



# On the Agenda

MICE planners discover new and exciting event destinations.

BY HOLLY RIDDLE

**IN 2019 A MICE PLANNER'S JOB** consists of more than just finding an easily accessible, satisfactory event venue within budget. More than ever, meetings and events are experiences, and travelers' desire for the new, exciting and undiscovered challenges MICE planners' creativity. As such, the unprecedented up-and-coming MICE destinations across the globe tap into just that — the new and exciting.

Each year, event and hospitality software provider Cvent compiles data on the top meeting destinations worldwide. Chris McAndrews, vice president of marketing, Cvent Hospitality Cloud, noted the implications of last year's data: "You certainly see the usual suspects at the top of the list. In the United States, for example, you see Orlando and Las Vegas. One interesting thing you see, and no negative connotation intended, is what you might say are second-tier cities rising up the list ..."

McAndrews isn't alone in this observation. Catherine Chaulet, president, Global DMC Partners, said something similar. Through her work, she finds MICE planners gravitate toward destinations that provide a combination of safety, affordability and uniqueness, meaning destinations that are somewhat smaller than those preferred in the past. Even when an event is held in a destination already popular with the MICE market — Paris, London, New York City, Orlando, Chicago — planners look for new experiences or neighborhoods within those destinations.

"[MICE planners] are really eager for their audience and members to discover new parts or unknown parts of those cities," Chaulet commented.

As what MICE planners are looking for evolves and, as McAndrews pointed out, more attention is paid to small meetings versus only large events, new MICE destinations have the opportunity to gain traction.

Take, for example, Wales. According to Heledd Williams, head of business events, Visit Wales, the U.K. event market is worth £44 billion (about \$57.5 billion), of which £24 billion (\$31.3 billion) is allocated to business events. Wales currently holds less than 2 percent of the market share of that £24 billion. However, with the opening of the new ICC Wales complex in



July, the country enjoys an opportunity to plant itself more firmly as a contender for international events.

Less than two hours from London, Wales is easily accessible but also highly competitive when it comes to cost and value. Additionally, for those MICE planners in search of a truly unique destination, Wales delivers. In addition to the brand-new, £84 million (\$109.7 million) ICC Wales, a plethora of activities will keep groups of travelers entertained in a memorable way, from surfing in a manmade surf lagoon at the base of the Snowdonia mountain range to zip-lining on the world's longest and fastest zip wire tucked within the repurposed Penrhyn Quarry, once a derelict slate quarry.

Similarly, other U.K. destinations look to tap into the MICE market, drawing travelers away from London and exposing them to the country's more overlooked regions. Cheshire newly targets events within the science industries with its latest initiative, Brilliant Science, combining the region's reputation as a world leader in the sciences with its related venues and attractions.

"This is a truly ingenious corner of the United Kingdom, where free-thinking minds have flourished and where scientific research, discovery and application — and no little ambition — have changed the world," said Nicola Said, commercial direc-

tor, Marketing Cheshire. "From the industrial powerhouse of Manchester and its world-leading universities, out through the plains and uplands of Cheshire and Staffordshire, the roots of our scientific ingenuity and achievement run deep. Now we are providing a unique opportunity to enjoy the places and stories of globally significant science, the heritage sites, laboratories and innovations; and we are also creating unique access to globally renowned contemporary research and science facilities. A new range of unique opportunities will allow visitors to experience the unique nature of our area; explore our scientific past, present and future; and experience our ingenuity and love for science and scientific endeavor."

Building a MICE market around a destination's existing industries proves a smart move for many up-and-comers, including Edmonton, Alberta. While Cheshire looks to the sciences, Edmonton boasts its status as a medical research powerhouse and home to world-class researchers, medical facilities and post-secondary systems.

As such, Barb Stuhl-Smith, business development account manager, Edmonton Tourism, said, "In Edmonton, our meeting venues aren't just rooms; they're incubators for great ideas and connections."

Edmonton also tapped into many of the benefits MICE

WALES  
WELCOMES  
THE WORLD:  
*ICC Wales exterior (left)  
and interior (above)*

PHOTOS: © ICC WALES



**SUSTAINABLE  
EVENTS:**  
*Edmonton  
Convention Centre*

PHOTO: © EDMONTON  
CONVENTION CENTRE

planners look for — value, accessibility and individuality among them. The destination welcomes 60 direct flights globally, and new development makes way for properties such as the third JW Marriott property in Canada, opening in 2020, and a new downtown Hyatt property with 300 guestrooms, also slated for 2020.

Additionally, MICE planners with a focus on sustainability find Edmonton more than satisfactory. The Edmonton Convention Centre launched a new initiative in April to help planners host events infused with corporate social responsibility and sustainability goals. At no charge, the convention center assists hosts in measuring event impact with waste and sustainability audits and then partners with sustainable local organizations to achieve related goals.

Leipzig, the fastest-growing city in Germany, ties its long heritage of education and science into its MICE appeal, welcoming events in the fields of medicine, science, business and politics. It also promotes the key attributes MICE planners look for in a destination in this and upcoming years. The same value, accessibility and uniqueness North American travelers might find in Edmonton, European travelers find in Leipzig.

“Leipzig ... is a place where constant change and renewal meet continuity and tradition. In the 12th century, the most important

trade routes in Europe crossed here, laying the foundation of a tradition as a city of trade fairs and commerce that now goes back more than 850 years. Leipzig’s university was founded in 1409, and ever since the city has been a place of education and science, a crossroads for the exchange of ideas. Leipzig also enjoys an excellent reputation as a city of music,” commented Hiskia Wiesner of Leipzig Tourism and Marketing.

“Today, Leipzig is one of the most popular MICE venues in Germany and Europe. Every year the cultural city ... [welcomes] hundreds of thousands of attendees,” Wiesner added. “The city and surrounding region offer ideal facilities and conditions for industry events attracting a wide audience.”

Continuous venue expansion and options certainly don’t hurt any MICE market, but for those seeking a larger piece of market share, it’s crucial. Yusuf Poonawala, head, Bharat Deko MICE, Cox & Kings, focuses on raising global awareness of India’s MICE market. A primary way to do so is by bringing attention to the country’s latest venues, both those suited to larger events and those better for smaller MICE groups.

“Over the last five years, several new venues have come up, along with the expansion of the existing ones that are underway,” he said. “For instance, Pragati Maidan in Delhi is undergoing a

Summit, is set to complete its first phase of construction this year. Incorporating many hotels and a parking facility for 30,000 vehicles, all set across more than 200 acres, it boasts a total capacity of 20,000 people.

“Cost-effectiveness, impeccable event management and seamless government clearances are helping portray India as the ultimate destination,” Poonawala added.

In New Zealand, Auckland’s Aotea Centre is set to complete a \$44 million refurbishment, and the New Zealand International Convention Centre opens in Auckland in 2020. In Christchurch, the new convention center Te Pae also opens in 2020. Across both cities, luxury hotels from brands like AccorHotels and Hyatt opened or are set to open in the next year.

“Along with superb new infrastructure in idyllic locations, our professional approach and our unique cultural identity make [New Zealand] easy to do business with. We are seen as a safe and secure destination, another drawcard,” said Sue Sullivan, chief executive, Conventions and Incentives New Zealand. “Our two largest cities, Auckland and Christchurch, both with easy air access, are well underway with new convention centers, putting us high on the consideration list for international conference organizers.”

Stateside, MICE destinations follow the same trends. Planners turn to previously unknown destinations that now offer a combination of value and experience, while old favorite destinations build bigger and better venues and attractions to retain attention. For example, in Orlando, Walt Disney World Swan and Dolphin Resort recently announced a new structure for 2020, The Cove, built with MICE in mind, with the most meeting space available at Walt Disney World and unique rooftop event space. Wilmington, North Carolina, meanwhile, completely built a new Convention District from the ground up, with \$426.1 million in investments, giving planners the best and most modern amenities at an unarguable value.

These destinations top MICE lists as rising stars for many reasons. Affordability, fewer crowds, growing economies, safety, good press, shifting travel trends and accessibility — all play a role. From Cheshire to Leipzig, Edmonton to Wilmington, with so many attractive up-and-coming MICE destinations on the table, the hardest part of a planner’s job in 2019 is simply picking a destination among a wealth of good choices.



COMING SOON:  
New Zealand International  
Convention Centre cross section  
(top), and Walt Disney World  
Swan and Dolphin Resort’s The  
Cove (bottom)

PHOTOS: © NZICC, © WALT DISNEY  
WORLD SWAN AND DOLPHIN RESORT

facelift and [is] set to be a world-class, state-of-the-art, integrated exhibition-cum-convention center, ready this year. With [a] basement parking facility for about 4,800 vehicles and comprehensive traffic decongestion plans, the venue has capacity [for] 7,000 people.”

Additionally, the International Convention and Exhibition Centre, built for mega-events such as the G-20