



Meeting trends for 2015

What does the guest want?

For 2015, several trends and developments have already been projected. The locations as well as the meeting and event planners should heed these forecasts, if they wish to continue to organize successful meetings for satisfied clients.

It appears that a number of demands that have been drawing more and more attention in the past, have now finally been met. One of the trends – it is impossible to ignore it – is sustainability. In the future, this aspect will gain more and more importance in selecting a location. One way to make meetings more sustainable, is to organize hybrid meetings, which necessitates provisions for digital interaction like connections for webcams.

A sustainability-related trend is the focus on health. In their daily life, guests increasingly pay attention to making responsible choices when it comes to food; more and more often, they also demand that this is also a concern during meetings. And this is not just about substituting sweet and savoury sins like cookies and fries with healthy, nutritious alternatives, but also about the effect of healthy food on body and mind. In choosing the ingredients, the location should take into the account the seasons and use high-quality ingredients of which the origin can be determined. Biological catering appears to be the solution to this problem. When a location is then also situated in a rural surroundings, the healthy, sustainable image is even more enhanced.

Service

Although it seems that sustainability is here to stay, there is one aspect that will always play the leading role: the price-quality ratio. As a consequence, the importance of

transparency increases, and this will cause an increase in all inclusive arrangements. Clients prefer to know immediately what the figure will be on the price tag, and not be unpleasantly surprised by additional costs after the event. The demand for transparency is also evident in other aspects of the selection process. Potential clients want to check the availability and be able to get an impression of the location by viewing a presentation. An aspect that greatly influences the ratio between price and quality, is the service offered. From the very first contact moment, this service must be good; a quick and appropriate response, proactive assistance and a customer-friendly attitude constitute the foundation for a positive assessment, and cause the client to actually choose for a certain location. This service and commitment must also be maintained during the meeting. It may be that locations find themselves forced to attract staff with a higher level of training, and to include special products in the menu. It is also important for locations to gain more knowledge about their guests and their target groups, and to reach their target groups by means of a tailor-made marketing strategy. And do not forget to adequately react to good and bad reviews, because these days, an opinion posted on social media is quickly disseminated to a very large audience.

Surprise

So sustainability and service are important, but the location itself must also be 'spot on'. A badly maintained or dated interior can cause a client to back out immediately, even if the conversation on the telephone was very pleasant indeed. A good accessibility by public transport and sufficient parking places are also practical demands that can not be ignored. And if the rooms are dirty, the beds uncomfortable or the room has a deafening noise level, a client will never return. A location must add something to the meeting and preferably be original and distinctive, so that the guests will be surprised and their curiosity is roused. Partly because of this wish, more and more locations enter the MICE market. If in the old days, the choice was limited to mainly hotels and a few castles, these days you can have meetings in a boiler room, have a party in a granary, or hold a presentation in a historic farmhouse.

Connected society

RAI Amsterdam is also spotting trends. Late 2014, the location published the RAI Insights trend report 'Hoe zijn evenementen veranderd in 2017' (How events will be changed in 2017). This report states that in 2017, events will be different from what they are now as a result of the





changing demands of the guests and the way they make contact. They form, as it were, a connected society. The online and offline sharing of information before, during and after meetings, for instance, becomes more and more common. Also because of this, it is essential for stakeholders to monitor the way guests participate in a meeting, how they experience it and contribute to its proceedings. What is more, the number of intercontinental visitors to international meetings is increasing. These visitors expect a combination of international standards and local elements. A third trend is the changing dominant culture, in which, among other elements, authenticity, sustainability and meaningful experiences are gaining importance and business and leisure are more and more combined.

Transition

According to this report, parties in the MICE industry would act wisely if they responded actively to these trends. The most important trend is the transition of a meeting, formerly mainly considered a way of getting people together, into a value-creating gathering as a physical meeting is combined with online possibilities. The physical getting together remains essential, virtual applications create an additional enrichment and added value. That is why it becomes of vital importance for professionals in the

industry to invest in the added value as well as in the resultative impact of the meeting.

It is possible to use several elements to create an added value for visitors of physical meetings. The trend report mentions, among other elements, the role of a meeting as a matchmaker before, during and after the event, the enhancement of the positive experience by means of technologies like holograms, as well as the use of robots. A dedicated program for the virtual visitors also contributes to the experience of the (online) guests. A personal conference or event program with a personal routing, or virtual bag the guests can fill themselves with goodies of their own choice, make sure that a meeting can be experienced at an individual level.

In order to better meet the demands of visitors of conferences, events and other meetings, it is essential for locations and clients to keep a close watch on the market, monitor the developments and, especially, seek the collaboration with other parties. According to the RAI, co-creation is the key element in this. Might it be a good idea to finally really contact those relations via the online rolodex LinkedIn? ■