



Planning Meetings & Events in Emerging Countries

Have you considered placing a meeting in an emerging country? What do you need to look out for when planning an event there? And what is an emerging country anyway?

An emerging country is a country that has been typically less developed but the economy is beginning to rapidly grow. The four largest emerging and developing economies are the BRIC countries (Brazil, Russia, India and China), with India and China considered to be the largest. Some other countries that are considered by some to be emerging are Mexico, Indonesia, South Africa, South Korea and Turkey.

The meetings business in emerging countries has grown significantly in recent years, as these

economies have increased in importance. There is a much greater desire to meet in these countries than ever before, and that brings to light a different set of challenges, experiences, as well as a greater sense of duty of care for planners.

There are five aspects to meeting planning that are imperative for planners to focus on in order to ensure their meeting goes smoothly in an emerging country: security, technology, transportation, food & beverage, and payments.

1 BE PREPARED FOR VARYING LEVELS OF SECURITY

Security issues vary country to country and it is essential that planners are up to date on security in emerging countries. The U.S. Department of State site (www.travel.state.gov) is a great resource for ensuring your meeting is in a location that meets the security needs for your client. In countries where unrest or other political issues may be a factor, a strong force majeure clause is required in your contract can help ensure you are able to cancel the meeting without penalty if a security issue arises. Items to consider in a force majeure clause should include consideration of curtailment of transportation due to strikes or unrests well as consideration for attrition if attendees cannot arrive on time due to these issues.

Meeting with security experts in the local country can help planners ensure understanding of issues to be on the lookout for, and how local security, the venues and the planner should handle those concerns. Be sure to ask the venue about their policies and procedures for medical situations (i.e. whether there is a doctor on staff, the location of the closest hospital, whether the staff is trained in CPR, etc.). Ideally, planners should meet with hotel security during a site inspection prior to the meeting regardless of the location, but it's especially important in emerging countries. However if that is not possible, talk to the hotel security to ask specific questions about their contingency plans for natural disasters, medical issues, political unrest, strikes,

etc. You should also know who your main point of contact is in case of an emergency and have their number with you at all times while onsite.

2 KNOW THE TECHNOLOGY LANGUAGE, AND KEEP ATTENDEES IN TOUCH

Even though technology in emerging countries is not as different from that in developed countries as one may think, it is important to make sure you are speaking the same technology language. As a simple example, confirm that the adapters you need for your printers or laptops are readily available or you will need to bring these with you. Ideally, connecting a technology specialist from your home country with a technology specialist in the host country can go a long way to ensure that you have everything you need to make your event successful. Be sure to make your onsite technology requests early on, so the venue can meet the needs of your program.

Beyond attendee security, there is the added question of IT security. Due to a lack of transparency, as well as rumors about the way other countries manage technology, many companies choose to err on the side of caution rather than assume data will be secure. Recently, one company's security director strongly advised against attendees bringing work laptops with them to a meeting program operating in China and suggested they bring a clean laptop without proprietary information. This decision was due to the company's security concerns that China could have the capability to obtain proprietary

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SUCCESS FACTORS



SECURITY



TECHNOLOGY



TRANSPORT



FOOD & BEVERAGE



PAYMENTS



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information from electronic devices once entering the country. Although not all companies will have clean laptops for a situation like this, it is important to consider these possibilities.

Mobile networks in emerging countries are often quite advanced and can be very useful in maintaining contact. Suggest to your attendees that they purchase a temporary international cell phone plan if they don't have one. If their phone does not accommodate international calling or their cell phone remains off unless they are making outgoing calls, you may not be able to reach them in an emergency, even if you have their contact information.

You may want to consider the option of renting a satellite phone while onsite in an emerging country. Satellite phones are able to work even if the normal infrastructure for communications goes down. While they may be costly to rent, it is a small price to pay for peace of mind.

3 TRANSPORTATION PREFERENCES AND POLICIES WILL BE DIFFERENT

Transportation can be challenging in emerging countries, and one country may offer very different modes of transportation and have different requirements when booking travel from another. For example, in China it is important to ensure attendees are booked with changeable airline tickets as schedules can frequently shift. It is important to discuss all booking options and preferences with your client, in

addition to educating them on what the specific country is able to offer in terms of transportation. A local Destination Management Company (DMC) or your hotel contact should be helpful resources.

Take into consideration that many attendees may need to take connecting flights in order to arrive in an emerging country destination, either due to their travel distance or reduced airline capacity into certain areas of the country.

Duty of care is also an important item for companies to consider. One must be able to reach attendees in case of a natural disaster or any kind of emergency situation. If attendees book their own transportation, duty of care can become a big issue as there is no central record of attendee travel plans. For example, throughout parts of Asia and Europe, train tickets must be purchased by the individual traveler. In these types of situations, self-reporting of reservations by an attendee within their meeting registration should be required in order to help provide a way to manage changes or required communication throughout their journey.

Additionally, traveling in a country where you don't speak the language can be quite challenging. Ask for drivers who speak both your language as well as the local language to ensure you and your attendees feel comfortable when traveling in a foreign region. The local DMC can be a great resource in arranging transportation and providing a sense of comfort and understanding of the local culture and language.

Many countries require a Visa for entry. Although it may be easier, discourage attendees from trying to enter these countries as a tourist if they are truly there for a work-related event, as they risk being banned from the country and turned away upon arrival. Partner with a group that specializes in Visa applications (i.e. CIBTvisas) to make certain that attendees are able to answer all of the questions on the application correctly. Visa regulations are updated constantly, and these service providers can help ensure the most current requirements are met, allowing all applications to be processed as efficiently as possible. Applications can be lengthy, so planning ahead is the best course of action. Some countries even require individuals to apply in person which will take additional time. If you are working with a hotel and/or DMC, they may be able to provide a Visa invitation letter stating the purpose of the visit and/or confirming the existence of a hotel reservation.

Many applications need to be sent via a hard copy and require your passport, so planning is required should travel to other foreign destinations be required during the approval process. If there is a possibility that someone will be visiting the same country again in the future, look at a multiple entry Visa application versus a single entry; while the cost may be higher the advantages can outweigh the expense.

4 TAKE FOOD & BEVERAGE INTO CONSIDERATION

Food and beverage is an integral part of every meeting. It is important

to understand the food and beverage norms in each country and work with the chef to ensure all food needs are met.

When building your menu, keep alcohol in mind. In some countries, alcohol can be very expensive due to taxes and distribution costs. Serving local wines and beers can not only have a big impact on reducing your budget, but also gives your attendees a chance to taste beverages that they may not otherwise have the chance to try. Conversely, it is important to know that in some areas of the world (for example, parts of India) alcohol is prohibited. This may be a challenge for some clients and knowing this before you start to source your location can eliminate unnecessary challenges in the planning process.

Make sure your attendees understand the culture of dining in the country they are visiting. In many countries, meals are not only for sustenance but also for socializing and can start much later than attendees are used to. Be sure to highlight the timing of the meals so attendees are prepared to eat at the appropriate time as well as any other important local customs or norms in pre-trip communications.

When planning your menu, try to incorporate as many local foods as possible. This gives your attendees a chance to experience food that may only be available to them once in a lifetime. For example Stroganoff is traditionally thought of as Russian. Although versions of Stroganoff are available around the world, experiencing this food in



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Russia, made by a Russian chef, can make for an impactful and memorable culinary experience for your attendees.

5 THE DIFFERENCE IN PAYMENTS

Billing and payments can be a very complex process in emerging countries. In some, it is required to pay the entire bill up front before arrival. Be prepared that this may be the norm and that a partial payment or the waiving of a deposit may not be acceptable.

In some countries, like Brazil, it is difficult to navigate the payment waters due to country restrictions and paperwork. And while globally the US dollar is more widely accepted than some other forms of payment as there are fewer restrictions on sending USD to many countries. Alternatively, in countries such as China, local payment or cash may be more easily accepted. Also keep in mind that international corporate card or meeting card acceptance may be limited. Both establishing clarity around payment expectations with vendors and understanding your company regulations as well as the financial nuances of the host country will go a long way in

making for a smooth payment process.

One also needs to be aware that not all attendees in some of these countries may have access to credit cards. For example, in China, it is less common for attendees to have personal credit cards so incidentals must be charged to the master account at the hotel. The attendee would need to settle with cash upon check-out.

MAKE A PLAN FOR SUCCESS

In general, whenever planning in a foreign country, one must be aware of cultural norms and language barriers. Additionally, it is imperative to start your planning early to ensure you have enough time to account for differences in time zones, currencies, country specific holidays and work/life philosophy.

Holding meetings in emerging countries can be a very rewarding experience for attendees and planners alike and can bring a new dimension to your event. Keeping technology, security, transportation, food & beverage and payments front of mind can make planning meetings smooth, rewarding and enjoyable for everyone.



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