

Added power for the MICE sector? Industry specialists invite political support for the meetings industry

Introduction

This survey anticipates the IMEX Politicians' Forum 2008 that coincides with the exhibition each year and involves the hosting to the show of key Members of Parliament and other Government officials from selected countries across the world and particularly Europe. The purpose of the programme is two-fold: to provide opportunities for key meetings industry representatives to discuss issues with those in power, and second, to update MPs with latest developments, insights and trends in the sector.

The poll was conducted in December 2007 both among suppliers and buyers, and attracted replies from 13 countries, mostly in Europe and Scandinavia, but also from Malta, Mexico, Syria and the USA. The job titles and responsibilities of respondents included: chairman, DMC; manager, MICE; managing director, convention bureau; account director; events; ceo, incentive travel agency; president, consultancy; and executive director, association.

* * *

At the heart of the survey was a 'serious issues' question that invited a ranking of those hot topics that industry specialists think 'politicians/governments' should be tackling. The hierarchy of replies follows:

- | | Ranking |
|--|-----------------|
| • Make Visa and passport control/customs service more efficient | 1 st |
| • Environmental responses to Climate Change | 2 nd |
| • Providing more funding for training to increase the professionalism of meetings industry staff | 3 rd |
| • Ensuring meeting suppliers are appropriately professional | |

- and accredited 4th
- Offering Value Added Tax reductions to delegates from overseas 5th=
- Investing in world-class meetings industry infrastructure, where necessary 5th=
- Providing more funding for international marketing 7th
- Increase confidence in perceived levels of security (whether threats of terrorism, crime, etc.) 8th
- Invest more in airports – flight capacity; visitor infrastructure; standards of welcome, etc. 9th
- Invest in attitude-changing campaigns to make host community populations more welcoming towards incoming delegates and appreciative of their contribution to the local economy 10th

This generalised analysis inevitably masks some interesting variations from the perspective of individual countries. For instance, the ranking of climate concerns in **Greece** is 10th, but attitude-changing for the host community is placed 1st; security concerns rank highest for many industry specialists in the **UK**, whereas the need for investment in airports earns 4th place; in **Spain**, attitude-changing campaigns for the host community are considered the second biggest issue, but with the need for VAT reductions for overseas delegates ranked in lowest place; security concerns were placed first in the **USA**, but ensuring adequate professional accreditation was considered least important; concerns about sufficient funding for international marketing ranked 2nd in **Montenegro** and **Belgium**, and 1st in **Germany**.

praise for governments

Fewer than half (45%) of respondents were prepared to make comments describing how governments in their countries had impressed them in their response to the meetings industry. Nevertheless, such praise was frequently fulsome: for example, in **Spain**, 'with the construction of convention centres'; in **Switzerland**, 'through investment in visitor infrastructure'; in **Germany**, 'via increased security controls at airports'; in **Malta**, 'by building new and better conference venues'; and in **Syria**, 'by encouraging international investment'.

Where further commitment by governments was recommended key issues included 'more environmental awareness' (**Spain**); 'more marketing needed' (**Switzerland**); 'more aircraft movements required' (**Germany**); 'emphasise the importance of customer care' (**Malta**); 'view the MICE sector more as a genuine industry' (**USA**).

Finally, with the intention of presenting proposals to put to politicians, the following suggestions were tabled:

- *'need for incentives for companies to hold 'sustainable' meetings'* (**Spain**)
- *'more protection against terrorism'* (**Belgium**)
- *'more politicians to attend MICE events'* (**Sweden**)
- *'recover international prestige by demolishing any unsatisfactory or unsightly hotels built on Mediterranean beaches'* (**Spain**)
- *'treat international visitors on arrival in a more friendly and efficient way'* (**USA**)
- *'do more to preserve natural resources enjoyed by tourists'* (**Montenegro**)
- *'encourage the free market and increase competition'* (**Syria**)
- *'devolve more international marketing activity to our Regions'* (**Belgium**)
- *'stop using tourism as merely a political issue and take it more seriously'* (**UK**)
- *'encourage all countries to refund VAT tax to international visitors'* (**Mexico**)
- *'help smaller companies to participate in the meetings industry'* (**Portugal**)

- Ends