards of comfort. Now more than ever, the industry is sharing the conviction that corporate

travel adds value, helps close good deals, generates good ideas in work situations and improves working relationships. They are key when it comes to offering a MICE proposal and make the difference.

It is in this favourable environment that the opportunity arises to take advantage of the more than 25 years of experience of the Hoteles Elba chain, independent and fully owned and managed. This feature helps to add flexibility, agility



and enhance any approach that pursues customisation, to create perfect events.

Meeting rooms and outdoor spaces with capacities from 25 to 2,000 people add extra charm to the experience. Meeting rooms with natural light for events, conferences, seminars, company meetings, team buildings, banquets, and other celebrations are the natural habitat for the professional teams of the company.

At Hoteles Elba they know what they are doing. The professional standards with which they work have an impact on the levels of success of the company that hires them and they are capable, in a short time, of transforming each space into an unforgettable setting that pursues and achieves the objectives



that have been set for the event. Variable capacities, up to 2,000 people, expansive gardens, convention centres, a pattern of spacious and highly comfortable rooms, ample on-site parking, grand halls, and top-notch gastronomy – Hoteles Elba offers it all.

In short, maximum comfort and the highest level of service without renouncing the common sense that guides each proposal.

MICE BY THE SEA. MICE WITH STYLE

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The strategic location of Madrid Alcalá, with a spectacular convention centre and a unique 1,300 m² garden, allows us to work with capacities of up to 2,000 attendees just a few minutes from the lfe-



ma exhibition centre and the airport.

In the heart of the Costa del Sol, Elba Estepona, with 204 rooms, mostly with sea view and an iconic thalasso-therapy centre, can accommodate 300 guests simultaneously with spectacular 5-star service.

The blue Mediterranean Sea frames any event at the Elba Sunset Mallorca on a spectacular cliff. Only 20 minutes from Palma, it has spectacular spaces with a maximum capacity of 150 people, indoor parking and a Thalasso Spa area in an exceptional location. ■



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HOTELS BET ON MICE TOURISM AND ITS GREAT DEVELOPMENT POTENTIAL

Undoubtedly, it is one of the segments with the highest contributions to total revenue per room

Vivi **Hinojosa**

@vivi_hinojosa

After a dazzling recovery that no one predicted, MICE (Meetings, Incentives, Conventions, and Exhibitions) has established itself as one of the key growth drivers for urban hotels... and even vacation properties. This was confirmed by the report from the consulting firm Simon-Kucher for AEHM (Madrid Business Hotel Association) on the maturity level of these levers. The report unveils how hotel chains must address the challenge of enhancing sophistication and maximising growth through this segment with a more comprehensive offering to appeal to corporate clients.



While in-person corporate gatherings are experiencing a strong comeback, hybrid events will not disappear, as their efficacy greatly facilitates work.

But what are the growth levers on which hotels must focus to respond to the new tastes and needs of this growing demand? Firstly, they must provide enriching experiences for travellers, a growing trend in corporate tourism, which is increasingly focusing on "bleisure." This involves, for example, allowing employees time off to explore and discover the destination.

In fact, luxury urban establishments already include local attractions as part of their offerings, making it easier for customers to enjoy them, as is already happening in Madrid. Business tourists are increasingly seeking to capitalise on the unique experiences offered by the destination, such as gastronomy, leisure, and shopping.

INTERNAL MEETINGS ON THE RISE

Another trend with significant growth potential for hotels in this niche market is the rise of small internal company meetings, contradicting those who predicted the end of in-person meetings in favour of virtual ones. Nothing could be further from the truth. This is affirmed by the annual report published by American Express GBT Meetings & Events, predicting that corporate travel will maintain strong performance in 2024, with internal company meetings continuing to be a significant

driver of growth in this segment.

This trend has been accelerated precisely by remote work models, which make the need to meet in person to build a team and convey corporate culture more evident. Furthermore, most people now advocate for holding these meetings in hotels.

MICE ALSO AT HOLIDAY HOTELS

The myriad opportunities MICE offers the hotel sector have not gone unnoticed by the holiday segment, which traditionally remained on the sidelines of this lucrative activity. However, there is a noticeable shift, as highlighted by the Commercial Director of Landmar Hotels, Francisco Quintero, who stated, "Well-balanced it can be brutal." He further explains, "In our hotels, it already represents additional income that we didn't have a year and a half ago. However, to achieve this, we have to work on customer experience and other segments where we haven't before." The results this year from conference centres in holiday destinations such as Malaga and Palma, among others, confirm this.

CHALLENGES: SUSTAINABILITY

Despite the promising surge in this sector, from which hotels are already reaping the rewards, be it in urban hubs or holiday retreats, they must also face the challenges

The demand for human interaction fuels the MICE sector. This "high touch" trend, as identified in a study by Eventoplus, transforms events into more than just communication tools, emphasising their role as relationship-building tools

presented by the development of this sector. These challenges are shared with fellow industry players, yet each must respond to them in their own way.

Many establishments are already working on measuring and certifying their carbon footprints. Not surprisingly, more and more companies are requesting this data to see if it fits in with their travel policies, a trend that has started in large North American companies but will inevitably reach Europe.

This approach ensures that busi-



Continuing a trend that predates the pandemic, there is a noticeable shift towards smaller, more specialised events, although large events are becoming bigger and more specialised.

nesses allocate financial resources for their travels and account for their sustainable footprint. If an establishment surpasses this eco-friendly threshold or lacks certified data, it risks losing clientele. According to Marcel Forns, the General Manager of GEBTA, "This trend is set to persist, propelled by client expectations and the recent European directive that came into effect at the start of the year on direct and indirect corporate emissions".

Entities actively strive to validate the environmental sustainability of hotels and destinations, emphasising the need for a

collaborative effort. This sentiment is aptly grasped by regions like Asturias, exemplified by their initiative 'Asturias in the Key of Sustainability: MICE Tourism and CSR.' The programme aims to enlighten corporate circles about the sustainable offerings within the region and explore innovative avenues to support the conservation of endangered species, including the brown bear and the bearded vulture.

CHALLENGES: ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

Artificial intelligence (AI), also in this seg-

ment, helps hotels automate routine processes with little added value to reduce costs and improve the overall customer experience. This opens up a whole world of opportunities, such as reducing the pressure on call centres with the application of chatbots so that agents can focus on higher value-added tasks and be more agile in communicating with customers, directly impacting increasing conversion.

MICE booking channels are undergoing a transformative shift, embracing mobile applications and online tools complemented by the assistance of chatbots.

MARRIOTT EMBRACES NEUROINCLUSIVE INITIATIVES, MAKING EVENTS ACCESSIBLE TO EVERYONE

Marriott International partners with The Neu Project, an initiative by Google's Experience Institute, to integrate neuroinclusive initiatives into events catering to over 250 attendees. The goal is to create more inclusive experiences, considering that between fifteen and twenty percent of the population suffer from neurological conditions such as ADHD, autism, dyslexia, and epilepsy.

Among the initiatives included, three stand out: the introduction of a 'quiet room', a room designed to foster mental, emotional and physical well-being that serves as a calming refuge, providing individuals with a dedicated space to recuperate from sensory overload. In addition, the provision of tools and resources, including sensory toys, noise-cancelling earplugs, sleep masks, sunglasses, printed diaries, and venue maps; as well as subtitles from presentations conducted on the main stage.

In a continued commitment to neuroinclusion, Marriott plans to elevate its efforts in 2024 by hosting active listening sessions with the community. These sessions aim to gather valuable insights and perspectives, allowing community members to actively contribute to shaping future content.

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The rising demand from new generations is steering towards integrated services conveniently housed on a single platform, emphasising user-friendly interfaces and paramount flexibility.

In renowned chains like Meliá, AI is already making its mark. According to insights shared by José Chamorro, the Sales Director, "AI is actively employed in forecasting, comprehensive analysis, and streamlining processes such as pricing and segmentation, even delving into specific market niches, to further personalise the customer experience". Chamorro emphasises that "AI's role extends to the MICE sector, aiding in the quoting process, suggesting prices, but interaction with clients must be one-to-one". At NH, technology facilitates instant bookings for smaller groups, as underscored by Janneke Messiaen, the Vice President of Commercial Systems and B2B Digital. "This automation not only streamlines operations but also affords the staff more time to focus on the core of their business – catering to larger groups, which are more complex and need the human touch".

Pushing the boundaries of techno-

logical integration, they have introduced a tool designed to interpret emails – the predominant channel for incoming requests. This innovative system detects language nuances and discerns the nature of requests, enabling efficient assignment to the most adept agent for enhanced customer service. The objective is clear: swift responses and increased conversion rates. Already operational, this tool, powered by machine learning, will soon be able to assign tasks based on conversion and revenue potential." At Meliá, the tool also assigns tasks "based on the conversion ratio and the workload of the agent."

Both hotel chains are investing a great deal in virtual reality to enhance the sales process, complementing AI. This innovative approach allows customers to explore the venue virtually, visualise room setups for their events, and play a pivotal role in tailoring their overall experience. Chamorro states, "This technology is a powerful tool for conversion, elevating communication with customers and augmenting the overall interaction, but undoubtedly it does not replace it".

In adopting this approach, hotels

can craft bespoke events while simultaneously gathering valuable data on what works and what does not. Unsurprisingly, Fabricio Titiro, Oracle's Director of Product Management and Alliances with Hoteliers, highlights the paradox where "Meeting rooms and accommodations, pivotal revenue streams for hotels yet often overlooked in terms of technology investment, are now undergoing transformative changes. Titiro emphasises technology's significant role in reshaping the distribution of these crucial assets, which are the lifeblood of a hotel's revenue and represent its most substantial costs. The industry is evidently recognising and addressing this issue, paving the way for transformative solutions.

Hotel chains like Riu are delving into the metaverse, offering a digital replica of the Riu Plaza España and its ten meeting rooms. This virtual space allows for the recreation of various configurations, providing visitors with a comprehensive view of set-ups suitable for all kinds of different events. Moreover, these spaces can host hybrid, in-person and digital or fully virtual events. ◀



Events are currently enjoying a sweet moment, being deemed more strategic than ever for companies seeking to establish meaningful connections with both their customers and employees.

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Present in Barcelona, Madrid, London and Paris, Derby Hotels Collection is one of the most prestigious hotel companies in the country with more than 50 years in the sector. Its hotels are spaces where art, culture and luxury coexist. Thus, each of its establishments houses a unique collection of works of art.

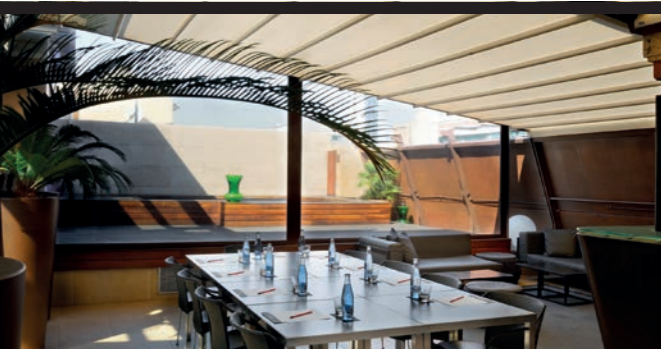
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CLARIS HOTEL & SPA 5* GL Monument, Barcelona

In Barcelona, located in the late 19th century Palacio Vedruna, the **Claris** stands out for its elegant 124 rooms that combine archaeological pieces and antiques with the most contemporary design, as well as for its pre-Columbian art museum. It has 10 meeting rooms to organise any type of event, in addition to its business centre. Not to be forgotten is its exquisite gastronomic offer, in La Terraza del Claris or in its new Japanese restaurant, Os-Kuro.

www.hotelclaris.com
claris@derbyhotels.com



HOTEL GRANADOS 83 4*S Monument, Barcelona

Granados 83 is located in Barcelona's Eixample district. Its oxidised iron structure, inspired by New York's Soho, contrasts with the stone and glass façade, and contains a collection of Hindu, Buddhist and Roman art. It has 77 rooms, four meeting spaces and a business centre, as well as the Terrace bar 9 with views of the city centre, Restaurant 3 with outdoor patio and the G Bar cocktail bar.

www.hotelgranados83.com
granados83@derbyhotels.com

Hotel	Meeting Spaces	Square Meters	Maximum Capacity	Exterior Spaces
Hotel & Spa Claris ***** GL (Barcelona)	10	957	200	Yes
Hotel Granados 83 ***** S (Barcelona)	4	339	100	Yes
Hotel Urban ***** GL (Madrid)	13	1.782	300	Yes
Hotel Villa Real ***** (Madrid)	9	990	220	Yes



URBAN 5* GL HOTEL, Madrid

Located in the heart of Madrid's museum triangle, the **Urban** is an ethnic, magical and unique hotel. With avant-garde architecture and a marked Art Deco style, the hotel has an extensive collection of works of art from Papua New Guinea. In addition to its 96 rooms, it has 13 rooms and spaces for events, as well as a business centre. It offers the best gastronomy and service with CEBO, by Javier Sanz and Juan Sahuquillo, the new cocktail bar Glass and the cocktail bar La Terraza del Urban with views over the city.

www.hotelurban.com
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VILLA REAL 5* HOTEL, Madrid

The **Villa Real** is an exquisite hotel located opposite the Congreso de los Diputados and just a few minutes walk from Puerta del Sol. An ideal location to explore the centre of the city on foot. In its 115 rooms and different spaces you will find a collection of ancient art. In addition to a business centre, the hotel has nine rooms for events. The East 47 restaurant and cocktail bar, the terrace and its pool complete its offer.

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“EVENT PLANNERS ALSO WANT TO MAKE GROUP AND EVENT BOOKINGS ONLINE”

Interview with Antonio Batanero, CEO of Spazious

Spazious is a company that is transforming group and event bookings by eliminating tedious online request forms (RFPs) and embracing digitization and the application of immersive technology in the sales and management process of the MICE business.

Could you tell us a bit about the company and its mission?

Spazious was originally born in response to a need from one of our clients who was looking for a solution to create interactive and immersive event setups, increasing proposal conversion. With our first company, FirstView, having extensive experience in 3D and 360° content creation, we saw the opportunity to develop a technological solution to showcase how an event would be in the future before it happened. From there, we discovered the digitalization needs in the segment and leveraged our direct sales and e-commerce experience in the hotel industry to introduce online sales of events and meetings.

Oracle and Google have recognized Spazious for its innovative approach to the industry. What are some key innovations you have introduced?

We take pride in being at the forefront of innovation in the events and group bookings industry. Our mission is to automate processes that currently involve excessive manual work. The ability to book rooms for a group, event space, and all associated services (food, beverages, audiovisual) is a significant advancement for both hoteliers and event planners. Additionally, our reservation, inventory, and pricing man-

agement system offer great dynamism, providing better insight and control over day-to-day business operations, leading to increased profitability.

What are some of the major challenges facing the industry in the meetings and events business segment?

First of all, there's a common denominator across the industry, which is the lack of resources. That's why our mission focuses on streamlining sales management so space owners or managers can focus on their specialty: delivering the best service for each event. On the other hand, event and meeting marketing have been largely overlooked in the digitalization processes of the past two decades. Similar to individual bookings, customers also want to make group and event bookings online.

What are Spazious' plans for the future?

All our plans are geared towards facilitating the sale, distribution, and management of the entire range of events and meetings. Every day, we analyze the behavior of people using our tool to book a group, a room, or a wedding. As we grow, we'll be able to offer our customers a new analytical perspective, helping them optimize sales and business like never before.

What are your leadership philosophies, and how do you translate them into building a successful corporate culture at Spazious?

Despite it seeming obvious, at Spazious, we define our roadmap based on the needs of our customers, who are the true experts in the business. Active-



ly listening to them, we learn new things every day that we try to apply to our platform. We're also highly competitive and a bit stubborn. Many times, we were told it wouldn't be possible to book a group online because of various factors... Yet, in just a few months, we managed events worth over 10 million euros for chains like Iberostar, H10, Petit Palace, or Hyatt, among others. Marriott, Hilton, Meliá, and NH also trust Spazious to offer their clients the most immersive view possible of their capabilities as organizers of the best events. ■



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FROM A MINE TO A STADIUM OF A SHIP, MICE VENUES ARE WITNESSING A SURGE IN UNIQUENESS

Diana **Ramón Vilarasau**

@dianaramonv



The Atyla ship in Bilbao presents a distinctive opportunity to host events or meetings at sea. (Picture: Barco Atyla Foundation)

Planning any event, be it a corporate meeting, gala dinner, institutional gathering, brand or product unveiling, pop-up store, showroom, or team-building day, typically commences with a meticulous venue selection. The distinctiveness of the chosen space infuses the event with originality and a novel perspective, coupled with the essential amenities and cutting-edge technology to guarantee its excellence. Spanish destinations boast an array of such exceptional venues; the following represent just a glimpse into this diverse selection.

INDOOR OR OUTDOOR

The **El Olivar Complex**, located in Alcalá de Henares, ten kilometres from the heart of Madrid and just a 15-minute drive from Madrid-Barajas airport, stands out with its distinctive feature of providing expansive indoor and outdoor spaces. With a maximum capacity of 3 000 people, this

venue offers an ideal setting for hosting events amidst centuries-old gardens. Encompassing a sprawling 60 000 m² area, including 25 000 m² of meticulously landscaped outdoor spaces, the complex boasts versatile indoor areas suitable for a wide range of events, from team-building activities and incentives to training days, trade fairs, exhibitions, and grand luncheons or dinners featuring captivating shows or family days. Additionally, the venue provides a catering service led by seasoned chefs overseeing state-of-the-art kitchens equipped with the latest technology.

EVENTS AND HISTORY

Nestled in an exclusive setting, within the heart of historic San Sebastian, lies the venerable **San Telmo Museum**. Housed within the walls of a former Dominican convent, this distinguished establishment boasts a monumental structure dating

back to the 16th century, complemented by a contemporary architectural extension. The museum promises a distinctive and unparalleled experience, providing a plethora of possibilities through the utilisation of its spaces, resources, and facilities for hosting a diverse range of activities and events, from conferences and presentations to business meetings, cocktail parties, gala dinners, concerts, photo shoots, advertising sessions, award ceremonies, seminars, and debates.

This extraordinary venue comprises four primary spaces, each complemented by additional offerings. The Church, adorned with captivating canvases by Sert and 16th-century paintings in the apse, spans an impressive 800 m² and can accommodate 355 people. The Cloister, a monumental area dating back to the 16th century, boasts an outdoor garden covering 533 m² with an additional garden area of 412 m², providing a picturesque setting for 355 attendees. The assembly hall is rented exclusively in case of being an auxiliary space when the church or cloister are rented, and the Gastro-cultural space, where attendees can enjoy local cuisines, with a surface area of 127 m² offering standing space for eighty people or seating for fifty.

AT SEA

For a truly unique and distinctive experience, the **Barco Atyla Foundation**, located in Bilbao, presents an opportunity to host events or meetings at sea aboard a historic wooden sailing ship that exudes the elegance of a true work of art. Inspired by the 18th-century schooners, this vessel

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boasts a maximum capacity of one hundred people. This extraordinary boat embarks on adventurous journeys around the world, standing as the sole representative of its kind in Spain.

The boat's home port is in Portu-galete, a town in the metropolitan area of Bilbao. It can be chartered for company events, incentive trips, teambuilding days or even for a professional retreat. Whether for a coastal trip of a few hours or an immersive voyage across the open seas spanning several days, the Atyla ship provides a unique setting with its distinctive character. Attendees are bound to feel truly exceptional while aboard this maritime gem.

IN AN ANCIENT MINE

The Arnao mine stands out as the oldest coal mine in the Iberian Peninsula, boasting the distinction of being the oldest vertical shaft in Asturias and the sole underwater mine across Europe. Situated in an idyllic natural setting overlooking the sea and conveniently positioned a mere eleven kilometres from Asturias airport, the **Arnao Mine Museum** offers a unique venue for a variety of corporate events. This remarkable museum features primitive facilities, including underground mining galleries with a legacy spanning over two hundred years, alongside a wooden headframe declared Asset of Cultural Interest (BIC). The venue also features a terrace, a versatile multi-purpose room, and a projection room.

As part of the array of supplementary activities available, guests can embark on a journey through time with a visit to the 19th-century mining town of Arnao. This immersive experience serves as the culmination of a captivating exploration into the life of a sector that profoundly influenced the socio-economic development of Asturias.

ANOTHER STADIUM WELCOMES MICE EVENTS.

More and more huge stadiums and football pitches are opening their doors to the congress sector, offering possibilities for a wide range of event formats. **La Cartuja Stadium** has become a new MICE space, combining it with sporting activity.

The multifunctional sports complex, located on the island of the same name in the northern sector of Seville, is just four kilometres from the heart of the city. Inaugurated on the 5th of May 1999, this multifunctional sports complex boasts



The La Cartuja Stadium has undergone a remarkable transformation, emerging as a distinctive space for MICE events, accommodating everything from intimate meetings to grand gatherings

a grand capacity for 57 600 spectators, making it the second-largest stadium in Andalusia and the fifth largest in Spain. To add to its accolades, it proudly wears the UEFA's prestigious 'Elite Stadium' distinction. Since its inception, this remarkable facility has evolved into a dynamic business hub spanning over 25 000 m². Here, one can find the luxurious 4-star Isla Cartuja Hotel, a cutting-edge Diaverum Clinic, and Crossfit La Forja – the first official centre of its kind in Andalusia, headquarters for many companies and a restaurant area.

This stadium stands out as an exceptional venue, suitable for hosting all kinds of events. From sporting showdowns to musical performances, cultural spectacles, and corporate gatherings. This multifunctional facility caters to events of all sizes and natures, unfolding on the pitch itself, the expansive terrace, the exclusive Grada Club, the stands, outdoor areas, or in its indoor rooms and corridors. These spaces are set up with furniture, large-format LCD screens, WiFi, and multimedia connections, and also offer audiovisual complementary services, hostesses, simultaneous translation, and catering services.

ALSO, FOR SLOW MICE

Alongside the growing trend for healthy living, 'slow mice' events are increasing in more relaxed settings than usual, including relaxing activities and eco-friendly food and beverages.

For this type of event, there are spaces such as the **Eco-Masia Ca l'Andreu** venue, located in Tiana, Barcelona, in the Serralada de Marina Park, surrounded by woodland, an orchard and a Mediterranean garden with views of the sea. It has

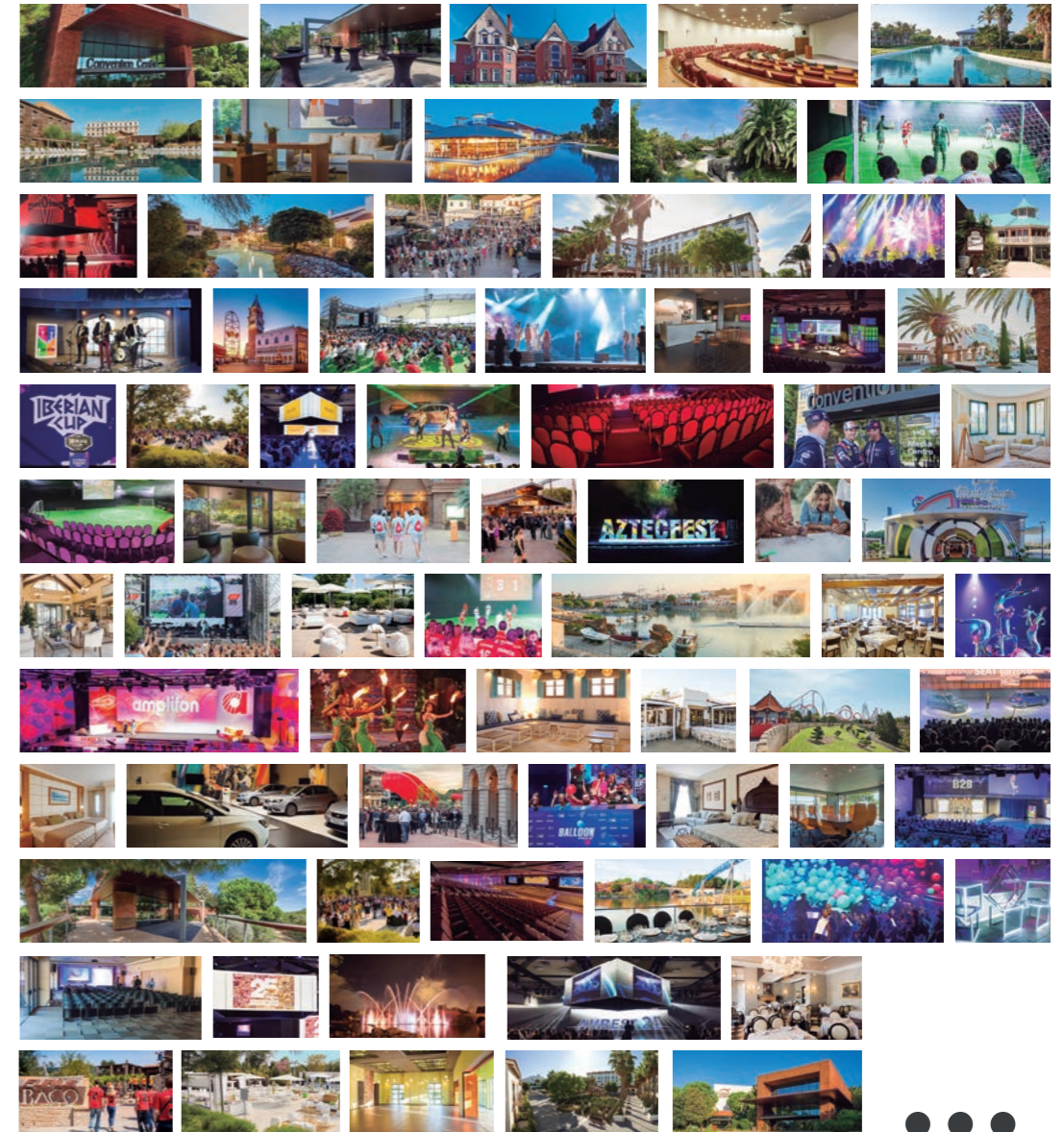
the following areas: the Gallery, an outdoor space with views of the park; the Studio, a multi-purpose space with a library and music; the Kitchen and the Dining Room, with a table for ten people.

The **Vivood Hotel** in Alicante introduces **ConTemple**, an innovative addition to its Benimantell premises. This new space immerses guests into the natural beauty of the Guadalest Valley, enveloping them in an environment that exudes harmony, exclusivity, and wellness – the epitome of a sustainable and tranquil event. For business engagements, the facility boasts an amphitheatre with a panoramic view of the valley, terraces adorned with ancient olive trees, and a spacious multi-purpose hall that can accommodate over three hundred people. This hall can be conveniently divided into three separate, sound-proofed areas, allowing for concurrently hosting various events or assemblies. It has outdoor gardens and a parking area.

Nestled within over 25 hectares of natural beauty, **Finca Valdetrigos**, just a stone's throw away from Madrid, graces an elevated terrain that provides breathtaking views and an ambience of serenity and tranquillity, setting the stage for unique moments of relaxation. The estate boasts exceptional facilities, including a 200 m² Arabic-style lounge, complemented by another 100 m² lounge adorned with expansive windows. Among its architectural treasures is 'l'Orangerie,' a 400 m² open lounge surrounded by glass windows, offering panoramic views of the outdoor expanse. Here, the gaze falls upon the swimming pool, paddle, football, and tennis courts, where one can also enjoy a variety of different relaxing activities. ◀



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Corporation

Barcelona has reclaimed its global leadership as an international congress venue

Catalonia has resurged as a world power in MICE tourism

Diana Ramón Vilarasau

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The 2023 edition of IBTM World, the global fair for the MICE sector (Meetings, Incentives, Congresses, and Exhibitions), marks a significant resurgence for Catalonia and its capital, Barcelona. This re-emergence positions them once again as the influential global and national powerhouses they were before the COVID-19 pandemic, particularly in MICE tourism.

During the fair held in Barcelona in November, Catalonia proudly declared the recovery of 2022 figures. The destination welcomed 1312 900 business visitors, representing an expenditure totalling 1 549.5 million euros.

Up until September this year, Catalonia has already welcomed over 887 000 tourists who visited for professional reasons, contributing a substantial 1114.8 million euros to the region. These promising figures for 2023 hint at a potential surpassing of 2022 results. Notably, France was the lead-

ing market in the MICE sector, accounting for 135 600 arrivals and an expenditure of 121 million euros. Germany followed closely, with 107 000 visitors and a spending of 87.4 million euros.

AT THE FOREFRONT OF EUROPE

Moreover, Catalonia is set to spearhead the transformation of Europe's MICE sector through the innovative initiatives of the **Catalan Tourism Agency**, particularly the **Catalunya Convention Bureau** programme. Their 'BEFuture' project, aimed at reshaping the future of MICE tourism on a European scale, has garnered recognition from the European Union (EU). This project focuses on promoting sustainability and resilience in the professional meetings sector, with a vision to solidify the continent's standing as a top destination for business events that are both environmentally and socially responsible.

Unveiled at the recent IBTM World

Tourism Fair, the 'BEFuture' project is poised to shape the trajectory of Europe's MICE sector over the next three years. Backed by a substantial 4.2 million euros in funding from the European Union's 'Single Market' programme, this initiative engages a comprehensive network of partners. These collaborators include congress offices, business support organisations, and research centres.

In the coming months, 'BEFuture' is set to provide the entire European MICE tourism sector and its ecosystem with a marketplace to showcase sustainable and inclusive initiatives within the European environment. Furthermore, an acceleration programme is on the horizon for 2025, offering approximately 30 000 euros to around eighty SMEs from Belgium, France, Germany, Italy, Spain, and the Netherlands. This initiative aims to support businesses that champion sustainability, inclusivity, and resilience within the realm of congress and business tourism.

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For yet another year, Barcelona has become the world centre of the MICE sector, hosting the IBTM trade fair.

BARCELONA REGAINS ITS LEADERSHIP.

The **Barcelona Turisme Convention Bureau** has officially declared the recovery of the MICE segment in Barcelona, ending the last available full year, 2022, with an impressive 94.6 percent of the activity levels of 2019. This resurgence translated into a substantial economic impact, surpassing

900 million euros. Throughout the year, the city hosted a total of 1 639 meetings, drawing in 553 242 attendees. 466 events were congresses, conferences, and courses, attracting 290 422 participants, while 1 173 were conventions and incentives, seeing the participation of 262 820 attendees.
In 2022, Barcelona achieved a remarkable global standing, securing the top

position worldwide for the number of international congress delegates and holding the fourth spot by the number of congresses. Per data from the **International Congress and Convention Association (ICCA)**, this outstanding performance underscores Barcelona's enduring presence in the top five for two decades. Notably, Barcelona is the sole city within the top ten that is not a state capital. Furthermore, it maintains its status as the destination with Spain's highest volume of international congresses.
Barcelona also came second in the list of Europe's top ten meeting destinations, behind only London.
During this period, it raised its profile as a leader in sustainable tourism by becoming the first Biosphere Platinum Destination.
Fira de Barcelona, the main bastion of the Catalan capital, reported revenues of 211.4 million euros in 2022, 234.8 percent more than the previous year, and a record operating profit (EBITDA) of 36.9 million euros. During the year, it held more than 250 events, including trade fairs, congresses and various others at the Montjuïc, Gran Via and CCIB venues. ■



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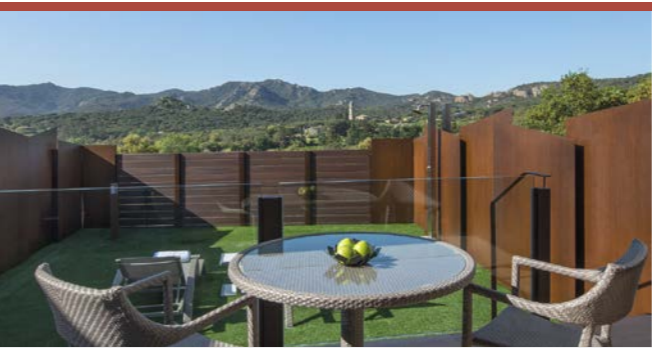
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www.hotelmastapiolas.com
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Hotel	Lounges	Total m²	Capacity meet. rms	Outdoor Spaces
Hotel Cala del Pi Beach Retreat (Platja d'Aro)	3	231	80	YES
Hotel Mas Tapiolas Country Lodge (Solius)	3	702	300	YES
Hotel Mas Tapiolas Suites (Solius)	3	702	300	YES
Hotel Marina Badalona Barcelona Coast (Badalona)	5	755	380	YES



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Located in the marina of this city bordering Barcelona, this property is a privileged Mediterranean viewpoint in a spectacular setting where guests can enjoy the select culinary offerings the Tela Marinera Restaurant, the Tastavents culinary space, or its spa inspired by the calm sea. The hotel has 181 rooms and offers various rooms and outdoor spaces with sea views for holding activities, team dynamics, and all kinds of other events.

www.hotelmarinabadalona.com
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Interview with Malin Nilsson, Director of PortAventura Business & Events

"We are witnessing a new era in events since our full recovery last year"

Diana Ramón Vilarasau

@dianaramonv

The MICE sector initiated its recovery in 2022, with Spain achieving approximately eight-five percent of its pre-pandemic economic impact. According to experts, the momentum is expected to persist following a highly positive 2023. Malin Nilsson, Director of PortAventura Business & Events/Convention Centre, shared insights in an interview with Hosteltur, outlining her strategy to address sustainability, innovation, and differentiation challenges as the industry anticipates full recovery after the pandemic in 2024.

Is corporate demand rebounding, or is the current situation, along with factors like inflation and other challenges in the European market, influencing the hosting of corporate events?

Industry experts predict continued growth in our sector in the upcoming year, following a highly positive 2023. In 2024, the corporate events industry is projected to undergo a definitive recovery after the pandemic. 2022 was also promising, with Spain achieving around eight-five percent of its pre-pandemic economic impact.

What is PortAventura Business & Events impression of 2023?

We have witnessed a new era of events since our definitive recovery last year, followed by an exceptional 2023, hosting around two hundred and seventy events, with an expectation to surpass last year's global figures by twenty-eight percent. We are filled with enthusiasm for a promising 2024.

How is the Convention Center addressing the challenges of sustainability, innovation, and differentiation?" At PortAventura Business & Events, we operate with a clear and innovative strategy for differentiation. Demonstrating an increasing commitment to sustainability in events is highly sought after by our clients. We are backed by recognitions and certifications such as B Corp, an accolade that acknowledges the company's efforts in terms of ESG, and regarding innovation, we have recently established a joint venture with Bmotion to revolutionise the audiovisual aspects of our events. With an initial investment exceeding two million euros, this represents our commitment to driving innovation, efficiency, and growth in the events sector. This partnership will also involve the creation of a permanent immersive room within our convention centre.

What types of events are you hosting more frequently, and which sectors are requesting them?"

Every year, we host large-scale events of various types, including corporate events, charity functions, sports events, incentive programs, conferences, and e-sports tournaments. These events cater to diverse sectors, ranging from the pharmaceutical and healthcare industries to consulting, insurance, IT, logistics, and consumer goods. We provide companies with the opportunity to create events that seamlessly blend business aspects with exciting experiences. We have an expansive convention centre with twenty-four rooms spanning twenty thousand square meters, 2,693



Malin Nilsson, PortAventura Business&Events Director.

rooms, in-house dining options, and exclusive access to PortAventura Park and Ferrari Land.

When you were appointed as the director of PortAventura Business & Events, one of your objectives was to enhance international visibility. How have you progressed in that direction?"

Our primary markets are the United Kingdom and France, with the international market accounting for sixty-one percent of participant origin, compared to fifty-five percent in 2022. We will continue to work along the same lines to achieve even better results in all our target markets. ■



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Capacity Total area

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Living area

833m²

Available outdoor area

4,000m²

Banquet format

450 pax

Cocktail format

1,000 pax

Theatre format

770 pax

Number of rooms

15



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- Annual Fokus convention - 550 danish and swedish managers.
- Maternal-Fetal medicine congress - 330 delegates.
- International radikal championship darts - 3.000 participants.
- International master of mus - 800 participants.
- V national scientific conference FETESS - 150 delegates.
- Easypark international convention 2022 - 800 delegates.
- International Kellydely convention 2022 - 200 delegates.
- International convention Force Point 2023 - 350 delegates

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BARCELONA



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The people of Madrid themselves are one of the destination's main attractions, and this holds true for the MICE segment as well

Madrid has stepped on the accelerator, consolidating its position in this market

The region, with the capital at the forefront, promotes its hospitality, safety, and accessibility.



Madrid attracts MICE clients for its infrastructures, accessibility, and security, but also for its cultural, gastronomic, shopping and nightlife offer.

Madrid counts its residents as one of its main assets, even in the MICE segment (Meetings, Incentives, Conventions, and Exhibitions), where the bleisure trend is gaining momentum. Evidence of this is that corporate travellers increasingly blend their business trips with leisure

time to enjoy the destination. The Madrid lifestyle and its vibrant nightlife also contribute to its allure.

Carlos Erburu, director of the Hyatt Centric Gran Vía and Thompson Madrid hotels, highlighted how 'being such a lively and welcoming city is a significant part of its success: Because

we all feel very comfortable here, regardless of where we come from.' In fact, one of its main strengths lies in how the city welcomes everyone with open arms. Its local culture is a key ingredient of the unique experiences we offer to those who visit us, so it is essential we preserve this authentic character to continue growing with that global appeal', he states.

An attraction that has not gone unnoticed by the destination's hotels, especially high-end ones. As acknowledged by **Ruth Larraz, Director of Sales and Marketing at Rosewood Villa Magna**, in their premises: 'We attract with the destination; we bring the style of Madrid to the hotel as a representation of what the city offers because, without the destination, we are nothing. We have to captivate because Madrid captivates and draws attention. We create and sell the destination, a cutting-edge city in motion.

Notably, as emphasised by **Rosa María Pérez, Regional Sales Director of Deutsche Hospitality**, 'Madrid is winning the game by positioning itself as the capital of luxury'. **Carmen López, Di-**

MADRID, THE CITY WHERE MEETINGS COME TO LIFE



Light, energy, a zest for living. These are the hallmarks of Madrid, a city that buzzes with life. You can feel this life everywhere, even in professional meetings, which turn into one-of-a-kind experiences in Madrid.

UNFORGETTABLE MEMORIES

Explore the city's streets and admire its historic buildings. The area of **Paseo del Prado and El Retiro Park**, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, offers an endless range of must-see monuments and cultural institutions. The blue sky invites you to share some laughs in one of the many outdoor cafés in Madrid, a sociable, welcoming city that will make your corporate event an **unforgettable meeting**.

EXCITEMENT AT EVERY TURN

You'll find **incredible venues, hotels that will win over even the most demanding traveller, itineraries full of stories and mysteries, artisans** who will share their knowledge with your group, **rooftop bars and restaurants with 360° views, first-rate gastronomy** and, first and foremost, an **endless supply of one-of-a-kind experiences**. The city has a special energy that makes any event held in Madrid come to life.

Madrid Convention Bureau
info.mcb@esmadrid.com
esmadrid.com/mcb



MADRID
CONVENTION
BUREAU

The comprehensive offerings of the destination and the professionalism of Madrid's tourism sector are fundamental to its leadership

ector of Events and B2B Programs for EMEA (Europe, Middle East, and Africa) at Marriott International, adds, "Very powerful international chains are placing the capital where it deserves to be, and this is happening very quickly, also because we had fallen behind".

Exactly along those lines, Erburu emphasised that to strengthen the commitment to luxury, the city lacked iconic brands that positioned themselves globally and were non-existent until "very recently." These are major brands and chains capable of attracting large events

with different customer profiles. "We already have the capacity to attract certain MICE groups; now we need to attract larger ones".

WORLD'S LEADING DESTINATION

Madrid's leadership as a MICE tourism destination also stems from the combination of two fundamental factors inherent to the capital that make holding any professional meeting a complete success.

First and foremost, its specialised offerings comprise significant assets such as unique venues, a thriving hotel industry, extraordinary connectivity, valuable historical heritage, exquisite gastronomy, and an extensive cultural and leisure agenda.

The other factor is the high professionalism of Madrid's tourism sector, ensuring the quality of its services, talent, and innovation, ultimately achieving high satisfaction among event organisers.

Proof of this achievement was evident at the **World Travel Awards 2023**, where Madrid was recognised for

the fifth consecutive time as the world's leading destination for meetings and congress tourism. In stiff competition with cities like Abu Dhabi, Las Vegas, Paris, Seoul, and Singapore, Madrid claimed the prestigious title. This recognition at the most esteemed international awards in the tourism industry underscores the professionals' choice of Madrid. Notably, Madrid was also voted the best destination in Europe in the same category last September for the sixth consecutive year.

This award solidifies its position at the forefront of this tourism segment, thanks in part to a robust commitment to public-private collaboration. The **Madrid Convention Bureau (MCB)** plays a pivotal role in coordinating these efforts. In addition to promoting the capital in this field and providing advice and assistance to organisers throughout the event process, the MCB has been a pioneer in implementing sustainability and legacy measures in Madrid's MICE tourism. This contribution adds to the overall excellence of the sector. ■





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MALLORCA

The best MICE destination



architect Francisco Mangado, with a design resembling a lying fish. Another large venue is the Palma Auditorium, located on the Paseo Marítimo overlooking the port. The island's offer is complemented by a broad list of auditoriums, theatres, exhibition halls, convention centres, multifunctional rooms, and unique spaces, providing many options. Moreover, many of Mallorca's hotels also feature specialised multipurpose rooms for MICE events.

THERE'S A LOT TO ENJOY!

For complementary activities, there are specialised companies that offer unique experiences in the island's landscape, allowing a blend of work with nature-related activities.

Indeed, Mallorca is a paradise for sports enthusiasts, with cycling routes, hiking in the Serra de Tramuntana, water sports, and golf courses.

The island combines traditional and avant-garde cuisine, featuring a rich gastronomic offering, including high-quality local wines.

Additionally, after a day's work, finding a place to relax in one of the island's many spas or simply enjoying the peace of its stunning landscapes is easy.

COSMOPOLITAN PALMA

The capital combines heritage and modernity, offering a wide array of shops and boutiques, museums, art galleries, and a vibrant cultural life. ■

Mallorca provides the ideal setting for events, combining experience, high-quality facilities, and an unparalleled environment. With its vast expertise in organising national and international events, the island offers the opportunity to merge work and leisure. This complements the MICE offerings with cultural experiences, traditions, nature, rich gastronomy, and well-being.

With Mallorca as the backdrop, MICE events become unforgettable experiences, fusing professionalism with the island's unique charm.

SUSTAINABLE AND RESPONSIBLE

The MICE segment (Meetings, Incentives, Congresses and Conventions) is crucial for the island thanks to its capacity to counteract seasonal tourism, aligning with the vision of "Mallorca, nuestro lugar" (Mallorca, our place), which advocates for the island's care as a home shared by residents and visitors. MICE tourism presents an opportunity to enjoy Mallorca responsibly and sustainably.

Excellent connectivity stands out among the indisputable advantages of Mallorca as a destination for events, con-

ferences, and meetings. In the heart of the Mediterranean, its capital's airport, Palma, is about a two-hour flight away from major European capitals.

Mallorca is an island with short distances and an excellent road network that allows for exploring diverse landscapes in a single day.

The island also stands out for its light and mild climate, boasting over three hundred days of sunshine annually and a Mediterranean climate that provides pleasant conditions throughout the year.

A GROUNDED EXPERIENCE

Mallorca boasts experts in event organisation who ensure success from the conception of an event to the post-event analysis.

MICE FACILITIES

The island's MICE infrastructure portfolio offers a wide range of possibilities tailored to all needs and preferences. Mallorca has large venues with the latest technologies and other medium-capacity spaces for smaller, more exclusive groups.

Palma's Convention Centre is noteworthy, designed by the Navarrese

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A HISTORIC YEAR FOR THE PALAU DE CONGRESSOS DE PALMA

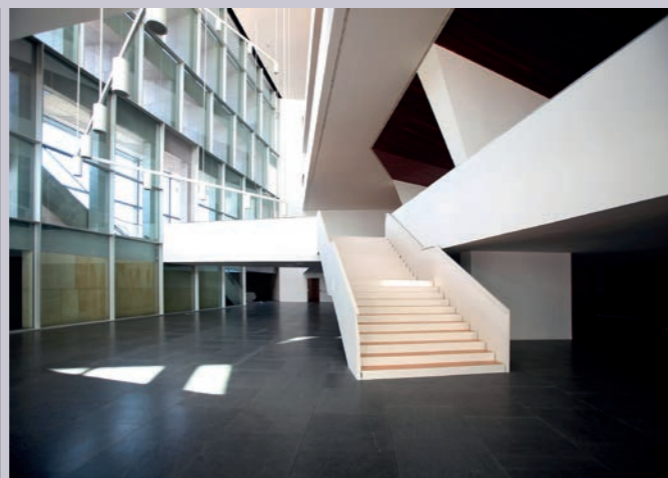


2023, a record-breaking year for the Palau de Congressos de Palma that has reaffirmed the full recovery of the MICE segment and set the stage for Palma as a premier destination for meetings and events in Europe.

The Palau de Congressos de Palma has been a hub of significant congress activity throughout 2023, hosting eleven conferences that welcomed over 10 500 participants from more than eighty countries. Looking ahead to 2024, the Convention Centre is gearing up to host another eleven confirmed conferences, including the European Conference on Interventional Oncology (ECIO 2024). This will mark the island's inaugural hosting of a major international medical congress, with an anticipated attendance exceeding 1 200 healthcare professionals.

The Palau de Congressos de Palma's commitment to excellence and the attraction of events of international relevance is on the rise, further enhancing the growth and recognition of Mallorca as a global destination for conferences and events. Moreover, its ability to successfully host and manage a diverse array of gatherings underscores the flexibility and excellence of this venue.

Designed by Francisco Mangado, the Palau de Congressos de Palma boasts two auditoriums equipped with state-of-the-art technology and seating for 1 966 and 471 people. In addition to these cutting-edge spaces, the venue offers other unique areas, including a terrace spanning over 600 square meters, providing



unparalleled views of the Bay of Palma.

This venue stands out for its brightness and versatility, coupled with a strong environmental commitment evident in its 100 percent renewable energy supply. The Palau de Congressos de Palma has efficient lighting systems, energy and water-saving



mechanisms, and consumption monitoring to optimise resource usage. Furthermore, among other measures, it embraces a circular economy and waste management system, achieving an impressive overall recycling rate exceeding 66 percent.

A GREAT START

The year kicked off spectacularly with the hosting of an international automotive industry event that commandeered the Convention Centre's facilities for nearly three months. About 12 000 attendees from around the globe graced the event, contributing to over 32 000 hotel stays in the city.

Medical, scientific, and technological conferences took centre stage from the second quarter onward. The largest was the international ASLO Aquatic Sciences Meeting, held in June with 2 300 participants from seventy countries. It was closely

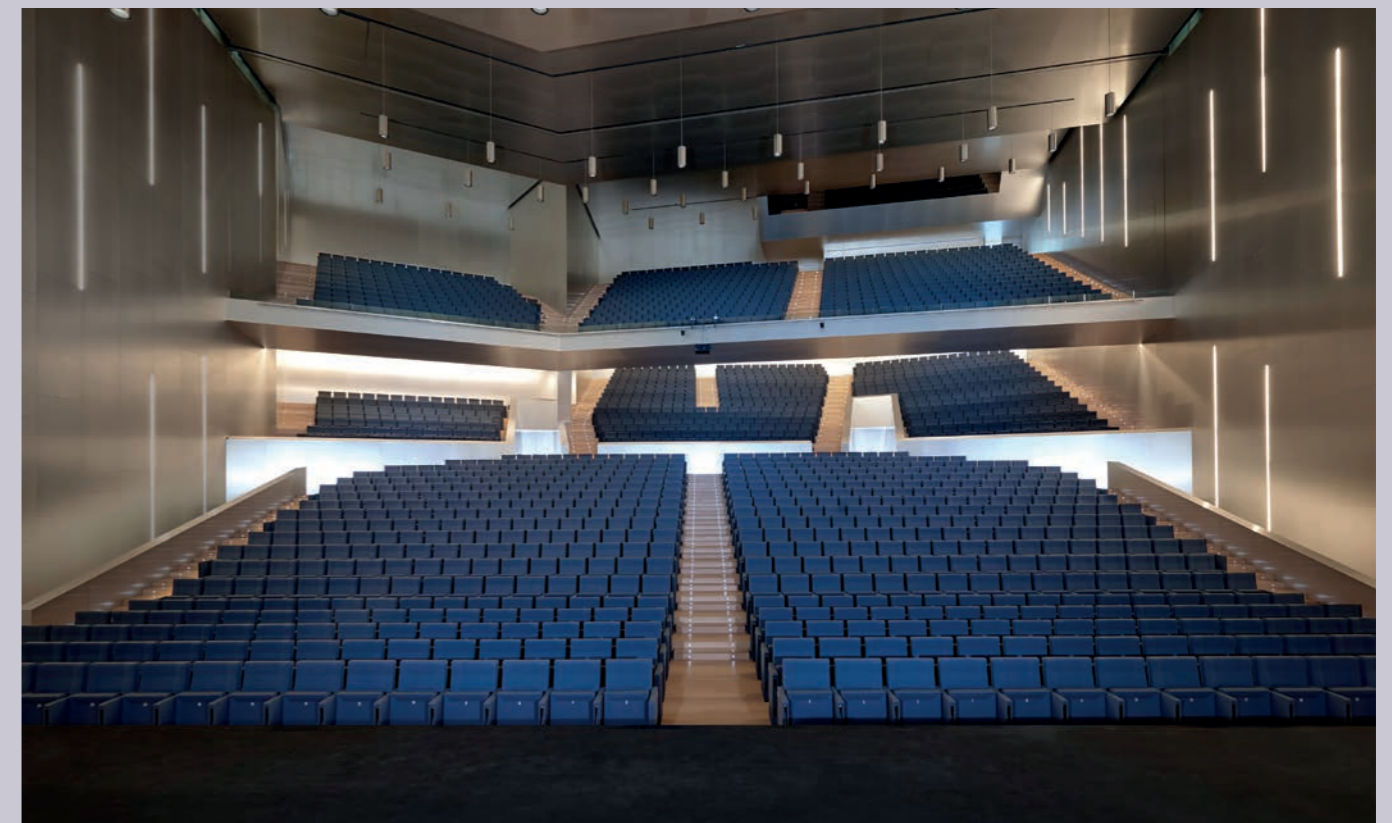
followed by the AUSAPE Forum (the Association of SAP Users in Spain), which attracted 1 220 attendees. In the medical arena, the Convention Centre hosted the National Congress of Paediatric Allergology (SEICAP) and Paediatric Endocrinology (SEEP) in May. In June, it hosted the Annual Meeting of the Heart Failure Association.

A POSITIVE IMPACT

The latter half of the year has continued a positive trajectory, marked by another half dozen congresses that underscore the resurgence of MICE tourism in the city. Notable among them were the 34th Meeting of GEDET (Spanish Group of Aesthetic and Therapeutic Dermatology of the AEDV), the 21st FAME Congress (Spanish Midwives Federation Congress), and the 2nd ABC Congress (Balearic Association of Comares). Additionally, the 53rd Congress of the Spanish Society of Nephrology (SEN), the 12th ASEBIR Congress (Association for the Study of Reproductive Biology), and the Spanish Hoteliers Congress 2023 (CEHAT).

By hosting this diverse array of events, the Palau de Congressos de Palma continues to strengthen its position as a premier venue for the MICE industry. Moreover, it significantly contributes to energising the local economy by generating tourism during the off-peak season. This influx of visitors positively impacts local businesses, hotels, restaurants, and transportation companies, stimulating economic growth and positioning the region as a year-round destination for meetings and events. Beyond economic benefits, these gatherings provide a platform for networking, knowledge exchange, and collaboration among professionals and experts from around the globe. ■

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CALVIÀ FOCUSSES ON MICE TOURISM

It is one of the priorities for the municipality

Calvià has outlined a determined policy to promote MICE tourism, as the municipal area is a perfect destination for meetings, incentives, product presentations, and social events. The various tourist areas in the municipality offer a MICE-oriented offer, providing an excellent alternative to large cities and a sensational opportunity to implement 'bleisure' (business+leisure), one of the major trends in global tourism. Calvià is a globally recognised, cosmopolitan destination with residents from over 100 nationalities, giving international projection to everything that happens in its territory.

80% of the municipality's area consists of natural areas. Calvià is a privileged area in terms of infrastructure, with numerous sports centres, 5 marinas, promenades, 5 golf courses, and leisure centres. In Calvià, you can combine the best of business with the enjoyment of its stunning natural landscapes and a wide range of specialised offerings for MICE groups: gastronomy, sports and outdoor activities, culture, or entertainment. Additionally, it has its own spaces such as multipurpose halls, theatres, as well as accommodations equipped with facilities to host meetings, incentives, congresses, conventions, and events in general.

The different areas comprising the municipality are Illetes, Portals, Palmanova, Magaluf, Santa Ponsa, Puguera, and Calvià village.

CONNECTIVITY

Calvià enjoys privileged accessibility from any point in Europe thanks to its proximity to Palma de Mallorca Airport (20 minutes away) with excellent connections to major European cities.

CLIMATE AND LANDSCAPE

With over 300 sunny days a year and an average annual temperature of 19 degrees, Calvià facilitates the celebration of



all kinds of outdoor events and incentive activities. Calvià offers diverse locations and options to event organisers, who can choose from its 56 kilometres of coastline with 34 beaches and 5 marinas, as well as coastal and mountainous areas.

EVENT INFRASTRUCTURE

The municipal area of Calvià has more than 70 private venues in hotels and estates, as well as 3 large municipal venues that can accommodate events for up to 500 attendees: Sala Palmanova, Sa Societat, and Casal de Puguera, and the public estate of Galatzó with a multifunctional room overlooking the Sierra de Tramuntana.

The municipality has over a hundred four and five-star hotels offering

over 33,000 hotel beds for MICE visitors, accounting for more than half of the total accommodation capacity in the municipal area.

GASTRONOMY

Some of the best restaurants in Mallorca, including Michelin-starred ones, are located within the municipal area of Calvià. Its gastronomic offer allows you to taste everything from the most avant-garde and creative cuisine to the most traditional dishes of Mallorca. ◀



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Asturias Meeting Land

Asturias is committed to establishing itself as a congress destination with its own distinctive brand

Diana Ramón Vilarasau

@dianaramonv

This year, Asturias has unveiled its new brand for MICE tourism (Meetings, Incentives, Conferences, Exhibitions) under the name 'Asturias, Meeting Land.' This initiative is a key component of its strategy to position itself as a hub for business and corporate events, leveraging its attractive tourist offerings, robust infrastructure, organisational capabilities, and a specialised professional network. The goal is to exploit the destination's potential in this model, offering value-added events that boost local economies and diversify and offset the region's tourist activity seasonality. This effort will receive a major boost with the arrival of the High-Speed Train.

READY FOR MICE TOURISM

Asturias boasts exceptional conditions as a destination for conferences, incentives, and meetings, attributed to the quality of its facilities, unique venues, and professional expertise when organising corporate events.

The three main cities in Asturias – the capital Oviedo, Gijón, and Avilés – collectively offer an extensive range of nearly 50 000 meeting room spaces, many of which are located in uniquely designed venues. The 'round triangle' they form can accommodate over 14 000 people.

In addition to their urban areas, more than twenty uniquely themed venues in rural surroundings augment their offerings, creating a well-connected urban-rural blend. The three cities are located within a radius of about thirty kilometres, enabling Asturias to provide numerous complementary experiences involving natural landscapes, culture, and typical food.

Indeed, one of the most ambitious



The Niemeyer cultural centre.

initiatives to establish Asturias as a prominent MICE destination has been the development of the corporate responsibility program 'Enclave de sostenibilidad' ('Sustainability as the Key'). This program offers companies and organisers a catalogue of outdoor experiences to enjoy in close contact with nature, focusing on the conservation of protected wildlife, thereby promoting environmental awareness.

IN RISING DEMAND

In recent months, three Asturian cities have experienced a surge in conference demand, extending even into 2024.

Visita Gijón has unveiled a two-year plan to restructure local tourism and promote the hosting of major corporate events in the city. The objective is to attract large meetings and business trips during periods when there are typi-

cally few tourists. At the end of the year, it successfully hosted a major medical congress, three other corporate events, and others from the healthcare sector. Looking ahead to 2024, the focus is on boosting MICE tourism, with ten bookings already confirmed and another twenty in negotiation. 'Visita Gijón' also targets incentives and meetings for private companies and professional associations.

In December, Avilés hosted large meetings, six exhibitions, and cultural events in its various congress venues.

In the last two months of the year, Oviedo has hosted eight conferences, attracting 150 to 500 participants. These events contribute to offsetting tourism seasonality, injecting vitality into the city during a period when the number of visitors typically experiences a significant decline. ■

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PR

SANTANDER AND CANTABRIA, MICE DESTINATION

The advantages of medium-sized destinations and their sustainability pledge

Santander and Cantabria have reclaimed their position as a premier MICE destination, returning to pre-pandemic activity levels. This achievement can be attributed not only to the normalisation of MICE activities but also to the momentum gained by medium-sized destinations that uphold high standards of quality of life and remain untouched by over-tourism. These destinations are now emerging as preferred MICE choices, offering a perfect balance between existing resources—such as a privileged natural environment with breathtaking landscapes, an exceptional gastronomic scene, and a burgeoning cultural repertoire—and less tangible yet highly valued qualities. These intangibles, deeply intertwined with the concept of sustainability, contribute significantly to the enhanced appeal for MICE clientele.

So, let's focus on these values that not only enhance the appeal but also elevate the competitiveness of these destinations, which is key when choosing the right place for a corporate event.

Slow Life. Diving into the authentic beat of a city and the lifestyle of its inhabitants is effortlessly achievable in cities like Santander and is common at medium-sized, uncrowded destinations. As a result, MICE visitors can truly immerse themselves in an authentic experience, surrendering to a rhythm that is generally more relaxed than the hustle and bustle of big cities. And why not round off a morning session with a traditional vermouth and 'rabas' (battered fried squid) at the iconic Faro de Santander lighthouse?

Something else that contributes to having an authentic destination experience is the region's size, facilitating agile travel and allowing visitors to make the most of their stay. In Cantabria, we can meet at a seaside venue in the morning and, within half an hour, journey to the heart of the verdant Páseos Valleys to relish a traditional mountain stew known as 'cocido montañés'.

Furthermore, let's not forget that things like the high level of security enjoyed by Santander and Cantabria ensure

peace of mind for attendees throughout the course of your event.

Personalisation and commitment, both from public administrations and all professional spheres involved in MICE activities, stand as another hallmark of medium-sized destinations. With a welcoming attitude, a genuine commitment is extended towards the goal and success of events, ensuring that they not only make a lasting impression but also leave a positive impact on the destination.

The prospect of organising events with a sustainable focus is also a noteworthy aspect of our region. Currently, in Cantabria, around twenty destinations, in addition to Santander, have a Tourism Sustainability Plan that includes measures and actions aimed at advancing sustainability, digitalisation, and competitiveness in the tourism sector. MICE organisers can solidify their commitment to social responsibility in our destination by collaborating with local agents and associations that provide opportunities to organise corporate volunteering activities related to the conservation of the natural environment or charitable merchandise. Cantabria's gastronomy is also committed to integrating sustainability, not only through distinctions such as the Michelin Guide's green stars but also by prioritising local products and producers. It offers a wide variety of activities around gastronomy, such as workshops on how to make traditional sponge cakes 'sobaos', sessions to learn the anchovy production process or tastings at artisanal cheese dairies. ■

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- The city is committed to putting technology at the service of the citizens and visitors with more than 20,000 sensors deployed that monitor your status.
- Sustainability is part of this development strategy in Santander at all levels: cultural, environmental and socioeconomic.

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Congress activity generates numerous business opportunities and exerts a significant economic impact on the community

The Basque Country: Leveraging MICE tourism to overcome seasonality and position the destination

The Basque Country is betting on an activity of great interest for the destination, both for its ability to extend the tourist seasons and for the positive image it presents of its cities. Considering the increasing influx of international events to this autonomous community, MICE tourism is consolidating itself as an essential activity to improve its positioning and projection.



The Kursaal has installed photovoltaic solar panels with a design that seamlessly integrates with the aesthetics of the building.

The MICE sector is experiencing an excellent reactivation process in the Basque Country, as highlighted by the **Tourism, Commerce, and Consumption Minister of the Basque Government, Javier Hurtado**. In 2022, there were 1 720 professional events, bringing together 339 912 attendees, still below the 2 025 events held in 2019 before the pandemic. These figures are expected to be surpassed in 2023.

Furthermore, MICE tourism is strengthening its commitment to environmental protection and legacy, i.e. the social and economic benefits that events generate for the destination.

BILBAO, MORE COMMITTED.

As part of its commitment to sustainability, Bilbao continues to climb the ranks among the top 100 international cities as a highly attractive destination for sustainable meeting tourism. In 2023, it secured

A VENUE WHERE ANYTHING IS EXPOSSIBLE!

Bilbao Exhibition Centre is an innovative and versatile venue. Established in 2004, it has proven itself to be a dynamic and innovative space, providing a platform for hosting major events and musical shows. The venue boasts three distinct lines of business: hosting its own fairs, facilitating third-party events, and staging captivating musical shows and sporting events.

In addition to its six-column-free pavilions spanning a total of 150 000 square meters and housing the renowned Bizkaia Arena, the Bilbao Exhibition Centre (BEC) boasts a Convention Centre strategically located above the main entrance. Its adaptability and versatility present countless opportunities to craft spaces tailored to any gathering. The facility features conference rooms and meeting spaces accommodating

anywhere from 20 attendees to a grand conference hosting up to 1 300 people.

With its 4 000 parking spaces (alongside twenty-seven electric vehicle charging points), BEC is strategically positioned: just thirteen kilometres from the airport and a mere ten-minute drive from the heart of Bilbao. Adding to its accessibility, a metro station is conveniently located at its main entrance.

Indeed, the capital of Bizkaia has emerged as a leading city in the events sector, and BEC has played a pivotal role in this growth. The organisation of its own exhibitions, such as the BIEMH International Machine-Tool Exhibition, which holds a strong position among the foremost fairs in its field, has contributed largely to this. Moreover, automotive back-to-back events have prominently featured on BEC's agenda and metro-

politan sphere. Noteworthy among them are the Skoda World Dealer Conference in 2016, the Volkswagen Charge-up Congress in 2019, and the New MAN Truck Generation in 2020.

Renowned industry expos have found a successful home at the Basque venue, leaving an indelible mark on its stellar trajectory. Notable editions include Routes Europe 2018 and Rail Live! 2018-19, WindEurope in 2019, 2022, and 2024, and the World Bank's Innovate-4Climate in 2023 and Intergraf 2023. In the realm of music, a standout moment was the hosting of the 25th edition of the MTV EMA Awards, alongside blockbuster concerts featuring international touring acts. Looking ahead, the venue is set to host other major events such as EHEC 2024, WindEurope 2024, and Enlit 2025. ◀

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The Bilbao Exhibition Centre will host a joint conference organised by the trade fair and congress centre associations in 2024.

the 24th position in the 'Global Destination Sustainability' ranking list, improving by nine positions compared to 2022 and significantly surpassing the 42nd position achieved in 2021, the year it was first included in the list.

In 2024, the city will host major events, with the **Bilbao Exhibition Centre (BEC)** being the venue for the second joint congress of the Spanish Fair Association (**AFE**) and the Congress Palaces Association (**APCE**). Concurrently, the **Euskalduna Palace**, celebrating its 25th anniversary in 2024, is set to host the National Congress of the **Spanish Society of Primary Care Physicians (Semergen)** in October, anticipating the participation of over 5 000 professionals.

SAN SEBASTIÁN, ECONOMIC IMPACT

In 2022, the **Kursaal Congress Centre** hosted 303 events with over 343 000 attendees. It generated a business volume of 4.1 million euros, just 3.7 points below the record achieved in 2019.

In its second full year under Kursaal's management, the **Miramar Palace** recorded 238 events with a total 17 466 attendees. Combining the revenue

from both venues, the business figure reaches 4.8 million euros, and its economic impact on Gipuzkoa is estimated at 50.5 million euros.

In the case of Kursaal, its positive results are attributed to the strong performance of key segments: the cultural sector, featuring a significant number of shows; the marketing of services associated with events (audiovisuals, lighting, communications, technical personnel); and the recovery of congress-related activities.

Forty-six percent of the events hosted were international. One of the milestones was the International Conference on Ocean Energy & Ocean Energy Europe 2022 (ICOE-OEE), the world's leading event on ocean energies, which brought together 700 professionals.

In 2023, the revival of the sector intensified. In the first six months of the year, the Kursaal Congress Centre and the Miramar Palace hosted twelve conferences, six of which were international, in addition to seventy-six sessions, three fairs, and thirty-six meetings. This is a similar number of events to the first half of 2019.

After a cumulative investment of 2.1 million euros in improvements from 2020 to 2022, in 2023, Kursaal allocated 185 000 euros to installing photovoltaic solar panels on its roof. This project was partially funded by the European Union's Next Generation EU initiative. With a capacity of up to 258 kW, the centre will generate its own electricity, reducing its dependence on external energy sources.

VITORIA, A NEW STRATEGY

In the first nine months of 2023, the **Europa Conference & Exhibition Centre** and **Villa Suso Palace**, the main meeting centres in Vitoria-Gasteiz, gathered over 71 000 attendees. Their projection is to end the year with figures similar to 2022 when they recorded around 350 events.

In its effort to attract events, **Vitoria-Gasteiz Turismo & Convention Bureau** is enhancing its social media presence and has recently launched a **LinkedIn** profile. This professional social network has become increasingly significant for organisations promoting cities as prime destinations for professional meetings. ■



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Enhanced connectivity fuels the growth of the MICE segment in the Murcia Region

Taiana **González**

@taianahosteltur



The Murcia Auditorium and Congress Centre obtained the Sseal for Sustainability in 2022. Picture: Auditorio Victor Villegas.

In 2024, the Region of Murcia is poised to ascend as a prominent international MICE destination, thanks to the introduction of new air routes to Madrid and Barcelona, coupled with reinforced rail connectivity. The demand for distinctive venues and the region's complimentary proposals encompassing gastronomy, nature, and wellness are anticipated to elevate its standing in the MICE segment even further

Meetings, Incentives, Conferences, and Exhibitions (MICE) Tourism is a key focus in the Region of Murcia's **Strategic Tourism Plan for 2022-2032** due to its ability to mitigate seasonality, drive employment, and enhance the region's reputation as a high-quality destination. The post-pandemic efforts are yielding results, with the current volume of activity surpassing 2019 levels, affirming the solidification of this segment. Looking ahead to 2024, positive prospects are on the horizon, thanks to strengthened air and rail connectivity—crucial elements propelling the region onto the global MICE map.

MICE TRAVELLERS

Insights from the Strategic Tourism Plan for 2022-2032 reveal that sixty percent of business tourists visiting the Region of Murcia are under the age of forty-five. They travel mainly in private vehicles (66.4 percent) or by plane (seventeen percent), opt for 4-star hotel

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Visit Región de Murcia



The region presents an array of experiences with a catalogue featuring one hundred and one ways to enjoy the destination. Picture Itrem.

Murcia is gearing up for a project that will expand its portfolio of unique locations, introducing new spaces under regional ownership

accommodations, stay an average of three days, and spend around 165 euros per day. The MICE segment represents 9.4 percent of total expenditure in the Region, second only to sun and sand and golf tourism.

THE REGION'S TOP FIVE DESTINATIONS

The Region of Murcia boasts five destinations with top-notch infrastructures and services for MICE tourism. In the lead are Murcia and Cartagena, having hosted a combined total of 142 congresses and events in 2023, attracting approximately 45 000 attendees. Águilas, Lorca, and Mar Menor-La Manga are the other three emerging destinations, and they are steadily gaining prominence, aligning with the evolving preferences of organisers and the quest for novel venues for meetings and events. The program for 2023 has been characterised by "a diversity of formats and the inclusion of events that blend in-person and online participation, featuring programs incorporating virtual interventions,"

The Region of Murcia has signed agreements with MICE entities and associations to promote and showcase the resources they offer

as outlined by the **Murcia Region Tourism Institute (Itrem)**. "There has been a notable uptick in the hosting of congresses and conferences in distinctive private and municipal venues," they further note.

While specific figures for 2024 have not been solidified, Itrem expresses confidence in surpassing the number of events hosted in 2023.

MORE LEAD TIME AND THE QUEST FOR SUSTAINABILITY

Overcome the fears and uncertainties stemming from the pandemic, 2023 witnessed "a stabilisation of demand" and "an increase in the lead time for the organisation of events". Another shift has been increased corporate events, potentially attributed to enhanced rail connections, notably the introduction of the AVE high-speed train from Madrid. Within the realm of association events, there is a growing demand for smaller venues catering to meetings with no more than two hundred attendees. Moreover, there is a noticeable "spe-

cial interest from clients to understand the sustainability criteria applicable to the organisation of their event." Distinguished in this aspect, Murcia proudly boasts the first conference centre in Spain to secure the "S" seal for tourism sustainability, awarded by **the Institute for Tourism Quality**. This recognition positions the venue as actively contributing to advancing the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) outlined in the 2030 Agenda.

DISTINCTIVE VENUES

The region can cater for over 7 000 people across nearly thirty halls housed in the four conference centres in Murcia, Cartagena, Águilas, and Lorca. Additionally, one hundred other venues are available at different types of hotels.

But if companies and organisers want to distinguish their events with a blend of style and exclusivity, the Region offers a plethora of distinctive venues. These range from locations nestled in the heart of Murcia's orchards and esteemed civil buildings to archaeological and historical sites in Cartagena. The options extend to wineries, theatres, and churches transformed into cultural centres, castles, and museums.

NEW FEATURES THAT ENHANCE THE MICE SEGMENT

In the Region of Murcia, according to the 2022-2032 Plan, over ninety percent of the demand for MICE and business tourism is currently driven by Spanish residents. However, the introduction of new air connections with Madrid and Barcelona, the country's primary hubs, is anticipated to be a key factor in positioning the destination more prominently within the international market.

Until September, Volotea will offer 340 flights and 57 000 seats on Madrid-Murcia and Barcelona-Murcia routes.

Representatives from **Itrem** state that these new routes project a surge in the influx of both domestic and international tourists while simultaneously giving corporate and business travel a dynamic boost. Rail connectivity will also be improved because Renfe will launch Avlo, a low-cost, high-speed service connecting Madrid and Murcia. **Ouigo** is expected to operate on the same route by the year 2024.

The introduction of these novel features is set to enhance the appeal of the Region of Murcia as a premier destination for events, congresses, fairs, and exhibitions. ◀

MICE EXTREMADURA CONVENTION BUREAU

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What do a photographer from Oregon, on the west coast of the USA and an Indian biologist have in common?

Both attended two top-level events held in Extremadura in 2023. The first took part in the meeting of the American Society of Travel Writers, an association of 1 000 content creators, journalists, and photographers from the USA and Canada, which, for the first time, chose Spain for its annual meeting—the second attended the European Congress on Vulture Conservation, bringing together 400 specialists from 45 countries.

These are just two examples of Extremadura's ability to attract international conferences, incentive trips, and corporate events.

This autonomous community has modernised and extended its MICE tourism value chain and created the MICE Extremadura Convention Bureau product club.

Exclusive accommodations have been inaugurated in both urban and rural settings, designed to cater to the most demanding customers. Among this new offering are hotels such as Casa Palacio Paredes-Saavedra in Cáceres, owned by Toño Pérez and José Polo, owners of the Atrio Hotel and Restaurant; Desconecta2 and La Dehesa de Don Pedro in Monesterio; Hábitat Cigüeña Negra in Sierra de Gata, as well as two innovative proposals that have been declared 'singular accommodations' by the Extremadura Regional Government: El Jardín de las Delicias and Glamping El Regajo, both in the Jerte Valley.

In recent years, joining those already existing in Badajoz, Cáceres, and Mérida, two new conference centres have been added to the offering in Plasencia and Villanueva de la Serena.

Additionally, iconic spaces have also been opened, such as the Helga de Alvear Museum in Cáceres, which has already become a landmark for contemporary art in Spain.



Badajoz Conference Centre.



Hábitat Cigüeña Negra.

At the same time, there has been an increase in professionals and specialised companies offering activities such as bird and star watching, active tourism, and olive oil tourism.

Extremadura's gastronomy has taken a qualitative leap forward with a third Michelin star for Atrio in Cáceres and maintaining the first for Versátil in Zarza de Granadilla, not to mention other establishments that have earned or renewed their recognitions in the most prestigious guides. In this regard, the first green Michelin star for Hábitat Cigüeña Negra is worth noting for its commitment to sustainability.

The establishment of the MICE Extremadura Convention Bureau product club has marked a turning point for the region. It brings together over one hundred

members from both the public and private sectors, collaborating to ensure any event's success and promote Extremadura in national and international markets.

Travellers, like the American photographer and the Indian biologist, can enjoy authentic and unique experiences from vulture watching in the Monfragüe National Park to a safari through the dehesa to discover the origin of the acorn-fed Iberian ham, the only product of its kind in the world. ◀



Extremadura

+ info
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Andalucía flourishes as a premier destination for major international events and B2B activities

Ángeles Vargas

@angelesvargaspe

Andalucía's steadfast commitment to this segment will materialise in 2024 with the implementation of a new strategic plan for a more comprehensive management approach. This plan aims to attract major events, categorise their offerings, and maintain constant connectivity with the sector through meetings organised by **Andalucía MICE Experts**. Furthermore, the strategy to attract B2B events in the region is solidifying, reinforcing the destination's positioning, and fostering business opportunities for the specialised Andalusian business sector, as indicated by **Turismo Andaluz** to HOSTELTUR.

The **Malaga Congress and Trade Fair Centre (Fycma)** will conclude 2023 "with a more international calendar, a greater share of professional events, and a clear commitment as an organiser to fostering innovative ecosystems through specialised trade fairs and forums. This aligns seamlessly with Malaga's leadership in this field," explains the

venue. Celebrating its twentieth anniversary in 2023, Fycma has firmly established itself as the preferred congress venue in southern Europe. Since its opening in 2003, over 2 280 organisers worldwide have placed their trust in FYCMA.

Moreover, Fycma is diversifying and strengthening its specialised management role in providing services for other organisers, as exemplified in October with the EU Industry Days, an event promoted by the **European Commission** and held for the first time not in Brussels. The outlook for 2024 foresees continued occupancy and the hosting of high-quality events, such as the European Convention of **IAGTO**.

Meanwhile, the **Congress and Exhibition Centre of Sevilla (Fibes)** concluded 2022 with a direct impact of 182.5 million euros, welcoming 844 000 visitors. In the first half of 2023, Fibes had already welcomed 260 000 visitors, generating revenues of 57 million euros, increasing by four percent, and this

period kicked off with the Goya Awards Gala. Looking ahead to 2024, the budget of the **City Council of Sevilla** plans a capital increase of 4.3 million euros for Contursa, Sevilla's Congress and Tourism Association.

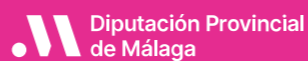
At the provincial level, the **Sevilla Congress & Convention Bureau (SCCB)** has announced that the destination has, for the first time, secured a position in the Top fifty of the ICCA ranking. New venues such as Exploraterra, Factoría Cruzcampo, Hacienda Guzmán, Hacienda La Soledad, Feeling Sevilla, and Alabardero River Club have also been added to their portfolio.

On a different note, the **Granada Congress Centre** ends 2023, having welcomed over 300 000 attendees to 221 events, generating a revenue of fifty million euros. Meanwhile, the **Córdoba Congress Centre** has analysed its impact since 2018, during which it has contributed 27.3 million euros to the city with 512 congresses and exhibitions, attended by more than 237 000 participants. ■



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