

MEETINGS & EVENTS TRENDS

The **shifts shaping** what comes next.





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WELCOME

Ten years ago, we published the first edition of our annual trends report. A great deal has changed since then, but one thing has remained constant: the pace of change continues to accelerate.

Over the past decade, our industry has navigated a global pandemic, economic uncertainty, geopolitical conflict and growing environmental pressure. Through it all, meetings and events have shown remarkable resilience. Whatever the challenge, this industry adapts.

That same resilience is reflected at BCD Meetings & Events. As 2026 draws to a close, so too does Thinking Forward, our three-year strategic plan. It has been a strong period for our business, and this year we continued to build that momentum while laying the foundations for what comes next.

**“Whatever the challenge,
this industry adapts.”**

We have continued to invest in our people, capabilities and technology to support our clients’ evolving needs. That includes exploring where AI and automation can create practical value by improving efficiency, reducing friction and giving our teams more time to focus on high-value work. We've invested in expanding our creative capabilities, including the growth of The Collective, our strategic experience design and production agency, into Germany, with further market expansion planned.

Looking ahead to 2027, change and uncertainty are no longer temporary. They are part of the environment in which all of us operate. What gives me confidence is how our teams continue to respond with new ideas and insights. Spending time with colleagues across our business is a constant reminder of why I remain optimistic about the future.

This tenth edition of our trends report is designed to help make sense of a more complex landscape. As the industry has evolved, so has this report, shifting toward a clearer focus on the decisions, actions and outcomes that matter most. Use it as a guide to the forces shaping meetings and events in 2027, the questions leadership teams should be asking and the practical actions that can help turn event activity into greater business impact.

The world around us is not getting simpler, but there is still plenty to be excited about — for BCD M&E, for our clients and for the industry.

I hope you find this edition useful and it helps shape your thinking for the year ahead.

Happy reading!

**Bruce
Morgan**

Global President
BCD M&E



A WORD FROM OUR SPONSOR

Meliá Hotels International's perspective on the future of MICE

The MICE industry enters 2027 with strong momentum. Demand for face-to-face meetings, conferences and incentive experiences continues to grow, confirming that organizations increasingly recognize the value of bringing people together to share knowledge, strengthen culture and reinforce a sense of belonging.

While technology is transforming every stage of the event journey, from sourcing to execution, we believe the future of MICE will continue to be defined by human connection. Companies invest in events not only to communicate objectives, but to recognize achievements, motivate teams, foster collaboration and create memorable experiences. In that context, meetings and conferences will remain the backbone of the industry, while incentive travel is expected to gain even greater relevance.

In our industry, we spend a great deal of time explaining why our hotels are different and, naturally, why they are better than those of our competitors. We highlight beautiful properties, outstanding facilities, exceptional locations, strong brands and innovative technology. All those statements may be true, but they are also arguments that many hotel companies can legitimately make.

At Meliá Hotels International, however, we believe our greatest differentiator lies elsewhere. For more than 70 years, the company has maintained its family-owned heritage, with the founding family still playing a key role in its ownership and long-term vision. This family spirit, combined with a deep-rooted hotelier culture, shapes the way we do business and has helped create an organization where people develop long careers and demonstrate a genuine sense of pride and belonging.

For MICE clients, this translates into something simple but increasingly valuable: trust. From the initial venue search and event planning process through to on-site delivery and post-event follow-up, the professionals of Meliá Hotels International are people clients can rely on. In a world that is becoming more digital and automated every day, human reliability may well be the most important competitive advantage of all.

Manuel Riego

Vice President of Sales & Marketing
Meliá Hotels International



THE 2027 OUTLOOK

For meetings and events leaders and planners, 2027 will be defined not by one dominant trend, but by a series of connected forces creating broader shifts across the industry.

Geopolitical tension, climate exposure, cost pressure and rapid advances in artificial intelligence are changing where organizations meet, how they allocate investment and what they expect events to achieve.

This is not a case for retreat. Business events continue to play a significant role in the global economy. In 2025, the sector generated US\$1.3 trillion in direct spending, contributed US\$1.8 trillion to global GDP and supported 24.2 million jobs worldwide. The question for organizations is no longer whether bringing people together creates value, but where that investment delivers the greatest impact.

The outlook will vary by market, sector and program type. Some organizations will protect flagship events while reducing lower-value activity. Others will use regional formats, local delivery and more flexible contracting to manage cost and risk. Across both approaches, scrutiny will increase, with event teams expected to show that an experience was delivered well and advanced a business priority.

Artificial intelligence (AI) will play a central role in that change. An estimated 40% of the global workforce is exposed to AI (International Monetary Fund. Gen-AI: Artificial Intelligence and the Future of Work), and for meetings and events, the next phase is not adoption for its own sake. It is disciplined use — applying AI where it removes friction, improves decisions, strengthens accessibility or enhances the attendee experience, with clear governance and human accountability.

As working life becomes more digital and content becomes easier to generate, an event must give people a compelling reason to attend, with opportunities for genuine interaction, shared experiences and stronger connections.

Climate should now be treated as a core planning variable, not a secondary sustainability concern. Rising temperatures, severe weather and resource pressure are affecting attendee wellbeing, destination suitability, transport resilience and event continuity. In 2027, climate resilience will shape when and where organizations meet and what operational safeguards they require.

**US\$1.3
trillion**

in direct spending by
business events globally

**US\$1.8
trillion**

contributed to global
GDP by business events

**24.2
million**

jobs supported by
business events globally

Events Industry Council and Oxford Economics (2026), Global Economic Significance of Business Events Study



If the last 10 years have shown us anything, it's the remarkable resilience of this industry. Whatever the challenge, we continue to adapt and move forward."

Bruce Morgan, Global President, BCD M&E

FOUR SHIFTS

RESHAPING MEETINGS & EVENTS

The four shifts explore how wider forces are changing the way organizations approach meetings and events.

Each focuses on a key area of change, what it means in practice and the decisions the industry will need to consider in 2027.

What's driving these shifts?

External Pressure		Strategic Response
Geopolitical disruption	➔	Build resilience into design
Climate exposure	➔	Consider climate in operational choices
Cost and capacity pressure	➔	Manage M&E as a portfolio
Regulatory change	➔	Govern AI and data around value
Fragmented attention	➔	Earn attention and trust



SHIFT 1

RESILIENCE BECOMES A DESIGN DISCIPLINE

Risk can no longer sit at the edge of the planning process.

Geopolitical disruption, weather extremes, transport pressure, changing entry requirements and shifting perceptions of destination safety can all affect accessibility, cost and continuity. Climate is no longer only a sustainability issue. It is directly influencing venue suitability, attendee comfort, seasonal timing and operating cost.

In an April 2026 GBTA poll, 76% of buyers said geopolitical conflicts were affecting travel and meetings decisions. The same poll found that 56% had changed their meetings or events strategy in the preceding three months.

76%

Buyers affected by
geopolitical conflict

56%

Buyers changing meetings
or events strategy due to
geopolitical conflict

Source: Global Business Travel Association, April 2026 industry sentiment poll.

The practical response is not to predict every disruption but to build an operating model that can adapt at event and program level. That means having the data and resources to find emerging risks, make quick decisions and respond across a portfolio, as well as building resilience into individual events. Destination selection should consider climate exposure, route resilience, duty of care and alternative delivery options alongside cost and appeal. Contracts should support defined decision points, while teams need clear escalation roles and communication protocols.

What we're seeing

- Greater need for reliable, aggregated data to show emerging risks and support faster decisions across meetings and events programs
- More formal event risk assessments, especially for programs involving senior leaders or high-profile speakers
- Earlier involvement from legal, security, procurement and travel-risk stakeholders
- Greater scrutiny of destination perception, not only objective risk indicators
- More demand for flexible contracting, alternative routes and workable backup formats
- Increased attention to attendee tracking, welfare and communications before and during an event

THE NEW RISK-PLANNING FRAMEWORK

Move from: Point-in-time risk assessments, single-destination assumptions and reactive decisions

Move toward: Continuous monitoring, trigger-based decisions and multiple viable options

Define: Who owns each decision, what evidence will be used and when an alternative will be activated



LEADERSHIP ACTION

Build climate and geopolitical exposure into destination shortlists, contracting decisions, attendee communications and contingency plans from the outset.

SHIFT 2

AI MOVES FROM EXPERIMENTATION TO ACCOUNTABLE VALUE

AI has entered the mainstream, but the differentiator next year will be whether organizations can turn it into value.

The best applications will often be unobtrusive: reducing repetitive work, improving access to information, supporting localization and interpretation, identifying patterns across programs and helping planners make faster and better-informed decisions.

Greater use also brings greater accountability. Organizations need to understand what data AI tools can access, where human oversight is needed, how outputs are checked and how costs are managed within legal and compliance frameworks.

The aim is to use AI where it delivers clear benefits to the organization or attendee, with the right controls in place.

“

As AI becomes part of core business activity, organizations are moving beyond isolated innovation. The priority now is practical value, supported by stronger governance, clearer measurement and greater transparency around token cost, use and impact."

Carol Fergus, Director, Global Travel, Events and Ground Transportation, Fidelity International



The AI pressures leaders need to plan for:

1

THE HIDDEN COST OF AI

Large language models and agentic tools can create consumption-based costs as they process information and complete tasks.

Leadership question: Are cost, quality and business value being assessed together?

2

AGENTIC FLOODING

Employees and attendees can use AI to generate more requests and more personalized demands.

Leadership question: Can the operating model absorb more AI-generated demand without creating service pressure?

3

THE SELF-SERVICE ECONOMY

AI-enabled tools can move tasks to planners and attendees. The process may appear efficient while transferring time and effort elsewhere.

Leadership question: Is work being removed or simply redistributed?

4

QUIET AI

The most valuable AI may run in the background, improving search, routing, analysis, localization or recommendations, without becoming the center of the event.

Leadership question: Does technology improve the experience or make the use of AI more visible?

5

AI BURNOUT

As AI becomes part of everyday work, constant exposure to new tools, changing workflows and pressure to keep up may create fatigue rather than greater productivity. Organizations will need to consider the human impact of adoption alongside the technology itself.

Leadership question: Are we using AI to reduce friction for people, or creating new demands that add to it?



LEADERSHIP ACTION

Prioritize AI use cases with a defined problem, accountable owner, approved data, human review and measurable value.

What leading organizations are doing

- Establishing approved-use principles and governance
- Prioritizing use cases tied to business problems
- Measuring value delivered, not simply output volume
- Maintaining human review where context and judgment matter
- Connecting event data across programs instead of automating isolated tasks



Cutting through the hype around AI matters. The real question is not whether we are using AI, but how it drives measurable business outcomes."

Ted Stone, SVP, Global Technology and Products, BCD M&E



Transforming the MICE customer journey through AI and automation

Meliá Hotels International is transforming the MICE segment by combining automation, artificial intelligence (AI) and system integration to improve customer experience and commercial efficiency.

The strategy focuses on optimizing the entire MICE opportunity lifecycle, from client qualification and request prioritization to proposal generation and conversion. Key objectives include reducing response times, improving sales follow-up, increasing conversion rates and expanding connectivity with online RFP platforms and Instant Booking solutions.

One development is MIA, an AI-powered assistant integrated within the Salesforce Sales ecosystem. MIA analyzes incoming RFPs, identifies relevant information, creates structured MICE opportunities and assigns them to the appropriate sales teams. By eliminating manual administrative tasks, MIA significantly accelerates response times while improving data quality and operational efficiency.

The roadmap includes further AI capabilities such as automated account and opportunity duplication detection, intelligent client nurturing, AI-generated customer communications, creation of MICE opportunities from web forms and emails and prioritization of opportunities based on likelihood to convert. Meliá is also developing predictive quotation tools using historical data, destination trends and client behavior to support faster and more accurate proposal generation.

The company plans to introduce fully digital proposal workflows, including contract generation and electronic signature capabilities, creating a seamless end-to-end sales process. Together, these developments position Meliá Hotels International at the forefront of MICE digitalization, using AI to deliver faster responses and a more intuitive experience for meeting planners, event organizers and corporate clients.

SHIFT 3

ATTENTION AND TRUST MUST BE EARNED

Time is one of the most valuable things attendees give an event.

When information is abundant and working days are fragmented, attendance cannot be taken for granted. People will travel for access, interaction, shared experience, recognition, progress and human connection. They are less likely to travel for content they could access online.

As AI-generated content becomes more common and misinformation continues to shape the wider environment, trust will matter more. Live experiences can build trust through visible expertise, transparent dialogue, direct questioning and shared context. That raises the bar for content quality, speaker credibility, facilitation and the moments between formal sessions.

What leading organizations are doing

- Reducing agenda density and creating space for interaction
- Using participatory formats where dialogue matters
- Designing attendee journeys around outcomes, not content volume
- Designing for different needs so events are accessible and inclusive
- Extending engagement before and after the live moment
- Using live feedback and participation signals to make adjustments

WHAT MAKES AN EVENT WORTH ATTENDING?

People will travel for:

Access, insight, relationships, recognition, community and progress

They will not travel for:

Content alone, passive formats or an agenda that does not justify the time away from work

The design challenge:

Make the value exchange clear before the invitation is sent

From event measurement to event intelligence

Post-event surveys remain important, but they are only one part of the story. The greatest value comes from combining surveys with behavioral, participation and engagement signals gathered throughout the attendee journey. When connected effectively, these data points help organizations understand not only what happened, but why it happened and what actions should follow. Leading organizations are increasingly moving away from retrospective reporting toward real-time event intelligence. Live polling, audience participation, feedback, networking data and content engagement can provide actionable insight while there is still time to adapt experiences, support attendees and maximize outcomes.

At the same time, there is growing recognition that metrics alone rarely influence business decisions. Stakeholders need a clear narrative that explains the significance of the data, the implications for the organization and the opportunities it creates. The most valuable measurement programs translate event activity into business context.

Ultimately, the goal is confidence. Confidence that investments are delivering value, confidence that decisions are based on evidence and confidence that event programs are contributing to broader organizational objectives.

“

A lot of planners do not like attendee friction during interaction and engagement touch points. The question is whether they are willing to pay for the techniques and technology that reduce it."

Alex Wright, Solutions Director, The Collective, BCD M&E

WHAT THE INDUSTRY IS TELLING US

Measurement must influence decisions, not just report outcomes

Reporting is only valuable when it supports prioritization, investment decisions and risk reduction.

Stories over metrics

The value of data lies in explaining what happened, why it matters and what should happen next.

Confidence is the real ROI

Great event measurement increases confidence among leaders, stakeholders and attendees to take action based on reliable insight.

LEADERSHIP ACTION

Define the attendee value exchange before designing the agenda. Be explicit about what participants will gain, contribute and be able to do afterward. Engage with attendees on what they want to achieve, how they want to be met and what their interests are. Shape experiences using data trends.



SHIFT 4

MEETINGS AND EVENTS BECOME A MANAGED STRATEGIC INVESTMENT

An important shift is from managing meetings and events one at a time to managing them as a connected portfolio.

A portfolio view allows organizations to align activity with business priorities, consolidate spend, strengthen supplier strategy, reduce duplication and extend content and engagement across multiple moments.

A portfolio approach also changes how success is measured. Attendance, satisfaction and budget adherence remain useful operating metrics, but they do not show whether an event influenced a relationship, accelerated a decision, improved understanding or supported commercial progress.

Stronger measurement starts with a defined outcome agreed before the event and combines event data with relevant business indicators.

Organizations are moving beyond simple return on investment (ROI) models toward broader frameworks that include return on value (ROV), trust, influence, engagement and decision-maker access. The challenge is not just to prove an event happened successfully, but that the overall portfolio advanced a business aim.



“

Meetings and events can be an emotive investment. That often leads organizations to prioritize certainty over experimentation. The next evolution of strategic meetings management is understanding not whether an event succeeded, but whether the portfolio advanced a business objective.”

Shauna Whitehead, SVP, Commercial Strategy, BCD M&E

THE SHIFT TO PORTFOLIO MANAGEMENT

Move away from event-by-event planning, isolated budgets and inconsistent measurement. Move toward an integrated portfolio aligned to business priorities, audience needs and enterprise governance.

8

ACTIONS TO STRENGTHEN PORTFOLIO PERFORMANCE

1. Protect flagship moments
2. Reduce lower-value activity
3. Use portfolio scale to negotiate better
4. Lock in contracts earlier
5. Deploy local delivery where it adds value
6. Build stronger supplier partnerships
7. Plan around capacity and resource constraints
8. Strengthen the investment case with better data

LEADERSHIP ACTION



Treat the event portfolio as an investment portfolio. Review where spend is concentrated, which audiences and business priorities it supports and which activity is no longer justified. Reallocate resources toward the moments that create the greatest strategic and commercial value.

REGIONAL OUTLOOK

The four shifts will not play out in the same way everywhere. This section reflects the perspectives of BCD M&E regional leadership and should be read as directional planning insight, rather than a single forecast for every market.



APAC

EMEA

LATAM

NORAM

UK

APAC enters 2027 with strong variation between mature premium hubs and fast-developing markets.

Singapore is expected to retain its position as a leading regional center for meetings and events, though it remains a premium destination. Bangkok continues to appeal where planners value flexibility and relative affordability.

India and China will continue to lead regional growth, with investment and business activity increasingly extending beyond traditional metropolitan hubs. Interest in emerging destinations is also growing across Southeast Asia, supported by increased investment, expanding event infrastructure and supply-chain diversification. These destinations are giving planners more options beyond established hubs, particularly where organizations are looking for distinctive experiences and competitive value.

Air travel costs will remain an important consideration given the region’s scale and reliance on aviation, with fuel prices having a direct impact on airfares. Food waste is also becoming a more practical sustainability priority in destinations where banqueting is central to the experience.

“

We’re seeing a clear shift across APAC as organizations look beyond the usual destinations and seek experiences that feel fresh and memorable for attendees. Emerging destinations are creating exciting new possibilities while continuing to strengthen their event capabilities and infrastructure.”

Sanjay Seth, SVP & Managing Director, APAC, BCD M&E

IMPLICATIONS FOR PLANNERS

01



Compare destinations market by market rather than treating APAC as one environment

02



Balance access, capacity, cost, language and local delivery capability

03



Build food-waste reduction and donation options into catering plans early

APAC

Underlying demand across EMEA remains resilient, but the operating environment is uneven.

Europe faces moderate economic growth, regulatory uncertainty and cost pressures, particularly rising energy costs in some markets. Increased government-led defense spending is expected to provide further growth opportunities. Barcelona, Madrid and Lisbon remain attractive European options, while Cape Town, Marrakesh and Istanbul are also highlighted as leading destinations across the region. Dubai and Abu Dhabi face ongoing challenges linked to instability in the Strait of Hormuz and the wider Middle East.

Instability in parts of the Middle East has heightened the importance of duty of care, traveler communication, contingency planning and destination perception. Strategic Meetings Management Programs can support a more coordinated approach to these risks. AI adoption is likely to be shaped by transparency, governance and compliance, as the European regulatory framework develops.

Demand remains strongest in life sciences, including pharmaceuticals, biotech, medtech and healthcare. Technology and digital innovation, defense companies, financial services, manufacturing, engineering, automotive and government-led activity also remain important sources of demand.



Authentic human connections in the region will become more exclusive and valuable in 2027."

Mikael Ek, SVP & Managing Director, EMEA, BCD M&E

IMPLICATIONS FOR PLANNERS

01



Make destination and format decisions market by market

02



Involve security, legal, procurement and local operating teams earlier

03



Test AI, data and attendee-tracking practices against relevant regional requirements

EMEA



Meetings and events remain essential to how businesses connect and grow across LATAM. In 2027, combining agility, local insight and creativity will be key to navigating change and creating meaningful experiences."

Ana Paula Hernández, SVP & Managing Director, LATAM, BCD M&E

LATAM enters 2027 with resilient demand supported by a strong culture of in-person business.

The outlook is cautiously positive, though economic and political conditions will continue to shape decision cycles and lead times.

Mexico and Brazil are central to regional program strategies, with growing interest in multi-country activity. Colombia is also seeing increased regional importance, with some companies centralizing operations and setting up teams there to support neighboring markets.

In Brazil, tax, labor and cost considerations may increase planning complexity, with a growing shortage of skilled personnel adding further pressure to event planning. Across the region, shorter lead times are likely to continue where organizations want to keep flexibility amid uncertainty. At the same time, experience-led formats, attendee engagement and practical AI use cases are gaining importance. Agency consolidation is also expected to continue, alongside ongoing competition and the emergence of new local players.

In Argentina, meetings and events retain strategic commercial importance, although demand is expected to become more cautious in the second half of the year amid economic uncertainty linked to the presidential elections.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PLANNERS

01



Use flexible contracting and scalable regional formats

02



Plan decision gates around realistic local lead times

03



Protect the relationship value of in-person formats while building stronger evidence of business impact

LATAM

The NORAM market enters 2027 with stable demand and greater financial discipline.

Budgets are expected to remain broadly flat for many organizations, increasing pressure on planners to protect experience quality while controlling cost and showing value.

Financial services, professional services, healthcare and life sciences remain important areas of activity. Transport, energy, food and beverage costs continue to influence destination choice and overall program design. Visa policy, cross-border travel conditions and changing perceptions of U.S.-bound meetings may influence attendance decisions for some international groups.

Agency consolidation, outsourcing of selected planning or creative functions and demand for flexible external expertise are likely to shape sourcing strategies in the year ahead.



Event planners will be asked to do more with less, which can create service and execution risks."

Charlene Rabideau, SVP & Managing Director, NORAM, BCD M&E

IMPLICATIONS FOR PLANNERS

01



Build realistic cost assumptions early

02



Find where local delivery can reduce exposure without reducing quality

03



Link flagship investment to a defined business outcome

04



Test supplier resilience and continuity, not only price

NORAM

“

The measurement of return on experience will move even higher on stakeholder agendas and procurement teams will seek more longer-term commercial commitments, including fixed-rate agreements over multiple years."

Helen McCabe, Managing Director, UK, BCD M&E

UK events are expected to remain resilient but weak economic growth will keep pressure on budgets.

Organizations are likely to seek greater efficiency and commercial transparency, including closer scrutiny of third-party spend and stronger justification for premium experiences.

Client-facing activity is likely to receive priority where it can show commercial value. Independent and distinctive venues remain attractive alternatives to traditional chain hotels, especially for experience-led programs. Luxury supply in London is also constrained, increasing the value of early planning.

The UK is likely to see demand for flexible agency support, longer-term commercial commitments and a stronger focus on return on experience (ROE) linked to commercial outcomes.

UK

IMPLICATIONS FOR PLANNERS

01



Decide which moments require premium experience and where flexibility matters most

02



Assess whether longer-term commitments improve value without reducing resilience

03



Connect return on experience to commercial, audience or organizational outcomes

THE 2027 LEADERSHIP AGENDA

Organizations do not need to respond to every shift with a new initiative. Leadership teams should focus on the decisions that have the greatest impact across the portfolio.



1 BUILD RESILIENCE INTO STRATEGY

Ask: Where are the biggest vulnerabilities across routes, suppliers, capacity and the wider operating environment?

Ask: Which parts of our plan are most likely to come under pressure and what would trigger a rethink?

Do: Put decision-making responsibilities, contingency plans and communication protocols in place before they're needed.

2 GOVERN AI AROUND VALIDATED USE CASES

Ask: Which use cases are approved and which problem does each one solve?

Ask: How are data, cost, quality, risk and human oversight managed?

Do: Scale proven applications and stop activity that creates output without useful value.

3 PROVE BUSINESS IMPACT

Ask: What outcome is this event designed to influence?

Ask: What evidence would show progress and which business data can be connected responsibly?

Do: Agree on outcomes and measurement before approving the format and budget.

4 MANAGE THE PORTFOLIO

Ask: Which events create disproportionate value?

Ask: Which should be expanded, redesigned, consolidated or stopped?

Do: Review the portfolio against business priorities, audience needs, risk and total investment.

SUSTAINABILITY

BECOMES A PLANNING DISCIPLINE

Sustainability expectations in events are evolving from a focus on building capabilities, including tools, processes and expertise, toward a stage where sustainability data informs planning decisions.

Better access to sustainability data and analysis enables teams to compare options, reduce emissions, design more sustainable events and create stronger participant engagement outcomes.

In 2027, this means looking beyond individual sustainable features and considering environmental impact as part of core planning. This is particularly relevant where heat, severe weather or resource pressure can affect attendee welfare and event continuity.

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The closer we get to 2030, companies will be more exposed if they do not tackle the emissions related to meetings and events."

Thiago Araujo, Director,
Global Sustainability, BCD M&E



LEADERSHIP ACTION

Make sustainability part of planning and investment decisions from the outset. Use credible data to compare destinations, suppliers and other options and be clear about where environmental impact should influence the final decision.

5 PRACTICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Climate resilience

Assess seasonal heat, extreme weather exposure, transport resilience and attendee welfare as part of destination choice.

1

Value for carbon

Consider whether the experience and business outcomes justify the emissions associated with the program and compare viable alternatives.

2

Food waste

Use better forecasting, menu design, portion planning and donation partnerships.

3

Understanding Scope 3 emissions

A lot of event emissions sit outside an organization's direct operations. Better supplier, travel and production data can help teams understand this impact, compare options during planning and make more informed choices.

4

Regenerative thinking

Work with local partners to create a positive impact for the communities and destinations where events take place.

5

CREATIVE STRATEGY IS MEASURED BY **WHAT HAPPENS NEXT**

Creative work will play a more strategic role as organizations ask what an experience must achieve, not simply how it should look.

Events can build trust, create dialogue and help people navigate change, but only when content, format and interaction are designed around a defined audience response.

This thinking extends beyond the room. Meetings and events are increasingly treated as campaigns and communities, with content and engagement continuing before and after people come together. The value comes from what participants understand and do afterward.

AI can support that shift by accelerating research, production, storyboarding, localization and personalization. But human judgment remains central. AI can increase speed and variation but cannot decide what is strategically important or what will feel credible to an audience.



It will be about the moments between the moments. Consistently ranked number one is the importance of human connections. And humanizing moments are critical to events strategies."

Taylor Smith, VP, Event Production & Creative Content, BCD M&E

THE CREATIVE ACCOUNTABILITY TEST



Understand

What should the audience know or see differently?



Believe

What confidence, trust or conviction should the experience build?



Decide

What choice or commitment should become easier?



Do

What action should follow and how will the organization support it?



LEADERSHIP ACTION

Define the change the experience should create before developing the concept. Build the content journey and measurement plan around that outcome.



The attention economy is real, yet for far too long we have squandered attendees' time and not made the most of it."

Nils Hartmann, Head of the Collective, Germany, BCD M&E

LIFE SCIENCES IN THE SPOTLIGHT

Life sciences provides an early view into how regulation, data, compliance and outcome measurement are changing meetings and events strategy. As one of the industry's most complex sectors, many of the trends visible here are likely to shape broader event programs in the years ahead.

EXPERT PERSPECTIVE

Ashley Williams

SVP, Life Sciences Center of Excellence, BCD M&E



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The next evolution of Congress and event strategy will come from pairing human judgment with AI-driven insight. The real value lies in using data from today to anticipate future needs, shape smarter actions and demonstrate relevance to different stakeholders."

Martin Jensen, Director, Global Congress & Events Center of Excellence, Lundbeck

WHAT EXTERNAL FORCES WILL HAVE THE GREATEST IMPACT?

Geopolitical volatility, regulatory complexity and pressure for operational resilience will continue to influence decisions. Procurement teams are likely to play a more prominent role, while organizations must navigate different requirements across markets and engagement types.

HOW WILL MEETINGS AND EVENTS EVOLVE?

Organizations will continue to grow their presence at scientific congresses to better capitalize on healthcare professionals (HCP) attendance at those events through an increase in ancillary meetings. Meetings and events should remain part of a broader omnichannel strategy rather than operating as standalone moments to improve ROI and ROE.

HOW WILL SUCCESS BE DEFINED?

Organizations will increasingly want to understand whether an event influenced behavior, improved scientific understanding, strengthened stakeholder relationships or contributed to a broader objective. That requires stronger data, clearer outcome definitions and reporting that goes beyond attendance and satisfaction.

LEADERSHIP QUESTIONS



How does this event connect to the broader engagement strategy?



What evidence would show scientific, stakeholder or business value?



How will content remain accessible and useful after the live moment?



What regulatory and data requirements must shape the experience from the beginning?

RETURN ON VALUE

HAS BECOME A LEADERSHIP EXPECTATION

Return on Value (ROV) gives leaders a more credible way to assess impact and provides event teams with a clearer way to make decisions and demonstrate accountability.

Organizations are now expected to look beyond attendance and satisfaction to show how meetings and events contribute to broader business priorities.

This pressure is reflected in BCD M&E research that found more than a third of customers identified ‘demonstrating ROI and value’ as a challenge. And with many teams having little extra budget to work with in 2027, showing where meetings and events deliver value matters more than ever.



A MORE REALISTIC VIEW OF EVENT IMPACT

The value of an event is not always financial. ROV reflects the different ways meetings and events can contribute to the business.

Financial Value

e.g. revenue contribution, pipeline acceleration or customer acquisition

Strategic Value

e.g. alignment to business priorities, employee retention or market positioning

Experience Value

e.g. advocacy, behavior change and community momentum

Governance Value

e.g. risk reduction, policy adherence and stronger oversight

Relationship Value

e.g. customer lifetime value, deal progression and account growth

Taken together, these dimensions provide a more realistic picture of how meetings and events create value.

ACTIONS FOR EVENT LEADERS

TO STRENGTHEN RETURN ON VALUE



Organizations can accelerate maturity by focusing on a small number of practical actions:

1

DEFINE OBJECTIVES AND VALUE UP FRONT

Agree the event's objectives and desired outcomes before planning begins, so success measures are clear from the start. This ensures the event is designed around delivering measurable value, rather than trying to define impact after the fact.

2

CREATE A SHARED ROV MODEL AND SCORECARD

Create one agreed approach for measuring value across financial impact, strategic outcomes, governance and attendee experience, so teams use consistent definitions, metrics and reporting.

3

CONNECT DATA SOURCES

Bring together event, commercial, financial, people and operational data to create stronger evidence of contribution.

4

TAILOR REPORTING TO THE AUDIENCE

Different stakeholders need different views. Executive reporting should focus on outcomes, implications and decisions, not activity detail.

5

USE MEASUREMENT TO IMPROVE PERFORMANCE

Treat insight as an input to planning and experience design, not only as an output for reporting.

A SPOTLIGHT

ON RETURN ON RELATIONSHIPS

The value of relationships can be harder to measure, which means looking beyond the event to see whether the right people connected and those relationships continued to develop afterwards.

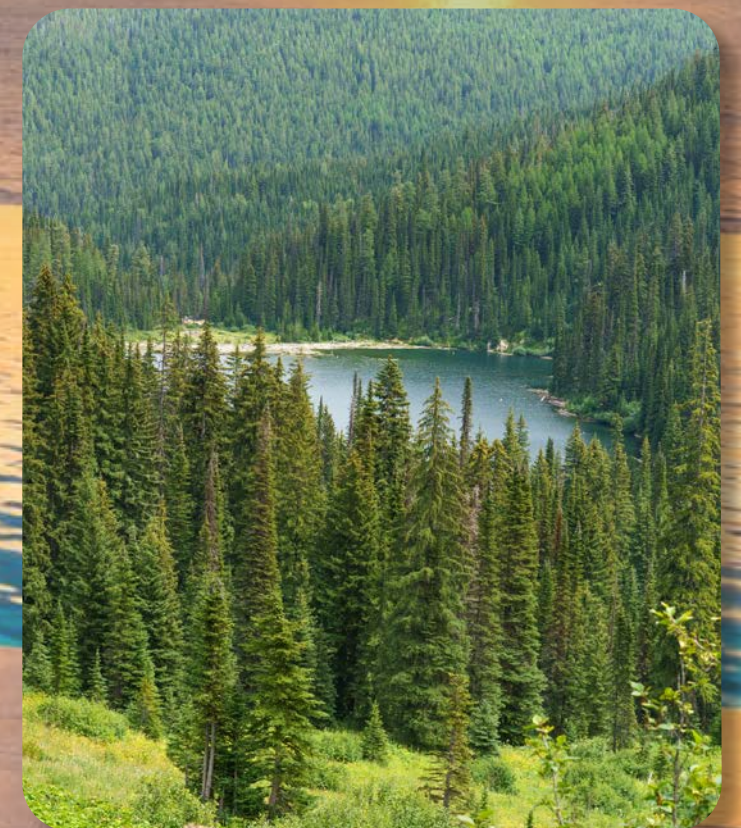
Combining event data with follow-up feedback can help show whether perceptions changed and engagement continued or connections led to something more.

The opportunity is not simply to report that relationships matter but to show how better relationship outcomes contribute to retention, stronger partnerships and long-term business value.



DESTINATIONS TO WATCH

The destinations below offer alternatives to established meetings hubs. Each should be considered against program purpose, access, seasonality, capacity, risk and cost.



Phu Quoc, Vietnam

Phu Quoc is gaining attention as an Asia-Pacific option for incentives and selected meetings, supported by growing resort infrastructure, natural appeal and increasing hospitality investment. Its coastline, biosphere setting and integrated resort developments give planners a destination that blends beach experience with business-event potential.



BEST SUITED FOR

Incentive programs and groups seeking integrated resort, beach and group activity options.

PLANNER CONSIDERATION

Transfer times, wet-season conditions, air access and specific property capacity should all be confirmed before shortlisting.



DESTINATIONS TO WATCH

Bilbao & San Sebastián, Spain

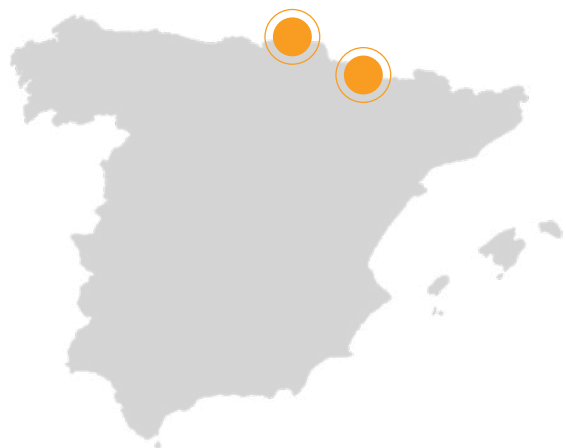
Together, Bilbao and San Sebastián combine culture, gastronomy, coastal scenery and contrasting urban personalities. Used well, they can create a two-center program with strong incentive appeal and a memorable sense of place.

BEST SUITED FOR

Incentives, leadership gatherings and food and culture-led programs.

PLANNER CONSIDERATION

The two-center format adds movement and logistics, so test whether the added experience value justifies the operational complexity.



DESTINATIONS TO WATCH

Panama City, Panama

Panama City combines regional connectivity, modern infrastructure, historic districts and access to tropical landscapes. Its appeal lies in the ability to move from business content to food, culture and nature within one destination.



BEST SUITED FOR

Regional Americas meetings, incentives and programs combining business content with food, culture and nature.

PLANNER CONSIDERATION

Reconfirm route options, hotel capacity, transfer times and seasonality for the intended dates.



Big Sky, Montana, USA

Big Sky offers mountain experiences, year-round outdoor appeal and a growing hospitality and meetings base. For the right group, the setting becomes part of the event experience rather than just a backdrop.



BEST SUITED FOR

Leadership retreats, incentives and smaller groups seeking active or nature-based experiences and high-quality accommodation.

PLANNER CONSIDERATION

Season, weather, transfer time and activity accessibility should shape program design.



Bath, UK

Bath combines a compact city center, strong heritage appeal, distinctive venues and easy rail access.



BEST SUITED FOR

Leadership meetings, incentives, client gatherings and off-site programs where character and walkability matter.

PLANNER CONSIDERATION

Historic venues may create constraints around access, production, capacity or conservation, so confirm technical feasibility early.





The New Luxury of Incentive Travel: Experiences Worth the Journey

Luxury in incentive travel is no longer defined solely by five-star accommodation or prestigious destinations. It's now measured by the experiences attendees have and the memories they take home. Participants are seeking experiences they could not easily access on their own, making authenticity, exclusivity and engagement more important than ever.

At Meliá Hotels International's luxury brands, including Gran Meliá, ME by Meliá, The Meliá Collection and Paradisus by Meliá, incentive programs immerse guests in the character of each destination. Whether it's a private cultural encounter in Rome, an exclusive gastronomic journey in Paris, a wellness retreat in Menorca, a safari-inspired experience in Tanzania or a bespoke celebration overlooking the Caribbean coastline of Playa del Carmen, the focus is on creating genuine connections with the destination rather than simply showcasing it.

This is also changing what planners expect from hotels. Beyond accommodation and meeting facilities, they're looking for personalized experiences, flexible event spaces, wellbeing-focused programs and opportunities for participants to connect. Luxury hotels are increasingly acting as experience curators, combining local expertise, cultural authenticity, wellness, gastronomy and innovative event design to elevate every stage of the attendee journey.

Destination choices are shifting too. Alongside accessibility, groups are considering the distinctive stories, cultural heritage and experiences a destination can offer.

Modern luxury incentive travel is becoming less about status and more about significance. For Meliá the opportunity lies in creating moments of discovery and connection that attendees could not easily replicate elsewhere.

MOVE AWAY / **MOVE TOWARD**

Packed agendas



Deliberate space for interaction

Networking by volume



Curated, outcome-led connection

Event-by-event budgeting



Portfolio investment choices

Attendance reporting



Business-outcome measurement

Sustainability statements



Carbon-informed decisions

Visible AI for its own sake



Quiet AI that removes friction

Reactive risk decisions



Trigger-based resilience planning

Standalone events



Connected campaigns and communities



CLOSING PERSPECTIVE

The organizations that gain the most from meetings and events in 2027 will not necessarily be those that spend more. The difference will be in how they invest, with a clearer view of what each event needs to achieve and where it fits within the wider portfolio. Better use of data can help inform those decisions and show what is delivering value.

That discipline matters even more in an uncertain environment. AI can make planning and delivery more efficient and provide better insight, but technology alone will not make an event successful. The purpose still needs to be clear, and human judgment remains essential. Just as importantly, creative ideas need to do more than capture attention. They need to support what the event is there to achieve.

For leaders, the focus in 2027 should be on making better decisions about where to invest and being clearer about the impact meetings and events are expected to have. That is how they move from activity to advantage.

