

BUSINESS TOURISM UPDATE ON TRENDS

In late 2003, VisitScotland commissioned the Moffat Centre for Tourism at Glasgow Caledonian University to review the latest information on trends in the conferences, meetings and incentives market.

The main findings of their review include the following:

- The USA continues to be the country to hold most international association meetings. Spain, France and Germany are also major association meetings destinations. Barcelona, Paris, London, Brussels and Vienna are amongst the top city destinations.
- The UK is also amongst the top destinations. ICCA statistics place the UK 3rd for international association meetings – hosting 151 or 5% of those held around the world. ICCA predicts that the UK will drop to 5th position in 2004, attributed in part to being outside the Euro-zone. ICCA statistics place Edinburgh in 9th position in their cities ranking – hosting 43 international association meetings in 2002. Glasgow is in 41st place – hosting 17.
- Associations are an increasingly important market for business tourism destinations. In the UK, the number, value and budget of association meetings has overtaken corporate meetings. A greater number of associations will host member events, but budget, lead time and accessibility will be increasingly important factors in decision making. It's vital for meetings destinations to be aware of, and build relationships with, emerging organisations.
- The medical, scientific, technology and industrial sectors account for the highest share of association meetings. Association meetings tend to last between 4 to 5 days or 2 to 3 days. The "shoulder" months of May, June and September and October are the most popular time for meetings. Conference centres and hotels are the most popular venues. Exhibitions are increasingly a part of meetings.
- Research by the Meetings Industry Association found that there was an increase of around 5% in the number of association events held in the UK in 2002, as well as a slight growth in the number of corporate meetings. Organisers expected to hold a similar level of meetings in 2003.
- According to ICCA statistics, the UK is the top European destination for international corporate meetings, followed by France, Germany, Italy and the Netherlands.
- The main purposes of international corporate meetings were sales, training, board meetings, and product presentations. Top sectors holding meetings were electrical/electronics, financial and transportation. The meeting planners who organise these events can be found in a range of departments including marketing and HR as well as specialist event units.
- MIA's UK Conference Market Study found that Scotland was the fifth top region in the UK for holding corporate meetings – hosting 35% of those held in the UK in 2002. Edinburgh and Glasgow were the 4th and 5th top hosting cities for UK corporate meetings.
- There is a continuing trend to shorter lead times, while important factors in choosing a destination include location, price, previous experience and access.
- There is no evidence yet that new technologies, such as video conferencing will reduce the number of meetings and conferences.
- Trends in incentives: Incentives are increasingly incorporating a business element. The internet is becoming an important tool for organising incentives, while there is a growing emphasis on demonstrating return on investment. A study in the USA found that travel incentives were more compelling and memorable than cash.
- Security has become an increasingly important issue for meetings organisers and destinations, given recent world events.

- Useful online sources of information on business tourism:
- www.businesstourismpartnership.com – UK Business Tourism Partnership
- www.citmazine.com – Conference and Incentive Travel Magazine
- www.iccaworld.com – International Congress and Convention Association
- www.incentivemarketing.org – Incentive Marketing Association
- www.meetingsnet.com – news site
- www.meetpie.com – UK news site
- www.pcma.org – Professional Convention Management Association
- www.site-intl.org – Society of Incentive Travel Executives
- www.uia.org – Union of International Associations