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# The Structure of the Meetings and Events Industry

## This chapter covers:

- The value of meetings
- Meetings terminology
- Classification of meetings
- Segmentation of demand for meetings

Meetings of all kinds – from international conferences and summits for several thousand delegates to board meetings, training seminars and team-building events for smaller groups of colleagues – are playing an increasingly important role in the business, intellectual, political and cultural life of communities worldwide. Demand for meetings comes from a wide variety of sources including all types of businesses, governments, academics, and the vast range of associations, clubs, federations and interest groups that bring together people with a common interest, from a shared profession to a hobby/sport/leisure pursuit enjoyed by the members.

In order to meet this escalating demand for such gatherings, there has been considerable investment in meetings facilities in all regions of the world over recent years. Cities and resorts worldwide have spent vast sums of money constructing purpose-built conference centres or renovating existing facilities. The global hotel industry has also recognised the importance to its profitability of hosting and servicing meetings, and has expanded its offer in this area; and an increasing

number of residential conference centres are available in universities and colleges. There is also a rapidly increasing number of 'unusual venues' being promoted as places where meetings may be held. Unusual venues are based in establishments that have a primary function that is not directly linked to the hospitality/meetings industry. These include cultural venues (museums, cinemas, theatres, etc.), sports venues (football stadia, racecourses, cricket grounds, etc) and tourist attractions such as historic monuments, castles, zoos and aquaria, and theme parks). In *The Future of Booking Venues* by Eades and Brewerton for the UK's Hotel Booking Agency Association, Tim Chudley, Managing Director of the Sundial Group of venues is quoted as saying:

The past 10 years as a period of time has seen most notably the massive increase in supply. It does seem now that every type of location is hoping to tap into the meetings and conferences market as a secondary revenue stream. Competition can now be found in the form of stadia, museums, tourist attractions and, in one village close to one of our properties, the village shop promoting 'meeting rooms'.

Venues of all types play a vital role in the hosting of the great variety of meetings and events that take place in destinations worldwide, and this makes them key stakeholders in the meetings industry. This chapter examines the structure of the industry, but begins with a review of the value of meetings to the destinations and venues that host them and to the people who initiate them and attend them.

## The value of meetings

The different types of value arising from the hosting of meetings and events may be divided into two categories: the tourism-related benefits and the non-tourism related benefits.

### ■ Tourism benefits

In terms of the tourism benefits, those attending meetings fill hotel bedrooms, seats on aircraft and other forms of transport, and places at restaurant tables; and their spending can extend into local shops as well as entertainment and leisure facilities. More than that, travel for the

purpose of attending meetings often represents the high-quality, high-yield end of the tourism spectrum, with corporate meetings in particular creating demand for premium seats on trains and planes, and the higher categories of hotel accommodation.

In addition, meetings attendance is generally an all-year-round activity even if demand tends to dip in the summer months. In this sense, the seasonality pattern for meetings-related travel complements that of leisure-related tourism, which for many destinations and hospitality businesses peaks in the summer months. Moreover, meetings tend to be scheduled during the working week, again providing complementarity with the leisure market, which generally focuses on weekends.

Finally, the tourism industry benefits from meetings whenever participants in such events take one or more of these actions:

- Come accompanied by family members or friends who make use of the tourism attractions of the destination
- Extend their business trip for leisure-related purposes, by arriving some days before the meeting and/or staying on a few days after the meeting, in effect turning the trip into a holiday
- Return to the meetings destination, with friends or family, for leisure purposes, motivated by the experience of their trip to the same destination in order to attend a meeting.

## ■ **Non-tourism benefits**

The non-tourism related benefits take the following forms:

- Many cities have invested in meetings facilities, such as flagship conference centres, as an element of plans to regenerate urban areas in need of re-development. From Glasgow and Philadelphia to Cape Town and Dublin, large-scale meetings facilities have been built as a means of bringing prosperity and animation back into previously neglected parts of those cities.
- More intangibly, the fact of hosting a conference, in particular an international event, can be a source of pride and prestige for the city or country where the conference takes place, as well as a means of creating an image or brand for itself, in the international community of nations.

Tony Rogers makes the point well in his book, *Conferences and Conventions: 'There is undoubted prestige in being selected to host a major international conference, and some less developed countries would see this as a way of gaining credibility and acceptance on the international political stage'. For example, there can be little doubt that national pride and image-building were factors behind Yugoslavia (as it then still was) offering to host the 1979 International Monetary Fund conference, and building a new venue, the Sava Centar in Belgrade, specifically for that event.*

In a 2009 briefing paper released by the global peak body of the meetings industry, the Joint Meetings Industry Council, entitled 'Key Messages for the Meetings Industry', a wide range of benefits derived from business events were identified. Apart from the more obvious economic impacts generated as a result of delegate expenditure, the benefits listed in this paper that "are critical to the business, scientific, professional, educational and cultural life and development of a community" were:

- Meetings attract investment by attracting an often influential audience of participants, and creating opportunities for showcasing local products, services, and investment opportunities.
- Meetings enhance professional development by bringing regional and international expertise into the community, where it is accessible to local professionals.
- Meetings enhance science and technology, which helps generate new forms of technology itself, improves understanding and access to it, and helps improve local knowledge and skills by bringing outside information and technology into the host community and providing a vehicle for local businesses and professionals to access the latest developments in their respective fields.
- Meetings promote cultural exchange by providing new forums for cultural exchange and new opportunities to expose local culture to national and international audiences.

Elaborating upon the third of the JMIC impacts listed above, Jago and Deery, in their publication, *Delivering Innovation, Knowledge and Performance: The Role of Business Events*, focused on the potential of