



ACCOR

MEETING EXPECTATIONS:
THE FUTURE OF
MEETINGS
& EVENTS

In association with

GLOBETRENDER™

The global business landscape is undergoing a profound transformation. The way we live, work, and interact has been reshaped in the last few years, and the ripple effects of these changes create opportunities in the meetings and events industry.

Travel is back. These three words echoed around the world in 2023, fuelled by our resilience, our passion and the strength of our sector. Today there are significant changes threading their way across the industry and the way we live, work and spend our time.

In this report – *Meeting Expectations: The Future of Meetings and Events*

(published in October 2023, and produced in association with Globetrender, the UK’s leading travel trend forecasting agency) – you will find a comprehensive exploration of the forces shaping this sector and the strategies essential for success in the coming years.

The pandemic was a defining moment for our industry. We were thrust into a world of virtual gatherings, with in-person events grinding to a halt. Yet, we adapted and evolved. Technology became our ally as we created immersive virtual experiences that transcended the limitations of physical space.

Hybrid events emerged as the bridge between the

digital and the tangible, showcasing the industry’s ability to pivot swiftly in response to changing circumstances. As we look ahead, the virtual, hybrid, and in-person realms of events will continue to intertwine, offering endless possibilities for engagement and connection.

Sustainability has become a guiding principle for our industry. A growing awareness of our environmental impact has spurred innovation in event planning and execution. From eco-friendly venues to zero-waste catering, our commitment to minimizing our carbon footprint is reshaping the way we host. This report delves into the eco-conscious trends driving

sustainability forward, urging us all to consider the lasting legacy of our gatherings.

Balance has become the central element in both business and travel decisions, as it now serves as the defining catalyst for our work-life choices. Today’s world must increasingly seek a balance between time, productivity, wellbeing, cost, carbon and commerce. Designing how we convene within these parameters is a thrilling challenge for creative experience designers and hosts.

In closing, the future of the meetings and events industry is a story of resilience, innovation, and transformation. The trends explored in this report are

not merely forecasts; they are blueprints for success. As we navigate this ever-changing terrain, let us do so with the spirit of collaboration, connection, and a relentless commitment to excellence. Together, we will shape a future where every meeting and event is a catalyst for progress, a source of inspiration and a place for belonging.



Sophie Hulgard
Chief Sales Officer, Accor



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Accor is a world-leading hospitality group offering experiences across more than 110 countries in 5,500 properties, 10,000 food and beverage venues, wellness facilities and flexible workspaces.

Accor is committed to taking positive action in terms of business ethics and integrity, responsible tourism, sustainable development, community outreach, and diversity and inclusion.

The group has one of the industry's most diverse hospitality ecosystems, encompassing more than 40 hotel brands from luxury to economy, as well as Lifestyle with Ennismore. Leading brands for meetings and events include Raffles, Fairmont, Sofitel, Pullman, Movenpick, Novotel and Mercure.

Accor offers more than 18,500 meeting and event spaces around the world. With Accor's dedicated loyalty program, event planners can earn points through ALL Meeting Planner for every meeting or event they book at one of the 3,900 participating hotels. **Visit: meetings.accor.com**



Globetrender is the UK's leading travel trend forecasting agency and online magazine dedicated to the future of travel.

Founded by award-winning travel journalist Jenny Southan, Globetrender delivers cutting-edge intelligence on how people will be travelling in the 21st century, giving professionals the knowledge they need to future-proof their businesses.

In addition to providing bespoke consulting and trend-based strategy sessions to brands, Globetrender publishes trend reports that are read by thousands of professionals globally who are looking for insights into the future of travel and consumer behaviour.

Accor's report *Meeting Expectations: The Future of Meetings and Events*, was authored by Steve Dinneen and designed by Ben Southan.

Globetrender's VOLT newsletter provides deep-dive analysis of emerging travel trends. **Subscribe: globetrender.com/volt**

During the pandemic, Bill Gates predicted that half of all business travel would vanish in the wake of Covid, signalling a fundamental, perhaps existential, shift for the meetings industry. Thankfully, a very different future has presented itself since global lockdowns were finally, gradually lifted.

“In 2020 there was a concern that this would spell the end for travel as we knew it,” said Robin Rossmann, Managing Director of travel data company STR. Rossmann was speaking to global meetings and event industry leaders at this year’s Accor Global Meeting Exchange (GME23), a three-day event hosted at the Pullman Paris Montparnasse.

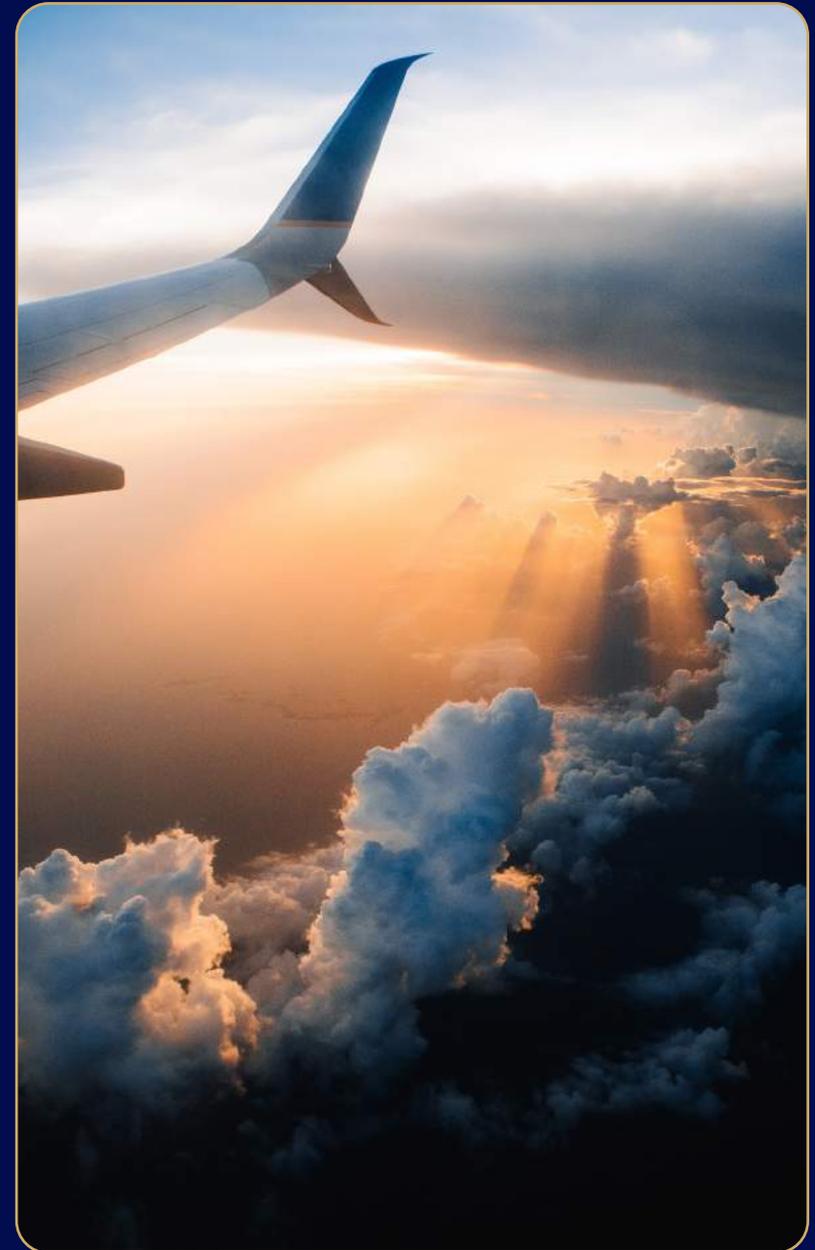
He said: “Just four years after the most remarkable downturn our industry has ever seen, we’ve gone from 90% of hotel rooms being closed to the same kind of recovery that we saw coming out of the global financial crisis.

“We’ve seen that people have money for leisure – for themselves personally – and

for business travel, and they are willing to spend it. We’re at the point where we’re really starting to see what the new normal looks like – and it looks a lot like the old normal. Initially, when we saw travel rebound with those first post-lockdown trips, it was a lot of domestic and regional travel, with a focus on family and wellbeing. Then as we went into 2022 many people decided to use money they had saved during Covid and we saw this massive growth in the luxury segment around the world. And in 2023, business travel started to come back fully, as well as international travel.”

The return of global business travel

The global travel industry is now only 4% shy of where it was in 2019, with airline capacity just below pre-Covid levels. International travel is yet to fully recover in Asia, particularly from China which is still 41% below 2019. But there is an expectation



Introduction: The evolution of meetings and events

that 350 million outbound Chinese flights will return over the next two years.

Exhibition industry recovery, a key driver for business

The exhibition industry is expected to make a full recovery by 2026. According to data from Daedal Research, in 2019 it was worth US\$32.9 billion and is forecasted to rise to US\$36.3 billion over the next three years.

A 2022 survey by UFI Global Exhibition Barometer found that almost 60% of people in the MICE sector thought Covid had definitely reinforced the need for face-to-face meetings, with fewer than 5% believing that digital meetings would definitely replace in-person meetings.

Business needs travel, travel needs business

The overall value of the business travel industry is forecasted to rise from US\$695.9 billion in 2020



to US\$2 trillion by 2028, according to Allied Market Research. The forecasted expenditure by business travellers will also rise, according to a survey by GBTA and Mastercard, increasing from US\$933 billion in 2022 to US\$1.4 trillion in 2026.

“Being in a room with people matters – it’s powerful and it’s valuable”

Sophie Hulgard, Chief Sales Officer, Accor

Accor client forecast – being in the room matters

These figures chime with the

data collected from top industry experts at GME23. An overwhelming 78% of respondents said that their or their clients’ expenditure had increased since 2022, with 36% saying it had increased by more than 25%. They also said they expect their clients’ expenditure to increase again in 2024, with 30% saying it would rise by more than 25%.

Meanwhile, 78% said they expect both the number of small- and medium-sized meetings (under 100 delegates) – and larger meetings of 100+ people – to increase next year. 78% said it would be “very important” for their industry to attend

exhibitions, conferences and trade fairs in 2024.

Meeting expectations – what the numbers tell us

A new report from the Events Industry Council (EIC), in partnership with Oxford Economics, evaluates the full scope and economic significance of the global business events industry at \$1.6 trillion USD. The EIC’s analysis includes the important “catalytic” effects or wide-reaching benefits of business events. “During Covid it was one of the worst hit sectors, dropping sharply in value. But the sector came back very strong indeed and continues to grow in value,” explains Sophie Hulgard. “That’s because being in a room with people matters – it’s powerful and it’s valuable.”

A new world

Covid has also changed the way we travel, especially in the business travel and M&E

sectors. Emerging from Covid, people around the world have adopted hybrid working practices and this is impacting the way business travellers behave. “Just as we’re seeing the emergence of shoulder season travel, so we expect to see an increase as savvy meeting planners capitalising on these shoulder days and giving their delegates the option to easily extend for leisure” predicts Hulgard. “Bleisure, or the concept of ‘blended travel’, still represents a huge opportunity for industry.”

The overwhelming message is that the future looks bright for events and the industry has exciting years ahead of it. Everything from changing demographics to new technology and the climate crisis will affect the way business events will be hosted, but in the words of Accor CCO, Premium, Midscale & Economy brands, Karelle Lamouche: “Business is back!”

Where we'll meet: Emerging international markets shaping the future of M&E

The meetings and events (M&E) sector is dominated by North America and Europe.

According to data from the International Congress and Convention Association, the leading countries for association meetings and events in 2022 were the US, with 24% more meetings than Spain in second place. The data shows the top ten countries for M&E were the US, Spain, Italy, Germany, France, UK, Portugal, Netherlands, Belgium and Canada. As of August 2023, the US was by far the most dominant market for conferences and trade shows, with 81% more than the UK.

However, the world is changing at a dizzying pace, bouncing back from Covid as a different place from the one we left behind. The economic growth and population boom in countries such as India, Indonesia, Brazil and China are reshaping economic boundaries, which will have monumental implications for the meetings and events industry, not only in the medium- and long-term but in the next few decades.

China

China is the second-largest economy in the world and is set to overtake the US by 2050, making it arguably the most important market for M&E, bolstered further by its status



as the “world’s factory”. While its domestic travel market has all-but recovered from Covid, outbound travel has been slower to bounce back.

Still, the figures are a stark reminder that companies ignore this giant at their peril. The number of Chinese domestic tourists is expected to reach 5.5 billion this year according to a report from the China Tourism Research Academy. That

translates to domestic tourism revenue in excess of US\$690 billion, a 90% recovery over pre-pandemic levels.

There are also signs that the outbound travel market will begin to recuperate. In August, China finally lifted its outbound group travel ban to countries including Australia, Japan, South Korea and the US, and those countries will relish the return of Chinese travellers,

who generated US\$255 billion in revenue globally in 2019. Capturing the business of these travellers should be a key goal for international event planners in the year ahead.

Here sustainability will be a priority. China’s travel sector represented approximately 6-8% of its total carbon emissions in 2019. Given President Xi Jinping’s ambitious target to make China carbon neutral by 2060, huge,

systemic changes will need to occur over the coming decades and the M&E industry will need to factor this in as it vies for Chinese business. A joint report by Accor, Trip.com Group and McKinsey, entitled *Promoting a Sustainable Future for China’s Travel Industry* found that 85% of Chinese travellers rate travel sustainability as important or very important, while 60% are concerned about climate change.

However, the report found that Chinese consumers still need convincing that sustainability is something they should pay more for, creating a tricky balance for companies investing in lowering their carbon emissions. Education will be key.

The report suggests this should include “using technology platforms to make sustainable travel options more visible online, using labelling to ensure travellers are informed on the environmental impact of their actions, providing incentives to encourage sustainable behaviour, and training employees to adopt a sustainability mindset.”

It calls for a collaborative approach with China, which will be key if businesses are to realise the benefits of the shifting priorities of Chinese consumers.

Where we'll meet: Emerging international markets shaping the future of M&E



India

India is the fastest-growing major economy in the world, with GDP growth of 7.8% in the second quarter of 2023. The number of millionaires in the country is predicted to explode, rising from 796,000 in 2021 to 1.6 million by 2026 – a 105% increase, second only to Brazil. And while the sector is already aware of the importance of Chinese markets, the sharp growth from India could take some by surprise.

In June 2023, Airbus struck a deal for the most jets ever bought by a single airline, with Indian budget carrier IndiGo ordering 500 narrowbody jets in a “multibillion-dollar” deal. It beats the previous record set earlier in the year when Air India ordered 470 jets. Overall, the number of commercial aircraft in India is predicted to rise from 700 today to around 2,500 by 2040.

The scramble for more jets is a result of a surge in demand for Asia-Pacific regional travel, with many Indian corporations and individuals becoming international players for the first time. According to Mordor Intelligence, India will become “a regional leader in MICE tourism in the Asia-Pacific region”. Its report into the growth of the Indian MICE sector found that metro cities’ infrastructure

is more than sufficient to host world-class meetings, conventions, and exhibitions. According to Mordor, the Indian M&E market is forecasted to have a CAGR (compound annual growth rate) of 6% between 2023-2028. Time to put Mumbai and Delhi on speed dial.

Sonic boom

Finally, planners can seek to benefit from the medium-term introduction of new supersonic jets that will make transcontinental travel a far more efficient endeavour. A new fleet of Overture jets from Boom Supersonic that can travel at

over 1,300 miles per hour – more than double the speed of current planes – could hit runways by 2029. Around 130 have been ordered so far by United Airlines, Virgin Atlantic and Japan Airlines. The new aircraft are said to run entirely on sustainable fuel and will be carbon net-zero.

These aircraft would halve the travel time from London to New York to just 3.5 hours and from Los Angeles to Sydney to under seven hours, a time investment that could be capitalised on by the M&E industry for smaller groups of C-Suite delegates.





Softer Productivity

A shift towards wellness and personal optimisation is motivating event organisers to prioritise downtime, movement and healthy eating as part of busy agendas



The business of events is shifting in a fundamental way, moving away from the “work hard, play hard” ethos towards a softer kind of productivity. Gone are the days when event planners should parachute 300 delegates into a conference room for six hours of back-to-back meetings before directing them to the hotel bar.

As Meenaz Diamond, Accor’s Senior Vice President, Meetings & Events, said at GME23, “Nobody wants to be pushed to their limits anymore. There is a space for much softer productivity that still allows you to deliver, but to do it in your own time and in your own way”. To boil it down: people don’t want to return from a business trip feeling more tired than when they set off.

“There's space for much softer productivity.”

Meenaz Diamond, Senior Vice President, Meetings & Events, Accor

There is a growing demand for better solutions in the realms of wellbeing, nutrition, and time management. Expectations are evolving, driven in part by

generational disparities, and this trend is expected to intensify. Ultimately, the objective is to strike a harmonious balance between life and productivity, making it imperative to adapt to these essential motivators.

Off the menu

According to Berenberg Research, Gen Z drink 20% less alcohol than Millennials, who in turn drink less than Baby Boomers and Gen X. This also tracks for those foregoing meat. According to Statista, of the UK adults who plan to not eat meat in 2023, 43% were Gen Z, 26% were Millennials and only 18% were from the previous generations combined.

According to the *Accor Meetings & Events Industry Forecast*

Survey of top meeting planners, more agreed than disagreed that there was too much emphasis on alcohol at events. When asked about food options, 38% wanted to see more vegan items, 36% wanted to see less meat, while 46% wanted to see more food provenance labelling.

36%

Percentage of event planners who want to see less meat on the menu

[Source: Accor Meetings and Events Industry Forecast Survey]



Softer Productivity

On the menu

There are many ways the events industry can incorporate these lessons into their programming. Wellness and nourishment can be hard-baked into schedules. Accor's Senior Vice President of Well-Being, Emlyn Brown, says: "What we're seeing is a really strong embracement of wellness within the meeting space. We've seen a significant increase in guests' interest and demand: now it's about building wellness into the event landscape.

"A younger generation is going into the workforce and their understanding about wellness and wellbeing is strong. This is fuelling the conversation. A lot of trial and action is happening around how we can make our food and beverage more plant-based and how we can incorporate exercise and movement into our events. We need to think about what a meeting looks like in terms of key goals and ideas. We need to incorporate the idea of social interaction and recovery during a meeting.

"We also need to consider how we're tackling food and beverage and nutrition, moving away from coffee and biscuits and sweets to much more nutritious elements that can boost your energy levels at certain times of the day and support your sleep,



without totally removing the social benefits that can come with alcohol."

So what might this look like for clients?

Softer productivity is about helping people to get the maximum value from their event experience without compromising their physical and mental wellbeing, helping them to make adjustments to their work, life and daily habits to allow them to become their "best self".

On a fundamental level it means curating the experience around the nourishment and wellness of those attending, including – perhaps especially – the downtime agenda.

Accor has been pioneering this through its Wellness Lounge concept, which it has already implemented at seven major events across the world in the last 12 months. This brings together companies in the wellness sector in a one-stop relaxation, recuperation and rejuvenation lounge, serving the needs of the planner and delegates, and evolving the industry with positive actions and positive impact.

Curated for the needs of each event, creative wellness concept development at events can bring

Softer Productivity

the expertise and innovation of the professional fitness world, companies responsible for maintaining the world's top athletes, with the latest wellness advancements in sleep, mindfulness, breathwork, muscular health and beauty to ensure delegates are at their optimal level of health and productivity.

"Wellness has emerged as a key consideration in the meetings and events industry," says Brown. "Attendees are increasingly seeking experiences that prioritise their physical and mental well-being, alongside the traditional objectives of networking, knowledge sharing, and productivity. Incorporating wellness elements not only enhances attendee satisfaction but also contributes to improved engagement, productivity, and overall event outcomes.

An emerging trend in MICE is the gamification of the experience to improve both wellness and engagement. Accor has experimented with providing attendees with pedometers to encourage people to hit their step count, for instance. According to Brown this increased engagement as well as improving concentration and overall wellbeing.

"Data from the Accor *Meetings &*



Events Industry Forecast Survey data reinforces these trends," adds Accor's Sophie Hulgard. "The study reveals widespread agreement from planners that in 2024 meetings and events will feature more experiences, more wellness and will be designed with work-life balance in mind."

Nutrition should be a holistic enterprise. We all know the importance of vegan and vegetarian options, but are the meals designed to give delegates a mental boost at the right time? High-fibre whole grains, fruits and dairy have been shown to promote prolonged concentration and can help eliminate that mid-afternoon dip – the so-called "graveyard shift" for speakers directly after lunch – when many attendees are ready to have a postprandial nap. Simple interval breathing breaks are a proven technique to reinvigorate and focus the brain. Oliver Patrick, Clinical Director at PILLAR Wellbeing, an Accor wellness partner, champions the physiological impact of breathing techniques that restore energy.

Planners can also consider breaking the wall between scheduled events and downtime. That all-important face-time with clients, for instance, could move out of the meeting room and into the treatment room.

Studies have found that moderate-intensity exercise in the morning can increase cognitive performance: while a decade ago asking your delegates to take part in a group fitness session may have seemed unthinkable, today this might be exactly what is needed to take an event to the next level.

Accor's Meenaz Diamond, says: "The priority is shifting to address attendees' concerns for their physical and mental health. Attendees want to have flexibility, comfort and headspace. They want to be able to have breaks, to go for a walk and even have some time alone, all of which can increase engagement and productivity."

WELLNESS TRENDS

Accor's constant evolution and analysis of wellbeing focuses on mind, body and productivity.

Active Meetings

Incorporating physical activity breaks, such as yoga sessions, walking meetings, or teambuilding exercises, encourages movement, boosts energy levels, and enhances networking opportunities.

Feed your Health

Providing nutritious meal options, incorporating locally sourced and organic ingredients, and catering to dietary restrictions and preferences contribute to the overall wellbeing of attendees.

Technology for Wellness

Utilising technology solutions like wellness apps, wearable devices, and virtual wellness platforms can enable attendees to track and manage their wellbeing during events. Additionally, gamification elements can be integrated to incentivize wellness activities.

Wellness-focused Teambuilding

Engaging participants in team-building activities centred around wellness, such as outdoor adventures, fitness challenges, or cooking classes, not only promotes collaboration but also encourages healthy lifestyles.

Greener Meetings

Emphasizing sustainable practices and environmentally friendly initiatives aligns with wellness values. Incorporating eco-friendly strategies, such as reducing waste, utilising renewable energy sources, and promoting green transportation options, showcases a commitment to holistic wellbeing.

Wellness Lounges

Dedicated spaces within event venues that offer relaxation areas, massage stations, healthy refreshments, and interactive wellness activities provide attendees with opportunities to rejuvenate and recharge.



Selling Belonging

Although video-conferencing remains a useful tool, in-person gatherings are key to building company culture, forging communities and cementing valuable business relationships





“Let’s stop selling events and start selling belonging” proclaimed Mark Adams, global tech and innovation entrepreneur and keynote speaker, at GME23, a notion that captured the hearts and minds of the industry leaders gathered in Paris. He added “magic happens when people get together” a statement that, to many, summarizes the value of the sector. The importance of human connection for business meetings is undeniable. Digital is powerful, face to face is valuable.

The *Accor Meetings & Events Industry Forecast Survey* found that 33% of meetings planners expect in excess of 40% more revenue from face-to-face meetings vs a virtual meeting. The majority, 80%, would not be happy to use video-conferencing to close deals in 2024.

80%

Percentage of top meeting experts who would not be happy using video-conferencing to close deals in 2024

[Source: Accor Meetings & Events Industry Survey]

Even in a world where hybrid working has become the norm and Zoom, Teams, Google Meet et al are part of our daily repertoire, there is still a huge amount of value in physical connection. The coming years will see an increasing number of planners move beyond the idea that events are simply about getting people into a room together, instead considering how they can forge deeper connections between attendees, cementing relationships and encouraging repeat bookings.

Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) are instrumental in the success of meetings and events, serving as catalysts for fairness, innovation, and heightened attendee engagement and belonging. Organizations that wholeheartedly embrace DEI not only cultivate more welcoming and representative environments but also drive positive outcomes, emblematic of their unwavering commitment to equality and social responsibility.

Different expectations

The concept of “business travel” is becoming increasingly difficult to pin down. When booking trips, companies are not only looking for a reliable, mathematical ROI (return on investment), such as closing deals or renewing accounts, they are increasingly

Selling Belonging

seeking positive ROX (return on experience). In a world where everything from costs to carbon are a concern, businesses will increasingly ask what is expected by both parties and how a trip, conference or event is able to meet those expectations and deliver a valuable experience.

As a result, companies will have to think in more complex ways about overcoming the problems that can arise when different parties have different expectations. Author, coach and consultant Oscar Van Weerdenburg addresses this issue in his research, which focuses on helping groups to overcome differences, be they corporate or cultural.

As an illustration he uses a photograph of a meeting, with a group of politicians from Nigeria sitting opposite a group of politicians from Germany. The Nigerian side of the table is empty, while the German side is stacked with ring binders, folders, tablets and notepads. “On the one hand, you see a Nigerian delegation that feels the best way to start a negotiation is to get to know each other,” says Van Weerdenburg. “On the German side there is an expectation that when you



negotiate, it's best to start with the tasks. Some cultures want to start on the relationship side and move towards the task. Other cultures will want to start with the task and if that works well, they feel okay investing in the relationship.”

Smart planners can help to negotiate cultural, economic and social differences, leading to events that allow both sides to meet their expectations. Rather than selling an event, they are in effect selling a sense of shared belonging. event planners will increasingly need to use their qualitative knowledge to make sure parties have a positive ROX.

The phygital economy

A big talking point at GME23 was the idea of using technology to harness online communities. The Covid years made online meetings, already on the rise pre-2019, the primary method of business communication. Shares in Zoom exploded (and subsequently collapsed to pre-Covid levels) and people across the world curated their bookshelves to act as background indicators of their erudition. But as the pandemic receded, the world began to adapt to a new “phygital” strategy for meetings, a trend that will continue to have a huge influence on the sector over the coming years.



Respondents to the *Accor Meetings & Events Industry Forecast Survey* overwhelmingly felt that in-person meetings drive more revenue than virtual ones, that corporate awaydays will be more important than ever next year, and that in-person business interactions boost employee mental health. The meeting sector needs to harness this new phygital economy, turning initial digital meetings to impactful real-world ones.

“The greatest insight for businesses right now is that people are desperately seeking a sense of belonging.”

Mark Adams, global tech and innovation entrepreneur

Mark Adams believes event planners can do more to discover, nurture and monetise online communities, especially those that have been starved of in-person contact during Covid. “Technology has changed the dimensions of community,” he says. “In the old days, you’d have an Oprah Winfrey or a Madonna and they would produce mass

culture. Now Spotify algorithms push me deeper and deeper into some weird stuff and people are congregating around it online. Whatever you’re into, you can find a whole bunch of people that love it, too. Community is no longer a physical place. This is leading to a massive fragmentation and stratification of our world. Every room is a network and there’s huge scale around these networks.

“We’ve got to the point where these digital communities have replaced the physical tribes that we were born into. But you also need to go home. The greatest

insight for businesses right now is that people are desperately seeking that sense of belonging. The question that comes up in every single online community is: “When are we going to meet?” He suggested the event industry could harness these same online communities to bring networks, fandoms and groups together for physical meetings.

For the M&E industry to take advantage of these networks, it will need to understand them and work with them, evolving the idea of phygital to help capture new clients. Adams also warns companies about making too many assumptions about clients based purely on demographics.

While labels such as “Millennial” and “Gen Z” can be a useful shorthand for changing tastes and priorities, assuming that they are homogeneous groups is a mistake. Adams points out that research shows there are more similarities between those who enjoy the fizzy drink Orangina than within Gen Z as a whole. He also pointed to the absurdity of Prince George (aged ten) and the rapper Lil Pump (aged 23) being in the same age bracket. Companies will have to think beyond broad generational stereotypes if they want to convert online communities into event bookings.



The image features a dynamic art installation. In the foreground, a large, multi-layered cutout of a hand is displayed on a pedestal. The hand is composed of numerous overlapping, semi-transparent layers in various colors including red, orange, yellow, green, and blue. To the left, another pedestal holds a black silhouette of a hand with a bright green, glowing, curved shape above it. In the background, more colorful, layered cutouts of hands and abstract shapes are visible, creating a sense of depth and movement. The lighting is dramatic, with strong highlights and deep shadows, emphasizing the three-dimensional quality of the pieces.

Designing Experiences

Thanks to the emergence of curated activations and human-centric interiors, events are being reimagined as environments to boost engagement, trigger new ideas and ignite creativity



The very concept of what an event looks like is being remoulded and remodelled for a new generation, both in terms of the environment in which they take place and the structure of the events themselves.

“The customer of tomorrow is looking for an experience-led but also purpose-driven brand, a brand that cares about the needs of the individual and the community,” explains Kishan Chandnani, Accor’s Global Senior Vice President, Premium Brands, who is responsible for Pullman, Swissôtel and Mövenpick.

“As organizers, we must consider optimizing networking, collaboration, and connection through spaces.”

Johan Vakidis, Chief Creative Officer of C2

Pullman is crafting an experience blended for the ever-changing professional lifestyle. The way we design our business and event experiences of tomorrow is rooted in this

lifestyle shift, reimagining the ways in which business life and personal lifestyle are integrated for the modern world. Through our designs, we blend innovative work and event spaces with vibrant social experiences for business, leisure and local guests.”

As we discussed earlier, the expectations of attendees at meetings of all sizes is changing. Individuals expect to feel nourished and refreshed, while businesses expect a return on investment. According to Montréal-based creative studio C2, 71% of attendees expect some form of personalisation, while 76% said they would have a negative view of an event if it’s not personalized.

“As organizers, we must consider optimizing networking, collaboration, and connection through spaces,” says Johan Vakidis, Chief Creative Officer at C2. By creating experiences rather than simply facilitating meeting rooms, the hospitality industry can help to embed ideas, memories and new ways of thinking, creating meetings that are fun and uplifting for participants but also – crucially – meet the expectations of those footing the bill.

“It’s crucial when we think about designing events that

everyone in our audience feels comfortable and able to engage with others, to be able to share ideas and to be able to participate in those experiences,” says C2’s Jesse Gainer, Vice President of Growth and Partnerships. “But to be able to do that, we found we really need to have a better and deeper understanding of who our audience is. It’s crucial we take the time to understand what are the needs states? What are the wants, the desires of each member of our audience? How do they want to interact with you? Our vision is to creatively unite and add value to communities and commerce.”

For the event industry this means a deeper understanding of the people attending meetings and a collaborative approach to designing event spaces. C2 debuted in Europe at the flagship Pullman Paris Montparnasse following the creation of a successful concept space at the Fairmont the Queen Elizabeth hotel in Montréal. The structure, which stands above the rooftop of the Fairmont hotel, was designed as a beacon of the city’s creativity and culture. The C2 collaboration with Pullman in Paris is the model for the future of meetings for the premium brand globally, a space to inspire the interchange of knowledge and ideas.

“The newly designed C2 space in Paris brings a new level of experience to M&E, and this experience – not just the space, the experience - is something that will define the future of meetings and events at Pullman hotels globally,” explains Meenaz Diamond, Senior Vice President Global M&E at Accor. “The C2 Immersive Floor is 16,000 sqft of space for every event imaginable – music videos to fashion shows to car launches – it’s spectacular. In a world where experiences matter more than ever, Pullman is truly transforming the business and meeting experience of tomorrow.”

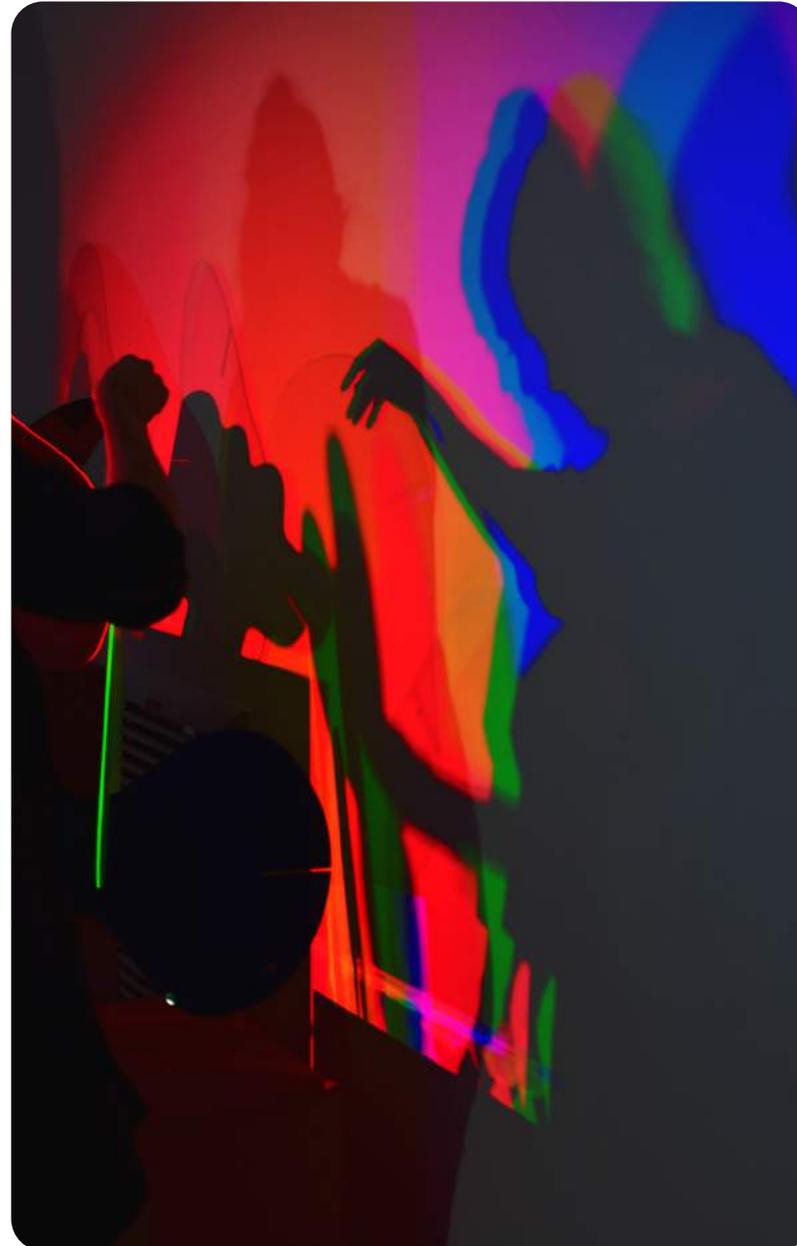
Next-gen spaces

C2 has experimented with numerous ways to help improve the meeting experience, often transforming spaces in order to encourage participants to form memories and make connections. The intent of the group’s Labs is to use wildly creative environment design as a metaphor to explore certain topics. In their most famous installation, Sky Lab, people were suspended in the air six metres from the ground on comfy seats chained to the ceiling, where they then experienced a facilitated brainstorm on Moonshots. By taking those involved out of their usual routine it inspired

new ideas and ways of thinking and ultimately cultivated “moonshot thinking”, delivering bigger, more exciting ideas.

Clearly your average event is not going to go to these lengths but there are lessons to be learned from this novel approach, namely that creating a unique experience can be an effective way to promote unity, connection and shared ideas among attendees. “It’s no longer enough to just deliver an engaging, exciting experience, the future of events and MICE experiences needs to be functional,” explains James Wallman, experience expert, CEO of the World Experience Organization and best-selling author of *Time And How To Spend It* (Penguin, 2019, FT “Book Of The Year”).

“Of course,” he says, “as Creative Group’s Senior Vice President for Innovation Melissa Van Dyke says, it’s figuring out how to change the way people ‘think, do, and feel’. I think we can even go further: it’s how you change their identity, especially given the importance of identity in how people make decisions, as George Akerlof laid out in his ground-breaking book *Identity Economics*. What’s so fascinating right now is how the science is being used to support the creative: immersive is really just



another word for ‘flow’ (credit for this idea goes to Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi) and flow, as we know, is very powerful in terms of creativity, wellbeing and transformation. So a well-designed immersive experience (and watch out, there’s a lot of snake-oil and ‘immersive-washing’ out there right now!) is better for the person paying – they get more impact for their budget. And it’s better for the participant because they get more from their time.”

15%

Percentage rise in productivity among office workers who are surrounded by plants

[Source: UK Green Building Council]

The same applies to ensuring guests are comfortable and looked after at events, he says, with a big emphasis on curating spaces outside of the event itself. “Helen Moon, supported by Google Xi, is doing great work creating calm space at events for those who need a break,” says Wallman. “It’s designed for the neuro-diverse

Designing Experiences

who may find all the noise, conversation and motion over-stimulating. It turns out that's a lot of us, and in our hyper-busy worlds – especially at events – we all need a bit more downtime.”

For meetings this could be as simple as making sure there is adequate daylight, or it could use more complex lighting rigs to cast meetings in certain hues; orange, for instance, is said to promote focus, concentration and creativity.

Biophilia – the love of plants – is another key trend in space design and will continue to dominate effective meeting spaces over the coming years. According to the UK Green Building Council, workers demonstrate a 15% increase in productivity when office spaces

are enhanced with plants, while there is a 23% drop in sick days by employees who have a view of nature. Surrounding your delegates with greenery is a relatively easy win.

An extension of this is to take meetings out of the meeting room: we have already discussed incorporating elements of wellness into the experience, but utilising all fresco spaces such as terraces, or even nearby green spaces, can help to elevate a meeting and bring people together by challenging their expectations. Modularity and flexibility is hugely important – being able to transform a ballroom for 300 people into a dozen break-out spaces won't only help sell events, it will make those events more successful and secure repeat bookings.



BLENDED BUSINESS PULLMAN LEADS THE WAY



Pullman is a key brand for Accor, bringing an innovative new approach to what the business and social events space and experience can look like.

“Pullman is moving towards space that is modular and flexible, phygital and social, communal and productive, inspired by nature and sustainability focused,” explains Kishan Chandnani, Accor's Global Senior Vice President, Premium Brands.

Chandnani says: “The new meeting and events space will launch next year but already today Pullman offers flexible spaces that can transform from conference space during the day to live entertainment in the evening. Our C2 space in Paris is a prototype space that allows us to create events that are transformative and creative. It's not just a

boardroom, it's geared towards immersive, creative and entertainment-focused events, which is what our clients are asking for. He adds: “Business life is at a turning point and this will shape how we convene in the future. It's about, participating in an experience rather than just consuming an experience.”

Beautifully illustrating these points is the Pullman Paris Montparnasse. Recently refurbished, it is the epitome of what a modern meeting-oriented hotel can offer. From the moment people enter the lobby they're presented with a wide-open space filled with large-scale pieces of art and an oasis of greenery. The main conference space is filled with invigorating natural light.

For GME23, the ballroom was divided into three sections, with sofa-style seating at the front to encourage attendees to fill those seats, which are often left until last, followed by more traditional seating in the middle, with standing tables towards the rear. This is a great example of how spaces can be designed to subtly influence attendee behaviour.

The Pullman Paris Montparnasse also has an enviable audio-visual system with floor-to-ceiling screens that can provide branded backdrops or present slides and videos. Even the social spaces are designed to help bring people together, from the break-out work spaces close to reception – filled with more greenery – to the modular catering spaces.

Green Gatherings

From carbon footprint reduction to eliminating food waste, meetings and events are being delivered in more responsible ways



Green Gatherings

You can't talk about trends in 2023 without covering the most pressing of them all: sustainability. Once seen as an "added bonus" for business travel, it is now at the heart of what brands are offering, and a linchpin of the future of MICE.

There's no doubt that reaching sustainability targets in the industry will be challenging but it's worth looking towards the feats being achieved by the teams behind the Paris 2024 Olympics and Paralympics, which have set the challenge – which they are on track to meet – to halve the carbon emissions from the previous summer Games. Once achieved, this sets a new benchmark for events.

“The more Accor acts to achieve its targets, the better our impact will be on our clients' commitments. Our clients rely on our actions.”

Valerie de Robillard, Senior Vice-President Environment, Accor

Not only do both individual and business clients now demand an increasingly rigorous

programme of sustainability and accountability, it can also lead to new efficiencies for brands. For the business travel sector it will affect everything from the structure of group trips to the way individual guests stay hydrated.

Over the coming years growing global demands for carbon reduction are expected to result in an increase in local and regional meetings and a reduction in the number of international trips – but for those trips to last longer.

There will also be an acceleration in demand for events that can prove their sustainability credentials and a move away from those that cannot. According to Valerie de Robillard, Senior Vice-President Environment at Accor, “Our corporate clients are asking us more and more to be aligned with their own sustainability expectations and targets.”

This isn't just good for the planet, it's also good for business. The global ecotourism industry worldwide was estimated at US\$172.4 billion in 2022 and is expected to reach US\$374.2 billion in 2028. According to a report by Ipsos, in 2022 81% of European and 74% of American travellers said they would actively avoid activities that are



not socially responsible, while 77% and 68% respectively would actively choose accommodation with a green certificate.

Earlier this year, Accor committed to supporting its 5,500 hotels in obtaining an external sustainability certification. In line with this ambition, Accor announced two global partnerships with Green Key and Green Globe as preferred certification partners, as well as local strategic partnerships with Green Key Global in the US and Canada, and EcoTourism Australia in the Pacific. These certifications will allow the group's hotels to get external and independent validation of their sustainability practices.

“Accor and more than 70% of our corporate accounts have established Science Based Targets,” says de Robillard. “The more Accor acts to achieve its targets, the better our impact will be on our clients' commitments. Our clients rely on our actions to help them achieve their goals.”

The sector now faces a race to both adapt to this changing landscape and to educate its clients on this journey. In 2022, 48% of people said the hardest part of travelling sustainably was picking socially conscious

Green Gatherings

accommodation, while 37% said they struggled to reduce their carbon footprint.

Accor has established an Event Carbon Reduction Charter for meetings and events, mandating priority hotel actions including recycling bins at every event, water filtration in bottles or water fountains, vegetarian menu options, donation of surplus materials, reusable table and glassware, food waste management solutions and temperature management.

Many carbon and sustainability targets will be mandated, with different regions and countries imposing their own restrictions. This year the European Parliament adopted the European Climate Law, which targets a 55% reduction in net greenhouse gas emissions by 2030 (up from the previous target of 40%). The French government has set a target to reduce water consumption by 10% by 2030. And in the US, proposed SEC climate rules could require public companies to provide details of their emissions data as early as 2024.

Accor has a target to reduce carbon emissions by 46% by 2030 (with 27% achieved through energy efficiency and the rest through buying green energy). It has split its



sustainability strategy into three pillars: Stay, Eat and Explore: to stay sustainably by improving building infrastructure; eat sustainably by reducing food waste and fostering more sustainable sourcing and consumption habits; and, finally, to explore sustainably by working with local communities and fostering low carbon conversations.

46%

Percentage of carbon emissions that Accor wants to reduce across its hotels by 2030

5,500

Number of Accor hotels obtaining an external sustainability certification

Stay – operate within planetary boundaries

Reducing the carbon footprint of the hotels themselves is the most pressing challenge for the sector. “We have been asking questions like ‘what if the temperature in the corridors and



common areas were 19 degrees in winter and 22 degrees in summer?', says de Robillard "Would customers think that's acceptable? The answer was 'yes' so this is something we've been rolling out since last winter. In the rooms the focus is more about technology, with guest room management systems allowing people to take control of their energy consumption."

There are also innovations in water management, another vital area given hotel guests have been shown to consume twice as much water as they would at home. Accor has fitted bathrooms with mist technology, which disperses shower water into tiny droplets, achieving a far bigger surface area – and therefore a pleasant shower – using significantly less water.

Eat – waste less, innovate more

There are fascinating and crucial innovations happening in the food waste sphere, which is another crucial area for events, when 300 or more people might be attending an event. "Increasingly corporate clients are actually asking hotel to prepare less food in order to meet their own ESG targets," says de Robillard. "Hotels are getting asked to reduce buffets and limit menus, serving more local food and less meat. If you look at the carbon footprint of a



beef meal in France, it's 14 times more carbon intensive than a vegetarian meal. So, at the Pullman Paris Montparnasse 63% of the meals are vegetarian or vegan. The key is that this can't impact the customer experience – we need to make sure that our chefs are all trained to produce vegetarian food that is premium and tastes great."

Huge reductions in food waste are being made possible by innovative technology like Orbisk or also Winnow, which has been shown to reduce food waste by 50%. The system scans food that is wasted whatever the origin or stage (spoilage

from the fridge, preparation waste, overproduction, guests' plate etc) through a combination of cameras and scales and is able to pinpoint with remarkable accuracy areas where food waste efficiencies can be targeted and menus can be adapted.

50%

Amount of food waste that can be reduced by using AI-powered food management systems



Green Gatherings

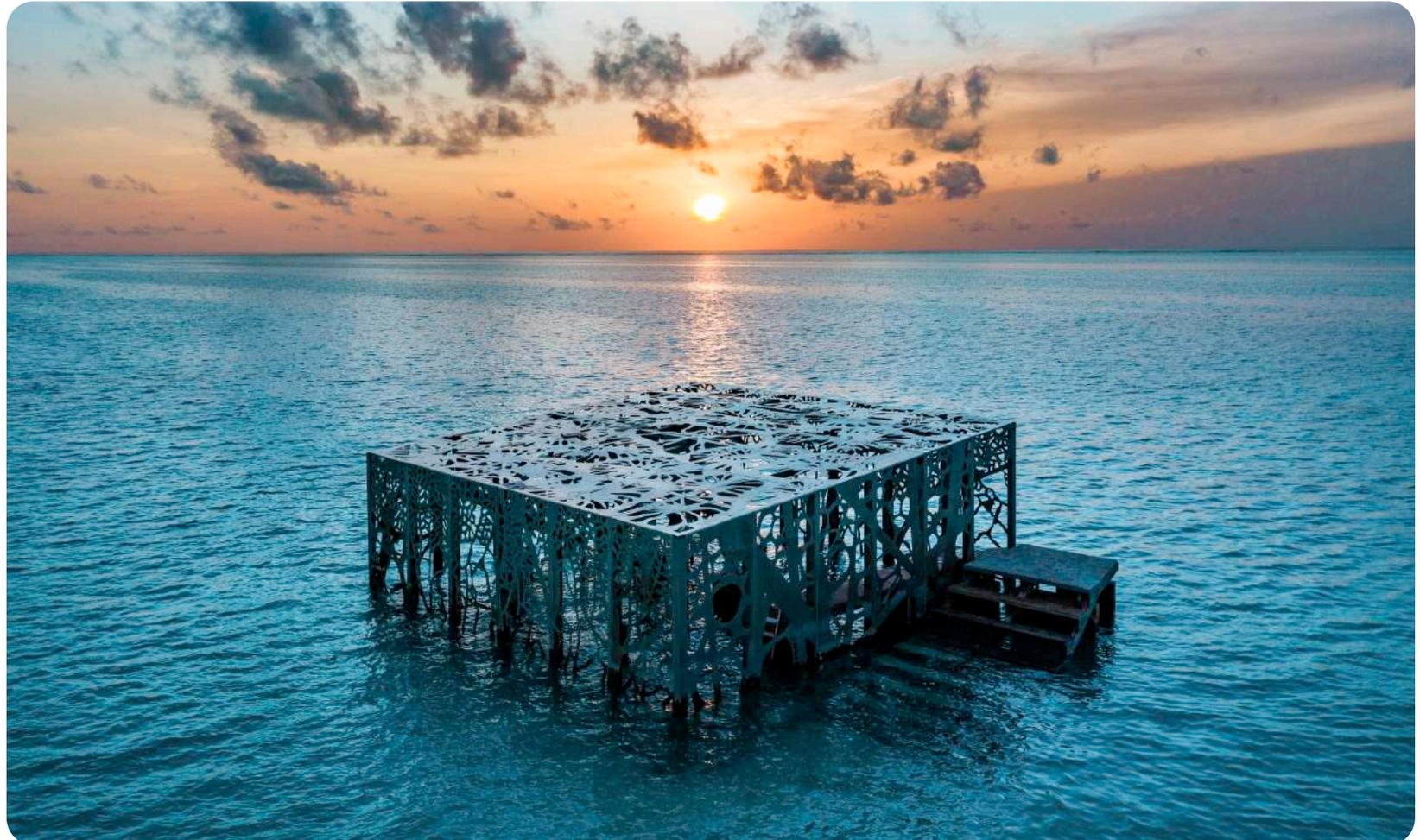
Explore – impact travel

Those creating events will also increasingly be tasked with fostering environmentally friendly conversations. This could be as simple as being able to recommend great public transport alternatives rather than always ordering taxis when transporting delegates. Or it could take the form of working with sustainable local attractions and activities.

“Authentic local discovery is a key part of building a sustainable event, engaging and supporting the local community and embracing sustainable discovery,” explains Accor’s Sophie Hulgard. “There is a significant opportunity for event creators to not only offer local experiences but also promote awareness and knowledge to ensure the protection and preservation of local culture and local natural ecosystem and to leave a positive impact on the person and the place.”

What Hulgard describes is Impact Travel, an extension of the recent trend for learning and betterment, with a desire for experiences to leave an impact on the self or surroundings, a trend offering huge potential for the M&E market.

One hotel leading the way is Fairmont Maldives – Sirru Fen



Fushi. The pioneering hotel has an on-site marine biology team offering fun and educational sessions centered on the marine ecosystem, conservation topics, coral reef preservation and the sustainability practices of the hotel’s Sustainability Lab.

Educational experiences share insights into the archipelago’s pristine yet fragile environment and interesting facts about its habitants including turtles, dolphins, manta rays, sharks, coral reefs, and sustainability practices.

“Even small gestures and simple actions can impact and inspire great change,” says Accor’s Meenaz Diamond. “For example, at GME23 we raised money to support Cuistots Migrateurs, a local charity that works with the Pullman Paris Montparnasse

to employ and train refugee chefs. Gifting is another precious touchpoint to leave a positive impact on delegates. At GME, beyond being locally supplied, the gifts included jams made from leftover orange peel from ibis hotels.”

The background features several large, 3D-rendered rings and spheres. The rings are primarily blue with a gradient to a darker purple or red at the edges. The spheres are translucent, showing a mix of blue, red, and white colors, suggesting they are made of a material like glass or plastic. The overall composition is abstract and modern.

Disruptive Technology

Although the metaverse and AI are still in their nascent stages, they offer all sorts of possibilities for next-gen meetings and events planners



Every year, event planners and suppliers around the world gaze into a crystal ball and attempt to discern what technology trends could enhance – or threaten – their businesses. The biggest tech trend for 2024 (and beyond) is the rise of artificial intelligence, which has gone in a few short years from the stuff of science fiction to a tool used by everyone from CEOs to school children.

For some, AI represents the democratization and amplification of information, for others it signifies a threat to workforces, reputational risk and a global governance nightmare. Regardless of which side of the great divide you fall, AI undeniably holds great value if used wisely.

The major draw of generative AI in its current form is its ability to almost instantaneously crunch

data into usable information, taking seconds to achieve what might take a human hours or days. Neural networks such as ChatGPT, while still in their infancy and far from infallible, are able to help meeting planners with everything from event scheduling to sourcing speakers and writing press releases.

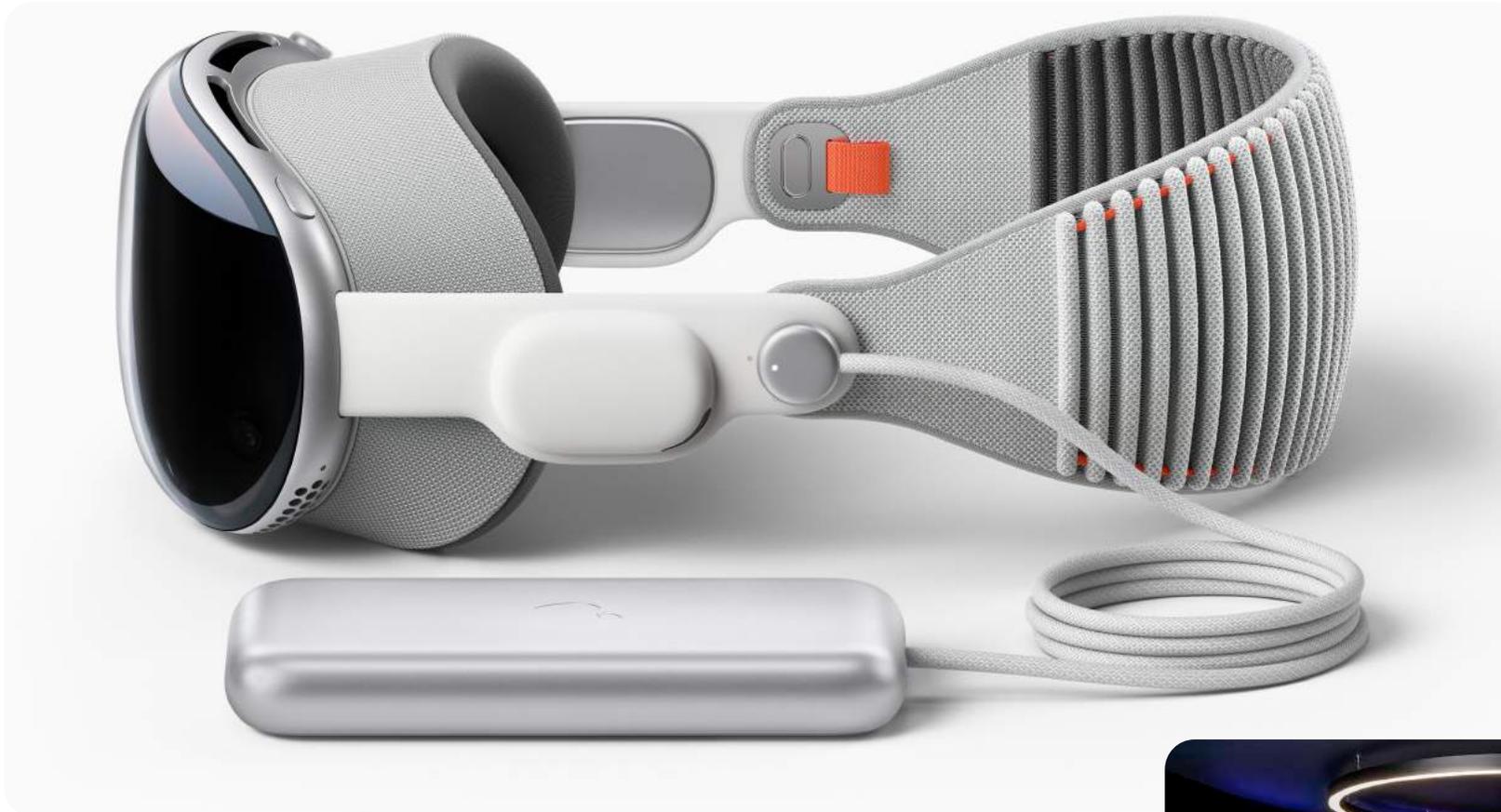
“This Fourth Industrial Revolution is exciting and scary:

it’s 1750-1800 all over again... where will we land?” asks James Wallman, CEO of the World Experience Organization. “The ability to get so much done so quickly is exhilarating. Learn to vibe with AI tools properly and you could be one of those whose productivity and creative output outpaces the Luddites.”

Feed in the availability of 300 potential delegates and you can

find the best dates for your event and suggested timetables for your speakers. If you’re stuck for talent, an AI can suggest relevant speakers in your area. It can even help brand your event, suggesting logos, generating speaker bios, and translate content into all delegate languages, including video content thanks to AI start-up, HeyGen.





In September, at the annual Meta Connect developer conference, Zuckerberg talked about the metaverse as a blended phygital world. He reportedly said: "Pretty soon, I think we're going to be at a point where you're going to be there physically with some of your friends, and others will be there digitally as avatars or holograms, and they'll feel just as present as everyone else." Now, this is reason for event designers to pay attention.

According to Bloomberg the metaverse market may reach US\$783.3 billion in 2024, up from US\$478.7 billion in 2020, a compound annual growth rate of 13.1%. What's more, a survey of more than 600 technology thought leaders carried out by the Pew Research Center found that more than half expect

What is the metaverse and how will it affect MICE?

Ask 100 people to explain the metaverse to you and you'll get 100 different answers. For Meta (formerly Facebook) founder Mark Zuckerberg it's a virtual reality "town hall" where you and your friends or colleagues can gather; for others it's a Minecraft-like video

game or something more akin to immersive, 3D television. What we now know is that, despite the best attempts of Zuckerberg, we will not be living inside a *Matrix*-style parallel reality any time soon. According to *Fortune*, Meta's VR division, Reality Labs, lost US\$21 billion in just 18 months. But it's Meta, so it's only dented confidence.

US\$783 billion

Potential value of the metaverse market in 2024 (up from US\$479 billion in 2020)

[Source: Bloomberg]



the metaverse to be a “fully-immersive, well-functioning aspect of daily life for a half billion or more people globally” by 2040.

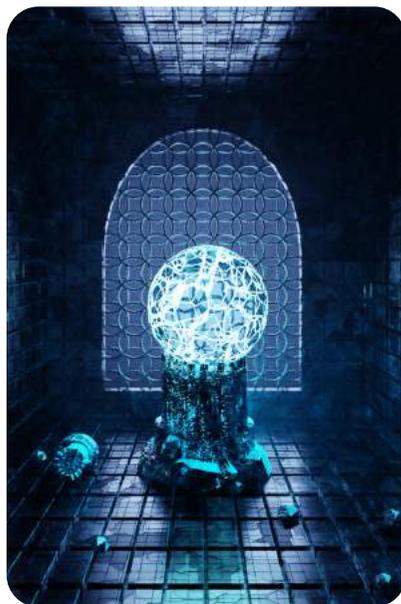
There are also more immediate uses for planners. Hotels including the Pullman Bangkok are already offering virtual tours of their meeting spaces using the Samsung VR Gear. This space looks set to flourish with the release of the Apple Vision Pro headset next year, described by *The Verge* as “an incredibly impressive VR headset with terrific displays and great video passthrough”. Meta’s Quest 3 VR headset is affordable at around US\$500 and lauded by the *Verge* as Meta’s “best and most usable headset by a wide margin.”

These strides in virtual reality give event organisers the opportunity to experience a space first. VR technology was revolutionary for the apartment lettings business throughout Covid and has remained a part of those operations as we emerge from the long shadow of those years. Much like the QR Code, virtual reality technology is enjoying a post-pandemic revival.

One company making exciting leaps in this space

is Rendezverse, a metaverse platform that enables hotels and event planners to create digital “twins” of their properties. This technology could be harnessed to provide guided tours of hotel spaces, or to allow entire conferences to be viewed in the metaverse.

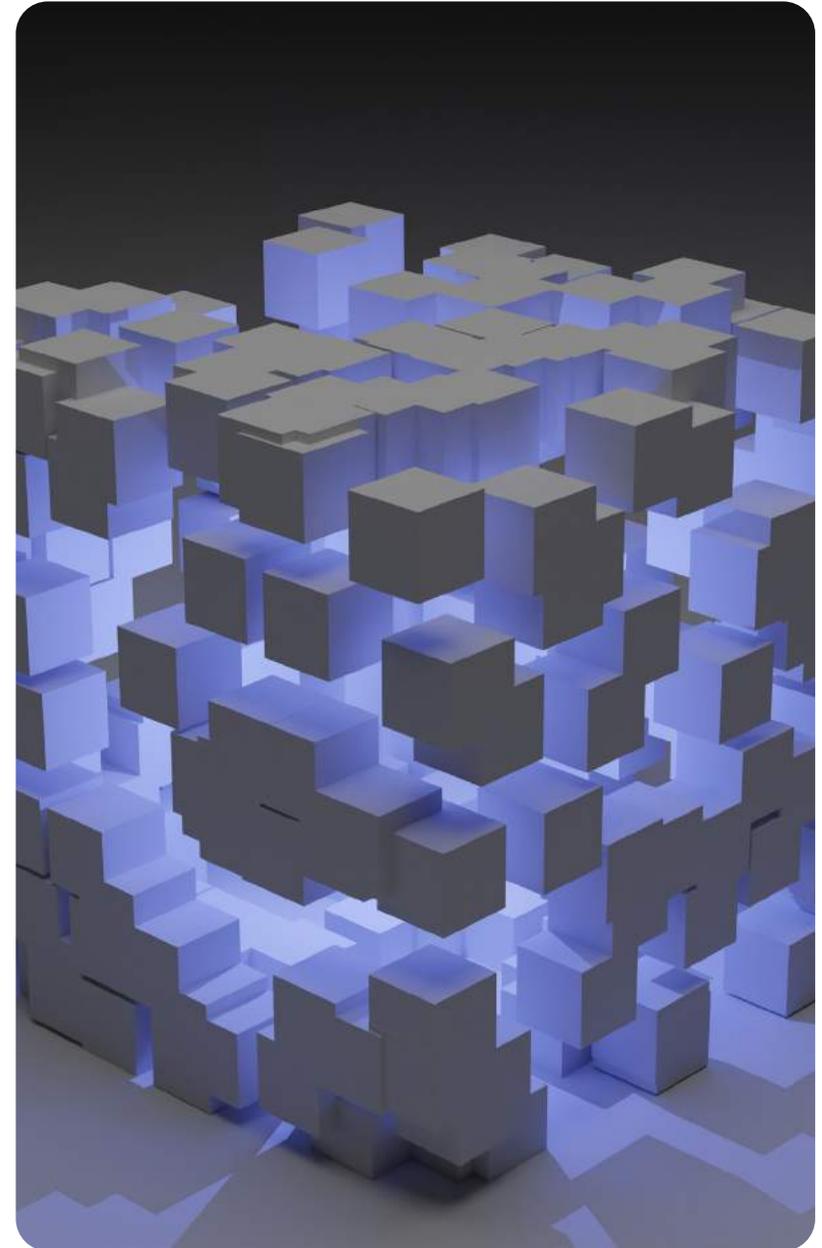
Another system, already used by Accor, is Visiting Media, which uses 360 degree video technology to help teams upsell their hotel suites. The dream for event planners would be to use this tech to host truly “phygital” events with some attendees watching in person and others able to take a front row seat via the metaverse.



NFTs are about more than bored apes

Few technologies have experienced a boom and bust cycle quite as short and painful as the NFT. In 2021 there was something akin to a gold rush over non-fungible tokens, a blockchain technology that gives users permanent, provable ownership of a digital asset. This was the year that the Bored Ape Yacht Club launched, with celebrities, sportspeople and millions of hopeful investors spending tens of thousands – sometimes millions – on sketches of apes looking bored.

A year later, the market crashed and those NFTs are now worth a fraction of their former value. It may sound like a chastening lesson, but NFT technology does have a place in the sector. NFTs make ticket scalping and fraud almost impossible. Their versatility also means organisers can restrict some speakers or events to attendees who have purchased a certain type of NFT. There are even more involved use cases whereby users can “unlock” rewards by using NFT tickets in certain ways, such as attending a minimum number of events. By employing NFTs in this way event planners can influence the behaviour of delegates, helping to funnel people to key events or rewarding customers with perks.





Hotel Spotlight

12 flagship Accor hotels for meetings
and events around the world



1. Raffles Boston, USA

- Opened September 2023
- 147 rooms and suites
- 15 meeting rooms
- Surface of the largest room 566 sqm / 6,090 sq ft
- Maximum seat capacity: 800



2. Raffles London at the OWO, UK

- Opened September 2023
- 120 rooms and suites
- 8 meeting rooms
- Surface of the largest room 678 sqm / 7,297 sq ft
- Maximum seat capacity: 700



3. Fairmont the Queen Elizabeth, Canada

- 950 rooms and suites
- 35 meeting rooms
- Surface of the largest room 742 sqm / 7,986 sq ft
- Maximum seat capacity: 700



4. Fairmont Century Plaza, USA

- 400 rooms and suites
- 14 meeting rooms
- Surface of the largest room 4,359 sqm / 46,919 sq ft
- Maximum seat capacity: 1,868



5. Fairmont Doha, Qatar

- 362 rooms and suites
- 9 meeting rooms
- Surface of the largest room 1,090 sqm / 11,732 sq ft
- Maximum seat capacity: 1,000



6. Fairmont Breakers Long Beach, USA

- Opening: spring 2024
- 185 rooms and suites
- 10 meeting rooms
- Surface of largest room: 270 sqm / 2,900 sq ft



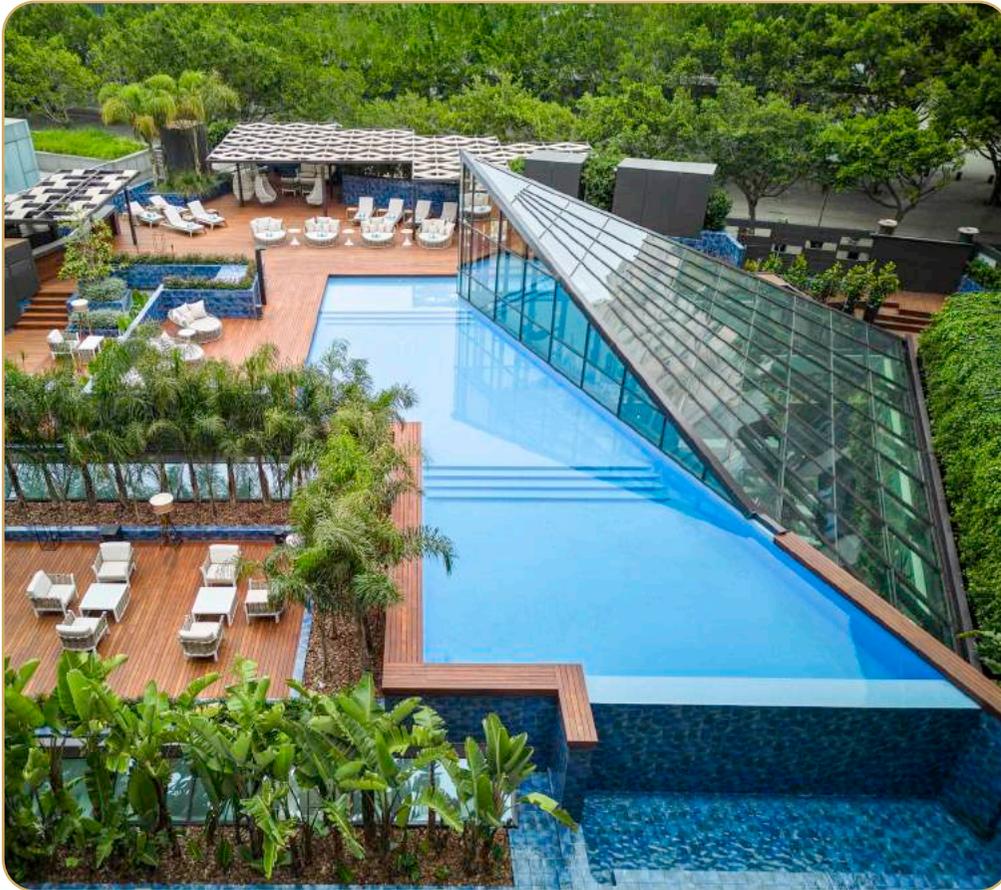
7. Fairmont Golden Prague, Czech Republic

- Opening: winter 2024/25
- 297 rooms and suites
- 6 meeting rooms
- Surface of largest room: 600 sqm / 6,458 sq ft
- Maximum seat capacity: 580



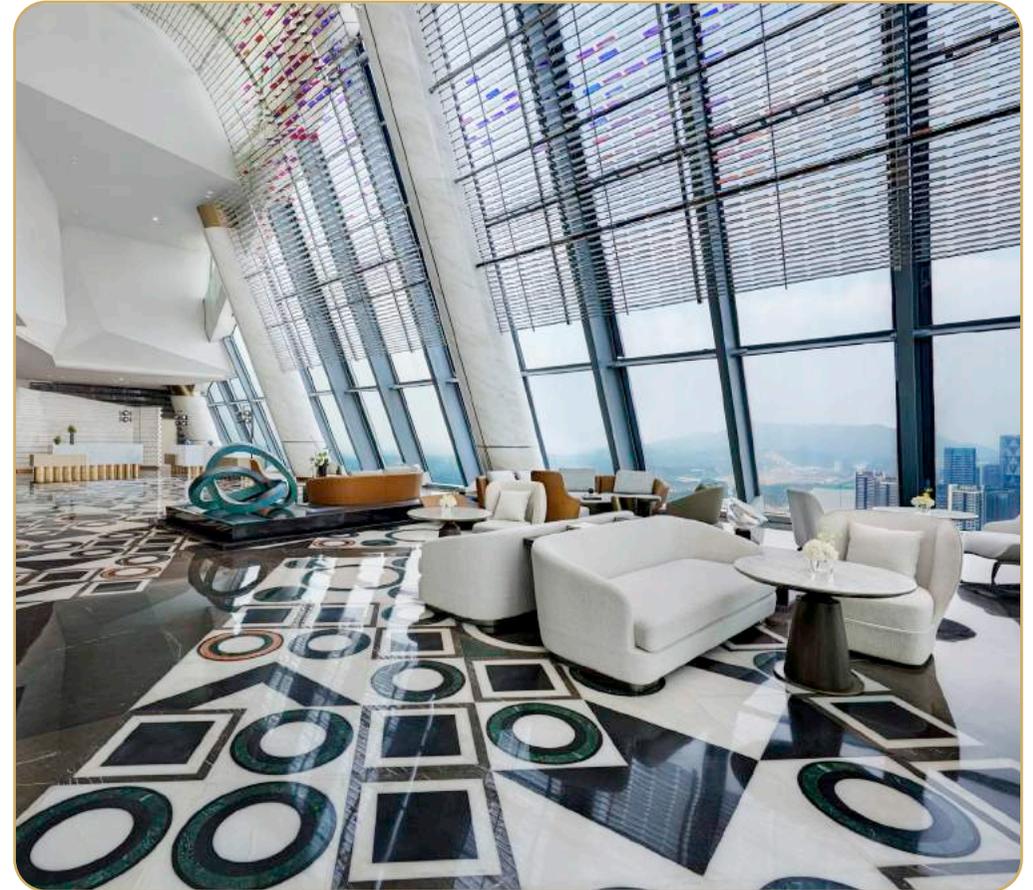
8. Sofitel Dubai, the Obelisk, UAE

- 595 rooms, suites and serviced residences
- 7 meeting rooms
- Surface of the largest room: 648 sqm / 6,975 sq ft
- Maximum seat capacity: 956



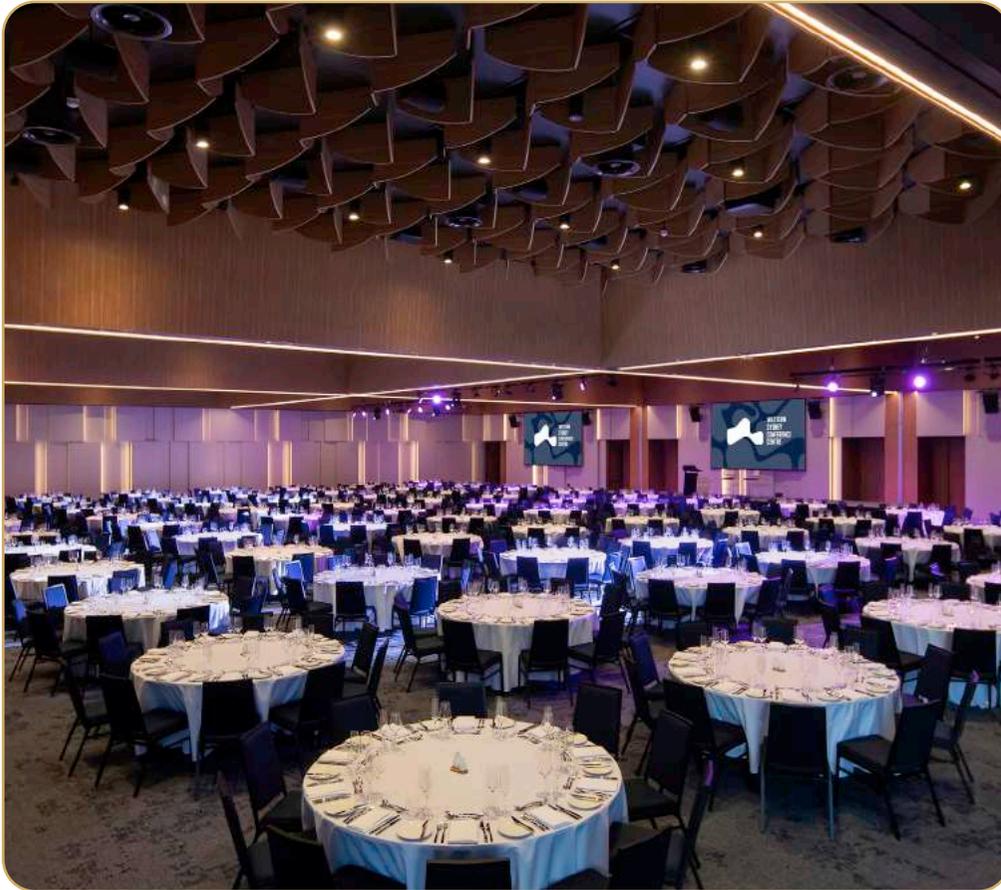
9. *Sofitel Barcelona Skipper,
Spain*

- 250 rooms
- 12 meeting rooms
- Surface of the largest room: 684 sqm / 7,362 sq ft
- Maximum seat capacity: 530



10. *Pullman Shenzhen North,
China*

- 271 rooms and suites
- 11 meeting rooms
- Surface of the largest room: 860 sqm / 9,256 sq ft
- Maximum seat capacity: 900



11. Pullman Sydney Penrith, Australia

- Opened: August 2023
- 153 rooms and suites
- 6 meeting rooms
- Surface of the largest room: 1250 sqm / 13,455 sq ft
- Maximum seat capacity 1,000



12. Novotel Paris Montparnasse, France

- 198 rooms
- 15 meeting rooms
- Surface of the largest room: 355 sqm / 3,821 sq ft
- Maximum seat capacity: 300

1. Sustainability should be the first thought, not the afterthought.

As international recognition of the vital importance of sustainability continues to rise, the event sector must embrace the opportunity to drive change, to make greater strides in carbon reduction, waste reduction, and meaningful engagement with local communities. Positive impact is the differentiator, and, more than ever, the sector has the green light to drive change.

Green credentials are no longer a bonus for events – they will be a deciding factor in who secures the business. The industry needs to be ahead of the curve, not just reacting to client demands but going further than they expect. This includes being able to cite hard evidence for sustainability projects and the ability to demonstrate ESG wins. The future of the sector relies on the future of the planet, after all.

2. Celebrate the human connection. Sell belonging.

The meetings and events sector is all about one thing: people. Human connection and fostering a sense of belonging are the cornerstones of successful event design. When people feel valued and connected, events become more than just gatherings – they become transformative experiences.

Keeping people at the heart of design ensures their needs, emotions, and interactions are prioritized, creating lasting memories and forging meaningful connections that extend beyond the event itself, enriching both personal and professional lives.

3. Create memorable experiences that forge meaningful connections.

Event planners are clearly looking for a return on their investment but they are more than ever looking for ROX, a return on experience. There is now an expectation that events will use innovative new ways of engaging participants and creating memorable experiences.

This is great news for those in the industry who have the capability to take their events to the next level, because there is no better sales pitch for future bookings than a room full of people who have forged meaningful connections and created lasting memories. Nothing demonstrates the value of attending “in real life” better than lasting memories from a well-designed event.

4. Balance purpose and productivity.

The “work hard, play hard” ethos once associated with the business and events is changing in line with the demands of new lifestyles. Event planners need to consider the attitudes and requirements of a whole new audience, with younger travellers drinking less, eating more healthily and more attuned to their mental and physical needs.

Balance is key. Every event should have a comprehensive plan for how it will cater to the needs of those participating, balancing mental and physical needs. People-centric event design should optimise productivity and enhances purpose.

5. Digital has reach. Face-to-face has value. Being in the room matters.

There are few in the MICE sector who haven't looked at the rise of hybrid working and the growth of digital meetings platforms with a hint of trepidation. The remote working revolution is an opportunity and in-person conferences are a vital way of bringing people together.

As James Wallman, CEO of the World Experience Organization, says: “People are asking the digital/IRL (in real life) hybrid question in so many industries. This is where you have to be smart and realise that tech is just a tool, and that the human must come first. Zoom is great... for Zoom calls. But nothing yet beats IRL interaction. After all, when you think about what's changing, you also have to remember what isn't changing: humans are still flesh and blood homo sapiens who have needs and desires, and are hyper social.”



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