



VisitDenmark 

OUT OF THE ORDINARY:

Getting more impact from
meetings and events

More than just meetings

In today's events world, there's little room for 'ordinary'. *C&IT* recently partnered with VisitDenmark to survey 80 event professionals about how they're delivering impactful meetings and events in 2023. The results suggest that, now more than ever,

planners are looking to maximise the value of face-to-face time in a post-pandemic working landscape where many co-workers are meeting in person less frequently. That means going the extra mile to make every meeting an extraordinary, authentic and

bonding experience. And while some M&E activities are as popular as ever (hello, wine-tasting!), new priorities – such as social impact – are gaining ground. Read on to discover some of the top trends and get plenty of inspiration for your next event.



Photo credit: Mitch Wiesinger Location: Copenhagen Harbour

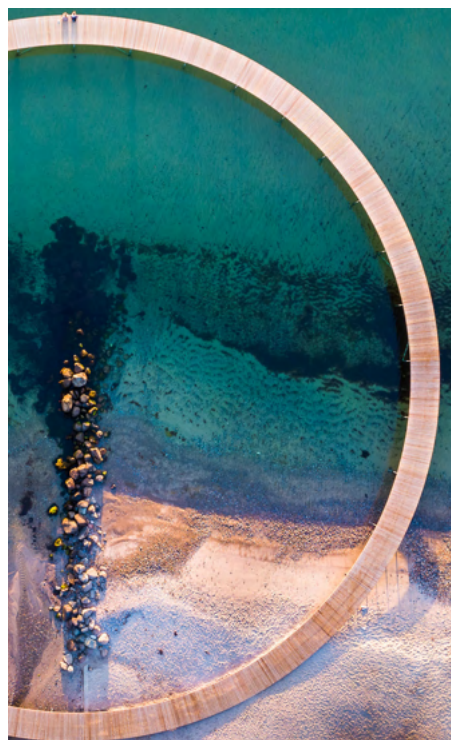


Photo credit: Dennis Borup Jacobsen Location: The Infinite Bridge – Johan Gløde

“Now that working from home is the new normal for many, employees who usually only see each other on screen want to feel a sense of connection”

Pedro Montoya Navarro, head of international MICE at Idéa Nordic

Key findings

- **Out of the ordinary:** Nine out of ten event professionals feel that adding an extraordinary experience to their business event is either desirable or essential; and more than half prefer to book meeting venues in extraordinary settings.
- **Team tactics:** For most, the primary advantage of including incredible extra-curricular activities is helping attendees get to know each other and bond as a team, rather than as a reward.
- **Thinking local and global:** Authentic, local experiences and environmentally socially conscious events are overtaking luxury on the events agenda. Giving back to the community was of middling importance for most, but one-in-ten now consider it a priority; and more than two thirds consider sustainable venues to be appealing or highly appealing.
- **What's on the wishlist:** Outdoor experiences are no longer the priority they were emerging from the post-pandemic, but are still a 'nice to have'.



Photo credit: Martin Halberg Location: Østergade

Making events extraordinary

Mundane meetings are increasingly not an option. Our survey found that the majority of event professionals (90%) like to incorporate an element of the extraordinary into every opportunity to meet and do business. As one respondent put it, “Unique experiences create permanent memories, and an ability to look on the other side of your own limited horizon.”

More than two fifths (43%) say they wouldn't consider booking a meeting without something extra supplementing the business agenda, and nearly half (48%) report that such experiences were a nice-to-have. However, 33% say they'd be the first to be cut if the budget doesn't

stretch, while 15% say they mustn't take up too much time.

Pedro Montoya Navarro, head of international MICE at Idéa Nordic, a creative DMC and event agency based in Denmark, says that events have to work harder than ever post-pandemic. “Over the past few years, we've learned that meetings can be done from anywhere – so why travel to talk to someone about strategy, when you could do that remotely?”

There definitely should be an add-on experience – and what that is will depend on the company and its needs. Now that working from home is the new normal for many, employees who usually only see each other on screen want to feel a sense of connection.”

43%

say they wouldn't consider booking a meeting without something extra

90%

say they'd like to incorporate an element of the extraordinary into every meeting





Getting the balance right

So how much of a corporate event should be devoted to a unique and extraordinary experience? Most felt this element should be substantial. For 37.5%, it should take up between a quarter and half of the total event time. For around a third (34%), the unique experience should even be more of a focus, comprising between half and three quarters of the event. Most still want time to cover the fundamentals of doing business, but only 6% want the unique element to take up more than three quarters of attendees' time.

Respondents report a variety of benefits from incorporating extraordinary experiences, but the most important relate to helping attendees bond as a team. Two thirds (66%) say they help the team get to know each other better, while 58% say they can help merge teams in a way an office meeting can't. Other popular reasons for adding an experience are as a treat for the team (50%), and to challenge perspectives and fuel creativity (45%).

Photo credit: Sophia Barghoim Location: The Circle Bridge

Choosing the right venues

When it comes to venue selection, the most popular option among event professionals is for meeting venues in an extraordinary setting, with 53% rating this as extremely appealing. A slightly less sought-after option is meeting rooms in close proximity to unique experiences (43% rated this as appealing).

Navarro believes it's important to be able to offer meeting spaces that can themselves spark conversation and creativity. "Here in Denmark, we're lucky to have many historic castles, which could be straight out of a Hans Christian Andersen fairytale, and definitely deliver on 'wow-factor'. But we also have many unique and futuristic venues that can inspire visitors. In Copenhagen, for example, there's CopenHill – a green energy plant with a dry ski slope on the roof, where you can take your group skiing year-round, then take a behind-the-scenes tour of its sustainable design. Or The Krane, a former industrial crane that has been transformed into an event space for small groups, you can meet in a boardroom high above the harbour."

Meanwhile, sustainable venues also rank highly on the majority of respondents' wishlists: they are ranked as extremely appealing by 34%, and appealing by a similar number (33%).

"The time of fluffy green promises has passed, with customers and venue bookers now demanding tangible and transparent change," notes Christian Folden Lund, CEO of Bellagroup (see panel, right).

It's a view echoed by Susanne Schweda, senior producer at INVNT, who reports that thinking of ways to keep overall event carbon footprint low is now standard practice.

"Our clients' mindsets are shifting further towards implementing sustainable options to tell holistic brand stories and deliver great experiences to their audiences."



Case study: Pioneering green venues at Bellagroup

It's not enough for venues to pay lip service to green issues – they must start embedding sustainability into everything they do. That's the ethos at one of the leading names in the Danish conferencing, hotel and hospitality industry, Bellagroup.

Take the group's pioneering eco-hotel Crowne Plaza Copenhagen Towers, built in 2009 ahead of the COP15 summit: "With integrated façade solar panels, a revolutionary ground-water heating and cooling system, and many intelligently up-cycled building materials, the hotel was awarded the World's Greenest in the past year," says Bellagroup CEO Christian Folden Lund.

Fast-forward to 2023, and it's still picking up awards. "In January, those same initiatives helped us achieve a HSMIA Europe [Hospitality Sales and Marketing Association International] Sustainability Award for key environmental and social accomplishments. Talk about green venue projects having true impact in the long run!"

Advances are also in the pipeline at one of Scandinavia's biggest conferencing venues: "We are utilising the vast urban dead space of the roof at Bella Center Copenhagen to construct the largest roof-integrated solar park on the entire island of Zealand," says Folden Lund. "It is already one of Europe's most ambitious congress centres when it comes to integrating environmental considerations and social sustainability into its production. But with the solar park, we take a very concrete and measurable step in a greener and cleaner direction."



Photo credit (bottom): David Zauverl Location: The Krane Photo credit (top right): Astrid Maria Rasmussen Location: CopenHill

Experiences that matter

What kind of away-from-the-meeting-room experiences are events professionals opting for?

Easily the most popular choice (for 83%) is authentic, local cultural experiences, while the second most popular option are CSR and environmentally friendly activities (58%). The third choice – luxury experiences, such as fine dining (54%) – just nudged outdoor experiences (48.8%) out of the top three.

Similarly, 63% said that learning about and engaging with the local culture was a key component of a business trip. Thoughtfully planned events that take full advantage of a destination are more of a priority than simply booking the most expensive option.

“Working with local suppliers that reflect the country’s culture and tradition has been key when I’ve organised events with an international audience,” says Hay

Tang, senior project coordinator at brand experience agency Owl Live. “We want to avoid delegates feeling like they are attending an event that could be anywhere in

the world when so much thought has been put into choosing an amazing location, and many of the delegates have travelled long distances. Bringing in local food, entertainment and design adds authenticity and personality to an event, making it much more memorable.”

“More and more, clients want experiences that they cannot just do by themselves,” adds Navarro. “Here in Denmark, everyone wants a picture with the Little Mermaid statue, and we get that. But we try to take visitors beyond the conventional, and give them a real experience of the culture. If they’re interested in history, I might take them to a restored Viking village to find out what Viking life was really like. Spoiler: they didn’t wear horned hats!”

63%

say engaging with the local culture was a key component of a business trip



Photo credit: Peter Salomon Location: G.A.S.A

“We try to take visitors beyond the conventional, and give them a real experience of the culture”

Photo credit: Kim Wyon Location/credit: Your Rainbow Panorama, Claes Elisson, 2006 - 2011, ARoS Aarhus Art Museum



Fantastic food and drink

When it comes to food and drink, giving groups the chance to unwind over a decent tipple is widely welcomed! The single most popular food and drink activity with those surveyed is visiting local distilleries, breweries and vineyards (favoured by 78%).

The second most popular option, for more than two thirds (68%), is sustainable dining initiatives, while in joint third place (with 63% apiece), came unusual food experiences and experiencing local cuisine. These just edged out food experiences in connection to team building (58%) out of the top three.

As Navarro notes, with a bit of creativity, it's possible to combine many of these elements in one event: "For years, we've had the world's top-rated restaurants in Denmark, but we also like to offer more unique and immersive experiences as well. Why not get your group to cook a meal together, trained by a Michelin-starred chef, or host a private dinner for them after-hours in a museum? Or Cykelkokken is a kitchen on a bike: your group will explore the city by bike, stopping in different locations for your cycling chef to cook five gourmet dinner courses."

"Fewer clients just want to sit down at a dinner and chat," he adds. "Because they don't meet so much at the office, when they're together, they want to get as much networking in as possible."

78%

say they favoured visiting local distilleries, breweries and vineyards

Case study: A taste of the authentic

As our survey showed, wineries, breweries and distilleries remain as popular as ever with event professionals, and offer the chance to sample local culture that so many are looking for. And these days, it's not just the traditional wine and beer-making countries that are well-placed to quench delegates' thirst.

Scandinavia might not be the first place you associate with wine making – yet Denmark has a flourishing wine scene that reflects its wider reputation for world-class, sustainably sourced food and drink. "It's a curious and surprising fact that Denmark is dotted with wineries," says David Tholander of VisitDenmark.

For a truly local tipple, Cold Hand Winery offers private wine tastings and gourmet dining for groups surrounded by orchards and countryside near Randers, Jutland. Its distinctly Danish fruit wines are made with locally sourced produce, including apples, pears, cherries, blackcurrants, plums, currants, blackberries, quinces and rhubarb. Or arrange a guided tour and tasting at Guldback Vingaard just south of Aalborg, North Jutland – it is one of the northernmost vineyards in the world and home to the award winning 56° North wines.

For those who prefer beer, head to microbrewery To Øl (Two Beers) City in Svinnige, Zealand, which welcomes groups for tours and tastings of its varied selection of craft beers and beverages – including 'wild ales' using botanicals from its kitchen garden and local honey. Or for something rather stronger, Nyborg Distillery produces organic whisky, gin and rum from historical workshops on the harbourside in Nyborg, on the island of Fyn. Groups can take a tour between its copper kettles and wooden whisky casks to discover the secrets of distilling, before enjoying a top-notch lunch in the on-site organic restaurant.



Photo credit & Location: Cold Hand Winery

Photo credit (left): Columbus Leth Location: Aamanns
Photo credit (right): NaturPisk Group Location: Nyborg Distillery

Making an impact

10%

say giving back to the local community was extremely important

Not everyone in the events world is on the same page when it comes to whether a business event should 'give back' to the local community. For the largest percentage (around 22%), giving back was of middling importance. Yet, more than one-in-ten now rate this as extremely important, showing that a more socially-conscious approach is firmly on the radar for some, if not all, of the industry.

This was reflected by respondents' individual comments on the social impact of events. One noted: "As sustainability becomes more important, we can see this increasing, but at this point, it doesn't seem very important." For many others,

however, giving back is definitely a concern. As one put it, "[Giving back] is so important as it leaves lasting memories that often foster stronger relationships."

Meanwhile, client demand is also driving more socially and environmentally responsible events. "At INVNT, we're observing an increasing trend of clients contributing to initiatives such as the UN Sustainable Development Goals, that are implemented through CSR activities at global scale or giving back to the host community directly," says Susanne Schweda. "Budget and the type of event seem to play a role in regard to how strongly CSR aspects will be prioritised."

Tracking success

How are event professionals tracking the outcomes of incorporating unique experiences into meetings? Attendee surveys and feedback forms remain the most popular way to measure effectiveness and ROI. One respondent found it valuable to carry out systematic follow-ups, seeking "long-term reflection on the value of the meeting, measured one week, one month, three months and six months" on. Others were monitoring social media activity around the event, such as delegates sharing photos and other assets.

Photo credit: Thomas Hoyrup Christensen Location: Hanne Kirkeby Kro

Outside the box

Outdoor experiences are now seen as a nice-to-have, rather than the priority they were in the immediate wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. Around 27% rated them of middling importance, with one respondent commenting that going al fresco was “important, but far less of a focus now”.

Yet, many respondents commented on the benefits of “a change of environment” and “getting people into nature” (despite reservations about arranging weather-dependent events). As one respondent put it: “We like outdoor activities because we’re so often all stuck inside. We want to see the beauty of the destination, feel it and smell it.”

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Photo credit: Scripta, Bergholm Location: Supendillen

Case study: Launching the Volkswagen ID. Buzz

To launch its latest electric car to the media and bloggers, Volkswagen looked for a location with great green credentials, a playful spirit and plenty of interesting scenery. Copenhagen was their chosen destination for the multi-venue launch, with ID. Buzz vehicles popping up outside venues, on quaysides and even rooftops around the city. Venue partners included the ultra-modern Green Key-certified Huone conference centre; Kajakhotellet, Denmark’s largest kayaking centre, with its panoramic sea views; and stylish harbour-side design restaurant Nærvær.

“We chose Copenhagen because the city exactly reflects the world of the ID. Buzz,” says a Volkswagen spokesperson, adding that “the sustainability factor played a major role. Copenhagen sets exactly the right signals, and we tried to convey this spirit to our guests with our partners hotels, restaurants etc. The city of Copenhagen, and Scandinavia as a whole, is in our view, a pioneer in the promotion of e-mobility, and a role model in terms of the charging infrastructure, which is crucial for our logistics behind the event.”

The varied scenery in and around Copenhagen was another draw. “Whether it’s through the city, with an architectural diversity that leaves nothing to be desired; along the beach; through a street art alley or over a country road with an incredibly wide expanse, there was something for everyone.

Photo credit (top): Thomas Rousing Location: Frederiksholms Canal Photo credit (bottom): Astrid Maria Rasmussen Location: Banana Park

Executive summary



Make it memorable: Rather than booking a conventional meeting or conferencing space, could you opt for a venue that will spark conversation and creativity?

Make it sustainable: With environmental considerations now increasingly part of the event RFP, the industry can no longer ignore or pay lip service to sustainability – and destinations that are lagging behind on this are likely to lose out on business.

“Every event is as an opportunity to help staff bond – and building in time for extraordinary experiences can help foster those vital personal connections”

Make it meaningful: Although social impact is still not a top priority for most, many report that it's a growing concern.

Make it authentic: Truly experiencing the local culture is more important to today's planners than simply offering five-star luxury.

Make it fun: Every event is as an opportunity to help staff bond – and building in time for extraordinary experiences can help foster those vital personal connections.

Photo credit (main & inset): Mads Tolstrup
Location: The wadden sea



Baghaven

Ever wonder where to take your team next and add some wow-factor to your next business event? Whatever you're looking for, Denmark offers world-class cuisine, sustainable venues and easy access to nature wherever you are.

Don't go with the obvious, go with an event that is memorable and experience The Land of Everyday Wonder.

For more information go to visitdenmark.com/business-events

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