



Flanders
State of the Art

INTERNATIONAL QUALITY STANDARDS FOR MEETING LOCATIONS

A GUIDE

VISITFLANDERS



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MEETING INTERNATIONAL EXPECTATIONS

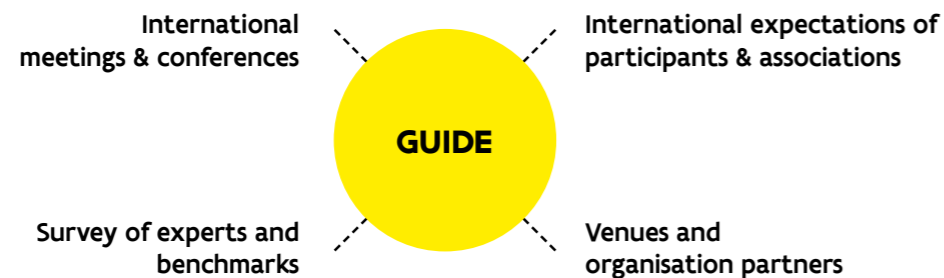
1

What do international associations, conference organisers and participants expect from a meeting location? Find the answers in this guide.

VISITFLANDERS wants our region to grow into an international top destination for meetings and conferences, with primary focus on international association congresses. For this reason, it is important that as many meeting locations as possible offer the quality that these associations expect. To facilitate this, VISITFLANDERS has developed this guide in collaboration with IDEA Consult.

EXPERTS AND PROFESSIONALS

The information offered in this guide is based on research from various sources and studies about the current and future quality requirements and expectations in the international meeting industry. IDEA Consult also gathered five experts together to gain their perspectives. In addition, they studied a few leading international meeting venues to serve as a benchmark. Finally, in a sounding board session with nine meeting professionals from Flanders, IDEA Consult refined the content of this guide.



TOOL FOR SELF-EVALUATION

The result is a document that can be used for self-evaluation. It contains useful checklists that provide an indication of whether your venue matches the international expectations, as well as inspiring tips and trends. We make a distinction between the basic requirements and the 'optional extras', which are additional assets that could give you an advantage in the international market. We focus on three aspects: management, service and infrastructure. Accessibility, the accommodation offer, political context, price, climate, sales and marketing all play a role when selecting a meeting location, but we will not be considering them here.

INTERNATIONAL AMBITION

As you know, VISITFLANDERS wants to attract an international audience. The guide is first and foremost intended for meeting locations in Flanders that operate internationally or that have the same international ambitions as we do. Based on advice from experts, we do not make a distinction between the different types of meeting locations in Flanders in this guide. Whether it is a conference hotel, a dedicated conference centre, an exhibition centre, a museum or a heritage location: international organisers and participants have the same general expectations from meeting facilities and services..

PROFESSIONALISATION PROGRAMME

This guide is part of the professionalisation programme that VISITFLANDERS has developed to support the meeting sector. The international meeting industry has high expectations. When choosing a venue, many factors play a role. With a customer-oriented attitude, flexibility, creativity, professional service, a solid network of partners, and a unique experience you can make a strong impression. This is where the opportunities exist for the sector. Consider the guide as a tool for the continued development and improvement of the quality of your meeting and conference location.



2

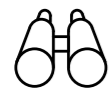
INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATIONS: A UNIQUE DYNAMIC

In this guide, we will pay particular attention to international associations. Their meetings and conferences have a unique dynamic. To allow you to respond to this, we will share some insights into their expectations.

Associations organise a wide range of meetings: training sessions, workshops, information sessions, development programmes, technical committees, networking opportunities, seminars, board meetings etc. In addition, there are the annual conferences. They often span several days, have a pre-determined programme and usually have multiple sessions running simultaneously. Most importantly, they are a crucial source of income. Therefore, associations go to great lengths to ensure that their conference is a top-level event.

QUALITY IN ALL ASPECTS

Quality is the keyword. Your infrastructure will determine to a large degree whether you succeed in attracting conferences and meetings. In addition to this, the accommodation available in the area, your accessibility, the destination etc. play an important role; however, as we stated earlier, we will not be taking those factors into consideration in this guide. Furthermore, it is important that you can respond to the expectations of the organisers during the planning and execution phases. They want to be sure they can rely on you before they choose your location. That is why we will not only discuss the quality of the infrastructure, but also the service and management.



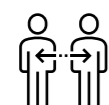
... planning ahead

A lead time of five years or more is not unusual. Each association conference is a multi-year project that is systematically monitored and supervised. Therefore, make a long-term plan and coordinate with local players (suppliers, government etc.).



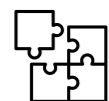
... international mindset

Participants may be travelling from all corners of the globe. Therefore, your employees should be multilingual. At the very least, they should be able to communicate in English.



... collaboration

The average number of participants is 150, but there may be several thousand in total. Therefore, allow planning partners to assist you. Many venues work with associations and intermediaries (e.g. professional conference organisers). The intermediaries will often take on the organisation and planning, either partially or fully.



... variety

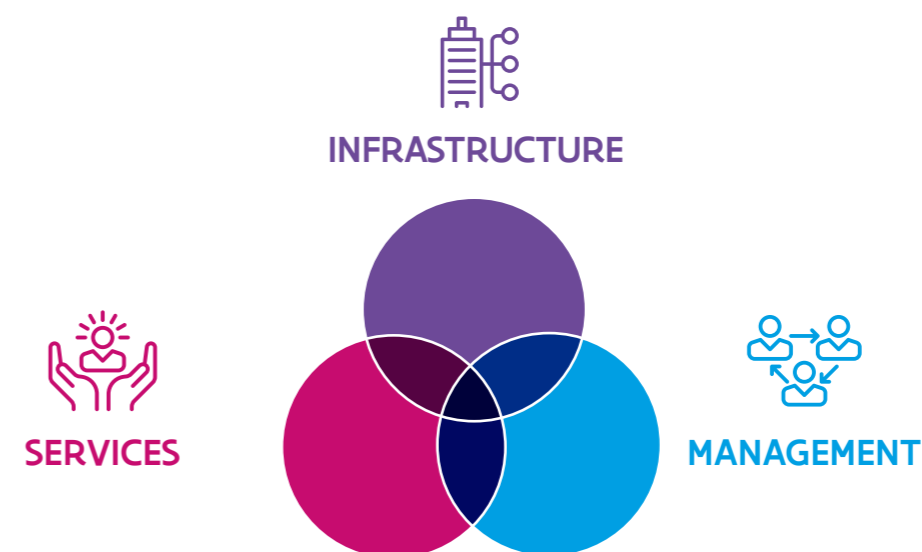
The larger a meeting, the more complex the technical and logistical challenges. A large conference needs a more extensive team for preparations and support. More participants means there needs to be proportionally more seating, parking spaces, cloakroom hooks and sanitary facilities. As a meeting and conference location, you don't always need to provide everything yourself. Often, the solutions will lie in flexibility, creativity and help from external service providers.



3

HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

This guide outlines the international quality expectations for meeting and conference locations around three themes: management, service and infrastructure. These three aspects are closely related and are impacted by the operational and investment budgets of your location.



Per theme, we will formulate recommendations that respond to the quality expectations of international associations. This will allow you to easily evaluate the degree to which your venue meets the expectations. You will also find concrete ideas for improvement. This will help you to take targeted future-oriented action that will improve your quality.



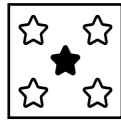


THE BASICS

State-of-the-art venues meet the basic expectations of international associations to the greatest extent possible. We describe the tangible expectations (the hardware and facilities at your event location) and the intangible expectations (hospitality, service, experience etc.).

ADDITIONAL

On top of the basic quality, we make additional recommendations:



OPTIONALS

additional initiatives for locations that want to have a competitive edge



INSPIRATION

inspiring examples and trends



TIPS

recommendations for venues, practical tips & tricks



TIPS FOR VENUES WITH LARGE CAPACITY

recommendations or tips specifically for venues with large capacity



TOWARDS A STATE-OF-THE-ART MANAGEMENT

4

A clear policy that puts hospitality and sustainability first is a definite plus for organisers. Excellent management also strives to have a positive impact on the local region, such as improving local employment, fostering satisfied and engaged employees and creating a connective network model in which you work with local organisations, experts and businesses on a long term basis.

1

Create masterful hospitality.

2

Treat your employees as if they were your guests.

3

Follow sustainable and responsible business practices.

4

Comply with legal standards and guidelines.

4.1 MASTERFUL HOSPITALITY

Management must strive towards masterful hospitality and actively foster it.

Masterful hospitality is expressed through the contact with customers. Hospitality means that you take care of the meeting planners and participants and lighten their load. Friendliness, a customer-oriented mindset, willingness to help develop creative solutions and to collaborate with flexibility are part of this too. In addition, clear and transparent communication is important – for example, when communicating about your company policy and prices.

The accessibility of your venue, the leadership style and the layout of your building also play a role in the way your customers and participants experience your hospitality. Genuine hospitality means that you make clear agreements with your customers and external service providers and fulfil these agreements.

Express your vision through a meeting and conference strategy, which is best developed with input from the whole team. It is important that you respond to market demands, changes and opportunities sufficiently and that you involve your team. This will result in a professional approach and a dynamic execution of the agreements you make with organisers.





Check how your venue scores:



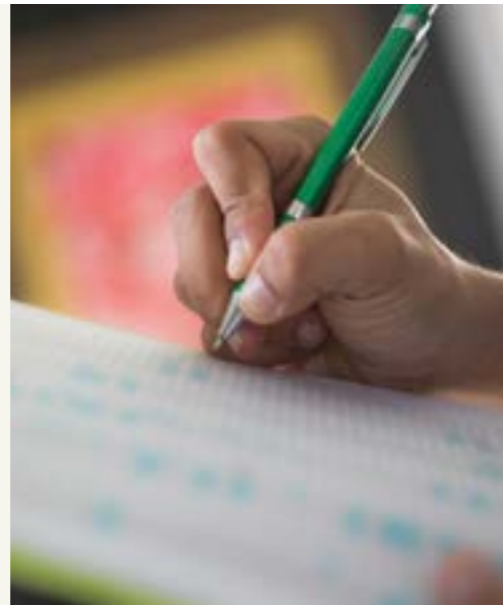
We have a meeting and conference strategy.	<input type="radio"/>
The meeting and conference policy is clearly communicated to our team.	<input type="radio"/>
Management makes and communicates decisions effectively (internal and external).	<input type="radio"/>
Management makes clear agreements with external suppliers for meetings and conferences.	<input type="radio"/>
Management and operational teams are prepared to help the organisers and intermediaries with ideas and solutions.	<input type="radio"/>
The team of employees is involved in the meeting and conference strategy.	<input type="radio"/>
The team of employees is aware of and involved in site inspections and fam trips.	<input type="radio"/>
The agreements made with the organisers are clearly communicated to the team.	<input type="radio"/>
The team of employees receives hospitality training or coaching.	<input type="radio"/>
The team of employees is multilingual. Speaking fluent English is the minimum requirement.	<input type="radio"/>
All employees look neatly dressed and are recognisable (badge, clothing).	<input type="radio"/>
The team of employees knows the products and services available at the venue.	<input type="radio"/>
You actively ensure that the venue is accessible to people with disabilities and communicate about it.	<input type="radio"/>



TIP

Create a plan.

Ensure that the agreements you make with the organisers are communicated to and understood by the team. Internal briefings in various phases of the planning process streamline the transfer of information. An internal script can help with that as well. You could use planning software to do this. It should include the planning, division of tasks and timing of any potential deliveries. Any sensitive issues or problems that arise during the planning process should also be included. Tip: remember to brief all the employees about the organisation team. Provide them with the names and photos of important people (speakers, participants politicians) and the people with whom they will be.



4.2 TREAT YOUR EMPLOYEES AS IF THEY WERE YOUR GUESTS

Regardless of their position, each employee at your venue will receive questions from organisers and participants. The way your employees behave around visitors can affect how comfortable the participants and organisers feel.

By including your employees in the policy and encouraging them to contribute, you increase their job satisfaction. This enjoyment is picked up on by the visitors. Good briefing and training on the job is therefore essential. You should listen to feedback from employees if you want to improve the quality.

For example, you could hold a short internal evaluation after each meeting and conference. This will allow your employees to be informed of any problems that occurred, so they can avoid them in the future. Integrate the solutions in your operations. Employees should be encouraged to follow trends and developments within their specific work areas, participate in (international) training networks and contribute ideas for improvement

Check how your venue scores:



The well-being of the employees is a priority.	<input type="radio"/>
Employees receive regularly training that is relevant to their range of tasks.	<input type="radio"/>
The team of employees provides feedback based on their practical experience.	<input type="radio"/>
You value input from your employee team as part of your policy.	<input type="radio"/>
You encourage the team to take part in peer-to-peer meetings, workshops etc.	<input type="radio"/>

4.3 FOLLOW SUSTAINABLE AND RESPONSIBLE BUSINESS PRACTICES

Sustainable business practices lead to the creation of economic, social and environmental prosperity. Each venue can contribute to this. Outstanding entrepreneurship is not about dreaming, but about doing.

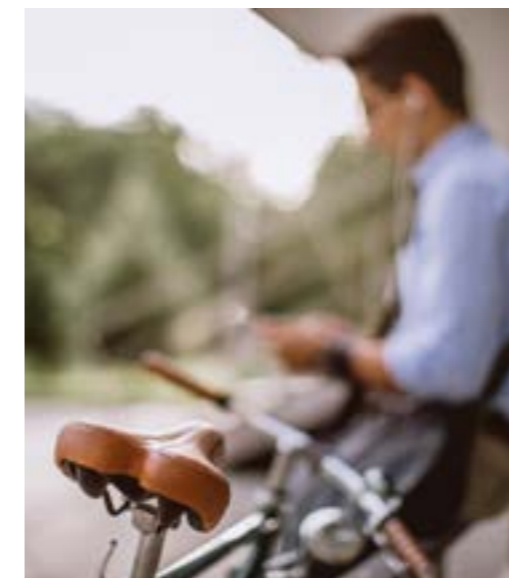
The sustainability of a venue is increasingly seen as a 'hygiene factor', i.e. it does not stimulate extra demand directly, but if the sustainability aspect is missing then customers may look elsewhere. This is certainly the case for non-for-profit organisations, among which international associations. Sustainability is becoming a deal breaker for them.

Create a sustainability strategy for your venue. This will ensure that your location can contribute to organisers' sustainability goals. It's the ideal way to create a win-win situation. Make sure you communicate about your sustainability strategy. For participants, ethical and environmental factors can play a role in whether they decide to participate in a meeting or conference. For example, communicate if you are serving organic food, if you are collaborating with social organisations making a local positive impact, or if your guests can take a tour with a local (like a local, with locals etc.).

Check how your venue scores:



You have a sustainability strategy.	<input type="radio"/>
You are implementing sustainable measures.	<input type="radio"/>
You communicate about your sustainability policy.	<input type="radio"/>
You are proactively building a local network.	<input type="radio"/>



BE INSPIRED!

- Use natural soaps, offer tap water, take energy-saving measures, use rainwater in your sanitation, prevent food waste etc.
- Build a network of quality service providers: work with local suppliers and producers (local products, organic food, short supply chain etc.), accommodation providers, host and tour organisations, speakers and moderators, photographers etc.
- Take part in employment initiatives for disadvantaged groups, work with social organisations, encourage local residents, knowledge institutions and students to participate in a conference etc.





WANT TO KNOW MORE?

- The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are a worldwide plan to combat poverty and to create a sustainable future. The tourism sector can make a significant contribution to this. The UNWTO (World Tourism Organization) created a digital co-creation information platform for this purpose. You can read more about how tourism businesses can contribute to sustainability here: tourism4sdgs.org
- The international Green Key label for sustainable tourism businesses is linked to the SDGs. You can find more information about this programme here: www.greenkey.global
- You can find an extensive list of criteria for hotels and meeting venues in Flanders here: www.groenesleutel.be



BE INSPIRED!

The city of **Gothenburg** is a world leader in sustainable meetings and the greenest hotel city in the world. Organisers of meetings and conferences can expect environmentally-friendly infrastructure, accommodation, logistics and other sustainable services. The Gothenburg Convention Bureau works with the organisers to assess how a meeting can contribute to positive change, help reach their sustainability goals and how they can communicate about this. They give the following tips: encourage participants to travel with public transport, work with accommodation providers who have an ecolabel, encourage gender equality, support local organisations etc. You can find more info here: www.goteborg.com



The **Bella Center Copenhagen** is part of BC Hospitality Group. Striving towards sustainability is embedded in the future strategy of the company. They have a 360° strategic approach to sustainability that they call 'Responsible Hospitality'. They are succeeding in many different ways: community engagement (e.g. career opportunities for disadvantaged groups and the unemployed), job satisfaction among employees, health, safety and security of customers, guests and employees. Want to know more? www.bellacentercopenhagen.dk

Hilton Meet with Purpose is a programme that connects the sustainability goals of Hilton with those of the organisers of meetings and conferences. There are three focuses: reaching the meeting aims, fostering the well-being of participants and serving sustainable meals. Learn more at meetings.hilton.com/meet-with-purpose



4.4 COMPLY WITH LEGAL STANDARDS AND GUIDELINES

It is important that you adhere to all regulations that apply to the meeting infrastructure. They will differ depending on the location of the venue. Management must ensure a correct implementation of matters such as:

- the accessibility of public buildings;
- the prevention policy (well-being at work);
- fire safety and fire prevention (e.g. stairs, doors and compartment dimensions etc.);
- environmental regulations and inspections (e.g. heating and cooling installations);
- building regulations (e.g. building volume, facade cladding);
- HACCP standards (food hygiene), hospitality licences and certifications;
- GDPR privacy regulations.

USEFUL

Want to make meetings and conferences as accessible as possible? VISITFLANDERS and Inter Vlaanderen have created a handy checklist for meeting locations: 'Accessible meetings and conferences: a checklist'. Both organisations offer numerous services to help you optimise your accessibility, such as a guidance programme for meeting locations. Find out more at www.toerismevlaanderen.be/toegankelijke-meetings-en-congressen





5

TOWARDS A STATE-OF-THE-ART SERVICE

Organising a meeting or conference, or participating in one, can offer many benefits. Organisers and guests can consolidate their professional network and expand it, share knowledge, discover new ideas and gain experience, generate new business and so on.

Yet the meeting experience is largely dependent on the service provided by your operational team and external partners. Therefore, it is important to respond to the demands and expectations of the conference target group pro-actively. Follow the trends and developments in the meeting industry. Surprise people with unique experiences, not just by investing in infrastructure.

- 1

Approach your business as if it were a team sport.
- 2

Build a network of service providers.
- 3

Communicate clearly.
- 4

Create a carefree environment.

5.1 APPROACH THE BUSINESS AS IF IT WERE A TEAM SPORT

Providing service to organisers is a team effort.

You must have a professional approach during all phases, from the sales and site visits to the preparations and execution of the meeting or conference. There is so much planning and production involved in a meeting. During the entire process – before and during the meeting – every employee becomes the face of the venue and the destination: the planning team and the reception, technical and kitchen staff.

The motivation and engagement shown by your employees is crucial to provide excellent service. They are a sounding board for organisers, solve problems, respond to requests, answer endless questions and are often the last to leave the venue.

Check how your venue scores:



You have a single point of contact who is the contact person for the customer and external suppliers until the contract has been signed.	<input type="radio"/>
The planning team creates a script and briefs the entire team on it.	<input type="radio"/>
The event supervisor/conference manager of the venue ensures the meeting or conference goes smoothly. In this phase too, the customer and suppliers have a single point of contact.	<input type="radio"/>
The reception staff are motivated to welcome guests in a friendly and spontaneous way. They have in-depth knowledge of all the products/services the venue offers and will refer guests to colleagues when necessary.	<input type="radio"/>
The reception staff have a wide product knowledge of the (leisure) activities in the area (cafés and restaurants, cash machines, chocolate shops, supermarkets etc.).	<input type="radio"/>
The technical staff have a thorough knowledge of the technical equipment at the venue and have good knowledge of the systems on the market.	<input type="radio"/>
The technical staff offer technical support in all phases of the organisation (pre check, set-up, during the event and during the dismantling).	<input type="radio"/>
The technical staff stay up to date on developments in techniques and technologies and can gain more information about them if necessary.	<input type="radio"/>
The technical staff are able to handle problems.	<input type="radio"/>
Organisers can use their own equipment on location. Your venue can offer them technical support with this.	<input type="radio"/>
The kitchen team (or the caterer) responds to food trends, dietary preferences, last-minute requests etc.	<input type="radio"/>
The waiting staff have product knowledge and master serving techniques.	<input type="radio"/>

5.2 BUILD A NETWORK OF SERVICE PROVIDERS

Build a network of quality service providers. Ensure that they are on board with your sustainability policy. This will ensure that you create the maximum local impact and that it generates more value for your organisers. Strive to create a comprehensive package of services, aimed at relieving the burdens of the organisers.

- **Work with local organisations.**
Work with a pool of professional conference organisers with whom you have had a good experience and make clear agreements. The organisation can rely on these partners. Work closely with local tourism organisations and the convention bureau. They can help you with your business presentation and to highlight the assets of the destination. Stay up-to-date on the latest trends and developments via workshops and training.
- **Make agreements with accommodation providers.**
International meetings and conferences attract international participants. They prefer to stay in accommodation close to your venue, that takes good care of them. Approach hotels and B&B's in your area and make agreements regarding prices and services. You can introduce these premium partners to the organisers. If you have a fixed pool of partners, you can offer them possibilities in different price and quality ranges.
- **Offer contemporary catering.**
The catering must be healthy and varied. Special requests are the new normal. Less meat and more vegetables is a trend that will only continue. The use of seasonal, fresh and local products remains crucial. Give participants the opportunity to try local specialities and dare to give them your own unique twist. In brief, serve exquisite food and drink. If you don't have an own kitchen team,



work with external caterers. This gives organisers more options and you can adapt to their quality and service requirements.

- **Provide sufficient parking spaces.**
If your venue does not have a car park, set-up price and reservation agreements with car park companies in the area. See if you can offer exit tickets. Make sure the car park company pays particular attention to the safety of the participants (e.g. lighting). Ask if they can be flexible with regard to participants arriving earlier or later. (see also: 6.1 on p.23)
- **Make agreements with taxi and coach companies.**
Set up agreements with taxi and coach companies for transporting participants: e.g. to and from the hotel, the airport etc. Sometimes organisers need shuttle services for activities at other locations (e.g. opening events, galas, social events, field trips etc.).
- **Give a warm welcome.**
Offer organisers the option to place banners, personalised signs etc. in your car park and at the entrance to your meeting location. Make agreements with printers so the organiser (or you) can print items locally. Place adverts or signs to the conference: e.g. on the driveway, access roads, in the city or at the train station.
- **Provide a plug-and-play basic technical infrastructure.**
At the very least, provide a basic plug-and-play technical infrastructure: sufficient power sockets, wired and wireless internet with sufficient bandwidth, suspension and cable systems etc. All materials and equipment that the organisers bring themselves must be able to be easily plugged in and must immediately function correctly. These facilities must be available at various locations around the venue. Do you already have a basic infrastructure for meetings and conferences? Make sure it's always up to date. (see also: state-of-the-art infrastructure)



Check how your venue scores:



You work with local tourism organisations and the local convention bureau.	<input type="radio"/>
You have a list of accommodation addresses.	<input type="radio"/>
You have a pool of caterers (who respond to food trends and expectations).	<input type="radio"/>
You have made price and reservation agreements with local car park companies.	<input type="radio"/>
You have made agreements with taxi and coach companies and shuttle services.	<input type="radio"/>
You are creating visibility for the conference organiser: in the area around the venue and at the location itself.	<input type="radio"/>
You offer a printing service (signs, banners etc.).	<input type="radio"/>
You also provide the option or the suppliers for hiring plug-and-play-equipment and technical support (projectors, screens, audio and lighting etc.).	<input type="radio"/>



TIPS FOR VENUES WITH A LARGE CAPACITY

Have the check-in outside the meeting location using flexible desks. This allows you to easily direct them to services such as a shuttle bus. Find out what local services are available and inform the organisers about them. For participants it should be clear that they are in the right place. This makes them instantly feel welcome!



BE INSPIRED!

Individual table settings

Be discreet about participants' diets. Subtle differences in table settings can indicate which participants have an allergy or dietary preference. This means you don't need to ask them directly. Provide full information for every meal at the buffet: even the vegan and gluten-free meals. Add interesting facts about the local specialities

Food pairing with a twist

Combine regional beers, wines or gins with small meals for an exciting flavour experience. In addition, you can introduce the participants to the culinary assets of the destination. Use plant-based meals to respond to the growing interest in organic and vegan.



Out of the box

Suomenlinna is a UNESCO-protected sea fortress, built on six islands on the coast of Helsinki. The location is only accessible by ferry from the centre of the Finnish capital. There are seven different meeting locations spread across two islands. On the islands there are limits placed on traffic (max. 20 km per hour). People travel mostly on foot or using a bike taxi. Water buses and taxis provide transport between the islands. Organising a meeting here is a logistical challenge. However, unique meetings take place without a hitch due to intensive cooperation with local and external service providers (transport, catering, entertainment, photography etc.). All service providers are on the same page as Suomenlinna when it comes to their sustainability strategy. Want to know more?

www.suomenlinna.fi/en





SURPRISE GUESTS WITH EXTRA SERVICES

Locations that proactively and creatively anticipate the potential needs of the organisation or the participants often have a competitive advantage. Here are a few services that can impress your guests::

Cycling facilities

Make agreements with other service providers and offer a cycling service. Participants that want to explore the area can easily hire a bike (and store) at your venue. You can also direct them to bike sharing stations. Tips from reception staff about locally marked and signposted routes can be a nice extra for the guests.

Social programme

Social activities before, during and after the conference are the ideal opportunity to get to know the destination. Work with other stakeholders in the city or region. This way, you can create added value for the local economy. Offer organisers a pool of restaurants, pubs, attractions, museums and local tour guides. This will help them when putting together a social programme. Tip: your local convention bureau will be happy to help.

Micro moments

Boost creativity and productivity with mini-incentives: during the conference and even in the meeting rooms. Surprise participants with musical intermissions, a game, fitness training, a yoga session or a massage. These micro moments provide well-needed breaks. Don't have these services in-house? Make agreements with specialised companies in the area and include them in your offering.

External services

You can also hire other external partners: hostess agencies, moderators, speakers, workshop leaders, photographers, interpreters (and suppliers of technical equipment, such as interpreter cabins), suppliers of decorative items, plants and furniture or technical equipment (network boosters, laptops, live streaming), external IT and AV professionals and security services.

Check how your venue scores:



There is a check-in service.	<input type="radio"/>
There are cycling facilities.	<input type="radio"/>
You have a pool of restaurants, cafés, museums, attractions and tour guides for social programmes.	<input type="radio"/>
You have a pool of providers of micro-incentives (gaming, fitness, yoga, massages etc.).	<input type="radio"/>
You have a pool of hostesses.	<input type="radio"/>
You have a pool of moderators, speakers, workshop leaders etc.	<input type="radio"/>
You can hire interpreters and the necessary equipment (cabins, headsets etc.).	<input type="radio"/>
You can hire decorative items and furniture.	<input type="radio"/>
You can offer suppliers of IT equipment (network boosters, laptops, live streaming etc.) and IT support.	<input type="radio"/>
You can set up AV productions and support them.	<input type="radio"/>
You can hire security services (e.g. security, access control).	<input type="radio"/>



BE INSPIRED!

Check-in service

Participants arrive at the airport, rush to a taxi and arrive at the registration desk just in time, with no time to check in to the hotel first. This a scenario that occurs quite frequently. And not all hotels have an online check-in service. The solution? Your venue can offer a check-in service. This means participants can attend the conference without having to worry about checking in and can pick up their hotel key in the hotel lobby later that day.



5.3 COMMUNICATE CLEARLY

Clear communication: it is a form of hospitality and good service. Being findable online is essential, as is a responsive website. Both planners and participants will frequently consult your communication tools. For planners, transparent communication about pricing is a must.

Introduce your venue in detail.

Your website should be multilingual. It must provide information about your venue, your business philosophy, the halls, the facilities and other services. Give planners the ability to preview the venue with floor plans, 3D visuals or a 360° virtual tour. Inspire them with images of meetings and conferences that have already taken place at your venue. This will give them an idea of the possible hall configurations. You can also give them information about the features of the halls (daylight, furnishings) and the technical equipment in the halls (lighting, air conditioning, IT, AV etc.).

Encourage online interaction.

Online interaction is part of a meeting's experience. With a responsive website, you can highlight the meeting, provide useful tips and publish the programme. With a meeting hashtag, participants can interact with each other and the organiser during the meeting. Sharing on social media gives the meeting a wider reach. By using your own communication channel, you increase the online visibility of the conference.

Explain the route.

Give information about your location, the route and the destination. Provide detailed information about the transport from the airport, by public transport (train, metro, bus) and by taxi or water taxi. You can link to external service providers (airlines, public transport companies and taxi companies). Where possible, provide indicative prices. You can also share information about current traffic problems (e.g. detours, roadworks etc.). Provide information about routes to your venue and the car park(s), including GPS coordinates.

Be transparent about prices.

Your pricing policy should be transparent and unambiguous: what is included/excluded, what extra fees or taxes should the organiser and participant take into account?





Check how your venue scores:

Your website offers multilingual info about your meeting location, the halls, maps, the facilities per hall and other features and services.	<input type="radio"/>
Your website gives an overview of the (creative) layout options.	<input type="radio"/>
Your website provides multilingual information about your business philosophy.	<input type="radio"/>
Your website is built in responsive design.	<input type="radio"/>
Your website allows people to contact you and request a quotation.	<input type="radio"/>
Your website has multilingual information about the location, transport, route and parking options.	<input type="radio"/>
Your website shows the highlights of the destination. There are links to the websites of the tourist board and the convention bureau.	<input type="radio"/>
Your website and other communication channels increase the visibility of meetings (before, during and after)	<input type="radio"/>
Your prices are transparent (including VAT, excluding VAT, taxes etc.).	<input type="radio"/>
Your meeting packages give organisers a good start and are flexible.	<input type="radio"/>
Your quotations are customised and multilingual.	<input type="radio"/>
You clearly communicate your cancellation policy.	<input type="radio"/>



BE INSPIRED!

Involve the local media.

Get your international meeting in the local news. Local media outlets can also provide exposure for conference news. Put together a local press list that the organisation can make use of. This means that press releases and invites to press opportunities can also have a local impact.

Create a meeting planner toolkit.

Provide the organiser with a handy checklist and floor plans so they can experiment with the hall layout; with a clear inventory of the basic infrastructure and technological facilities. It would also be good to offer an app that allows them to try out room set-ups.

Gain a competitive edge.

Flanders is a rainy region. Whatever the weather, a conference that has been planned long in advance must go ahead. Therefore, ensure that the paths to your venue are of good quality. Mud and puddles will be problematic for visitors, as they won't be able to change into clean shoes at the conference. You should also provide ponchos or umbrellas. Why

not provide a shoe polishing service? With a service like this your venue will be able to put its best foot forward at the next event!

Demonstrate your strengths! A true story.

A company was looking for a location for the launch of a new car. They asked various venues if they could drive a car into the building. All the locations immediately said 'yes'. However, during the site inspection, there was one party in particular that was able to convince the customer. Why? They already placed a car inside! The customer was convinced of the team's creativity and could instantly see the venue's potential.

Value local knowledge.

Meetings and conferences provide opportunities to take advantage of local knowledge and share it with a wider audience. Offer organisers the option to work with local experts in the central theme or subject. A great example: a veterinarian at Antwerp Zoo who gave a speech about Kiki, a gorilla with epilepsy, at a conference for neurologists in the Flanders Meeting & Convention Centre Antwerp (FMCCA).



TIPS FOR VENUES WITH A LARGE CAPACITY

Provide content for an app.

With a meeting app, participants can easily plan their programme according to their preferences. They can see the route on demand, gain tips about interesting activities and rate the sessions they have attended. The app is also a tool for efficient networking. The organisers also can also gain real-time insights into the behaviour of the participants. This allows them to provide tailored services. Ensure that you can provide the necessary information about your meeting location in the right format. This will allow the conference organiser to have an app developed specifically for the conference.

5.4 5.4 CREATE A CAREFREE ENVIRONMENT

Association conferences and meetings attract international participants. They are often multicultural. Depending on their country of origin, they may have differing expectations and needs regarding safety, hygiene, catering and communication etc. In this guide, we will not be exploring specific market differences. However, we do provide a list of basic requirements that help create a carefree environment for everyone attending.

Safety

Your meeting location must guarantee the safety of the visitors. Take increased safety measures and closely involve your employees. International planners often require an emergency plan. They want to see how everything is organised.

Health

Take care of the health and well-being of the visitors. For example, offer fresh fruit. Ensure that all participants always have access to water.

Cleanliness

The entire venue must be extremely clean and tidy. Guarantee hygiene by regularly cleaning, even during a meeting or conference.

Free internet

Organisers and participants expect the internet connection (WiFi and wired internet) to be free and stable throughout the entire meeting location and for all visitors.

Check how your venue scores:

There is an emergency plan with signage, emergency lighting etc.	<input type="radio"/>
You clearly communicate your evacuation policy (e.g. at the start of an activity).	<input type="radio"/>
You enquire about the availability of the local emergency services.	<input type="radio"/>
You regularly check all security systems before the meeting.	<input type="radio"/>
After each set-up, you check the safety of cables (and rigging) in every room.	<input type="radio"/>
The conference manager is the central point of contact. He/she is trained to take appropriate action during emergencies.	<input type="radio"/>
Staff trained in first aid are always on site.	<input type="radio"/>
First aid kits are available.	<input type="radio"/>
An AED device (automatic external defibrillator) is easily accessible and clearly visible	<input type="radio"/>
You offer free water.	<input type="radio"/>
You regularly clean all spaces.	<input type="radio"/>
You plan cleaning in collaboration with the team, and guarantee cleanliness and tidiness during the entire meeting.	<input type="radio"/>
During the conference, you clean the sanitary facilities every 4 hours.	<input type="radio"/>
In all internal spaces, you offer a free and secured WiFi connection with a large bandwidth.	<input type="radio"/>



BE INSPIRED!

Boost your vitamins.

Want to give your guests a pick-me-up? Provide fruit during breaks. Give the participants the opportunity to try seasonal fruit and the unique flavours of local fruit. Work with local suppliers.





6

TOWARDS STATE-OF-THE-ART INFRASTRUCTURE

Your meeting location, the layout, the technical equipment in your halls: it must all be high quality and meet modern standards. The infrastructure itself plays a role in the meeting experience of organisers and participants. Make it excellent: from the car park to the kitchen.

1 Parking	2 Access to the site	3 Access to the venue	4 Attention to the experience	5 Entrance hall
6 Foyer/ lounge	7 Large hall(s)	8 Meeting and break-outs	9 Facilities	10 Kitchen

6.1 PARKING

Does your venue have a car park? Ensure that it offers sufficient security and comfort. For example, take into account the need for different types of parking spaces. Organisers may wish to reserve parking spaces for themselves and the participants.

Check how your venue scores:



- The venue has an area for taxi and bus drop-offs and pick-ups.
- The venue has a car park.
- There are charging points for electric cars.
- There is a sheltered storage area for bikes, with charging points.
- There are disabled parking spaces close to the entrance.
- Organisers and participants can reserve parking spaces.
- There is lighting in the car park at night.
- Guests and organisers can park and leave at flexible hours (early and late).
- There is clear signage to and from the entrance to the meeting venue.



BE INSPIRED!

Reserve a VIP spot.

Do you have VIPs visiting? For example, a celebrity or a politician who will leave after the opening ceremony? Or an official speaker stopping by? Reserve a parking space for the duration of their visit.

Take care of your walkways.

Prevent mud and puddles from forming on the pathways. Regularly check their quality. Are they not managed by you? Discuss them with the owner or your local government.

Keep the house style consistent.

Give the organisers extra visibility in the car park. Position signs that are in the house style of the organisation, including the signs for the reserved parking spaces.

Organise a fam trip for taxi and bus drivers.

This will allow the drivers to become better acquainted with your meeting location and to have personal contact with your team. It encourages greater customer-friendliness.





6.2 ACCESS TO THE SITE

Is your meeting location situated on a shared site with other buildings? Pay extra attention to the entrance to your site, both for suppliers and participants. Is there a shared car park? Make clear agreements with the other partners on the site. For organisers, it is important that they can reserve a sufficient number of parking spaces for the participants.



Check how your venue scores:

There is a clear, visible and signposted access to the site for pedestrians, cyclists and motorised vehicles.	<input type="radio"/>
At the venue site, there is signage to and from the venue's entrance.	<input type="radio"/>
On the site or within walking distance, there is a drop-off and pick-up point for buses and taxis.	<input type="radio"/>
You reserve parking spaces for organisers and participants.	<input type="radio"/>
There is public transport at the site entrance or nearby.	<input type="radio"/>



6.3 ACCESS TO THE VENUE

Optimally organise the access to your venue for organisers, participants and suppliers.



Check how your venue scores:

The entrance is clearly visible, even at night (e.g. with evening lighting).	<input type="radio"/>
The entrance is accessible.	<input type="radio"/>
Is the entrance not accessible for people with disabilities?	<input type="radio"/>
There should be clear signs to an alternative entrance that is accessible.	<input type="radio"/>
Smoking is forbidden at the entrance. There is a sheltered alternative smoking area.	<input type="radio"/>
Suppliers have enough space to load and unload without hindrance.	<input type="radio"/>



TIP

Do not disturb.

Provide a separate entrance for suppliers. This prevents suppliers and visitors from bumping into each other. Keep the main entrance free from loud noises and stacks of delivered goods.

6.4 ATTENTION TO THE EXPERIENCE

In each space where the visitors enter, you must consider the overall experience. With a well-thought-out layout, you can create a pleasant atmosphere in your venue. The practical elements also optimise the meeting experience.

Place signage.

Ensure that the meeting location, the organisation and the participants merge well. Place clear and customisable signage (analogue or digital) in all circulation areas. Give the organiser the option to decorate the spaces according to their branding, increase their visibility and communicate their information. For example, provide digital systems that can share information during the conference. With stickers, projections, sleeves, etc. you can personalise the meeting experience for the participants and organiser (e.g. on doors, lifts, reception desks, waste bins).

Stimulate networking

Keep the participants close together during the meeting or on the conference day. By this, we mean you should keep them in the same building. Provide facilities that stimulate networking. Design the meeting rooms and 'third spaces' (corridors, foyers, outdoor spaces) to provide the visitors with optimal comfort. Create pleasant areas where people can share ideas and lay foundations for new collaborations.

Create a personal experience.

During all the activities that belong to a meeting (e.g. plenary sessions, workshops, breaks etc.) the

venue should provide sufficient space. The comfort of the participants comes first. Therefore, maintain high standards for the appearance and atmosphere of all areas where visitors will be, both indoors and outdoors.

Ensure a carefree meeting experience.

Guarantee safety and connectivity. Create an evacuation plan with clear signs. Provide participants and organisers with properly functioning internet. For example, you could provide WiFi boosters and back-up systems

Plug-and-play infrastructure.

In every meeting space, there should be flexible layout possibilities, entry points and systems to hide cables. Ensure that the basic fittings (that you manage) work perfectly and are always up to date.

Create storytelling.

Tell the story of the meeting location, the immediate environment and the destination. Participants and organisers like to know more about the place where they are temporarily staying. Tip: tell the story through the décor itself and use photos, murals, interactive digital cards or video projections etc.

Check how your venue scores:

The signage is multilingual.	<input type="radio"/>
You use universal symbols.	<input type="radio"/>
The furniture is ergonomic.	<input type="radio"/>
There are no distracting sounds from the technical systems, the kitchen or the sanitary facilities.	<input type="radio"/>
The audio mix in the halls is adjustable and set up correctly.	<input type="radio"/>
There is a flexible and adjustable climatisation (temperature, humidity and ventilation).	<input type="radio"/>
There is a flexible, controllable lighting system.	<input type="radio"/>
There is sufficient daylight.	<input type="radio"/>
The kitchen and sanitary facilities do not spread unpleasant smells.	<input type="radio"/>
There is a comfortable seating area where participants can retreat to take private calls, answer emails or have one-on-one conversations.	<input type="radio"/>
There is emergency lighting in the indoor and outdoor spaces and clear indications of emergency exits.	<input type="radio"/>
The wired and wireless system has enough bandwidth that it can be used by all participants at the same time and still work smoothly.	<input type="radio"/>



- The plug-and-play equipment (projectors, projection screens, microphones, PA system, rigging systems) managed by your organisation are up to date.
- There is back-up equipment available if something is not working.
- The décor tells the story of the venue and/or environment.



6.5 ENTRANCE HALL

The entrance is multifunctional. You will welcome prospects, partners, organisers and participants in this space, therefore it must have a good atmosphere, be a comfortable environment and be logistically manageable. Provide sufficient space for visitors arriving. The visitor facilities such as the cloakroom, lockers, baggage area and sanitary facilities should be located in the entrance hall or be able to be accessed from the entrance hall.



Check how your venue scores:

- Your reception and registration point is well-thought-out and centrally located.
- It is far enough from the entrance to prevent queues forming outside.
- The registration desks can be rolled under with a wheelchair or are accessible in other ways.
- Guests can use the internet via a WiFi connection.
- Screens provide information about the meeting.
- There is sufficient capacity in the entrance hall (proportional to the venue capacity).
- The entrance hall has sufficient circulation room and crowds can smoothly disperse to other areas of meeting location.
- Clearly indicated stairs and sufficiently spacious lifts ensure that groups can easily move from one floor to another.
- There is a pleasant seating area. There are brochures and magazines to look at (e.g. if participants have to wait for an appointment).



BE INSPIRED!

Use separate registration desks!

It can get very busy at the start of a conference. Especially if several meetings are taking place at the same time. This results in large numbers of people arriving at the same time. Separate registration desks are a must in these cases. You should place clear signage to and from the different activities.

6.6 FOYER/LOUNGE

This is the beating heart of the meeting location. The foyer or lounge gives access to all of the spaces that are important to the participants. It often serves many purposes: as a meeting place, a lounge, an exhibition or a reception space.

Check how your venue scores:



- There is sufficient space in relation to the capacity of the large hall, with good seating.
- If necessary, the foyer provides sufficient space for receptions, poster sessions etc.
- In the event of simultaneous conferences or meetings, the layout is adapted.
- There is comfortable seating.
- The screens display information about the meeting.
- All technical facilities are available: WiFi, sockets, lighting, hanging systems etc.

6.7 LARGE HALL(S)

Depending on the capacity of the meeting location, there may be one or more large halls or auditoriums. Your meeting location must have at least one large hall for all participants. This is where the plenary sessions are held. They usually take longer than one and a half hours. The layout of this hall should ensure the comfort of the participants. There must be a quality, basic technological infrastructure that is easy to use. Various speakers or panels will use the podium and the technical equipment. To arrange the hall according to the plug-and-play principle, there must be sufficient power sockets. There must also be wired and wireless internet with sufficient bandwidth and hanging and cable systems.

Check how your venue scores:



- There is at least one large hall to host all participants.
- The large hall has a flat floor or is an auditorium.
- It has a large enough surface area (at least 1m² of seating space per participant).
- It has a large enough volume (LxWxH). For the speakers to be audible, there must be a volume of 4–5 m³ per seat, for music, a volume of 6–8 m³ per seat.
- The large hall has basic facilities that are managed by your venue: projector(s), projection screen(s), microphones, PA system, rigging systems etc.
- Organisers have the option to use hired meeting equipment thanks to the plug-and-play infrastructure: i.e. power sockets, connections, rigging hanging systems etc.
- The built-in lighting, audio and video projection systems are easy to use.
- The hall offers good lines of sight and has no pillars.
- If there are pillars, determine the capacity based on the clear space and place screens to work around obstructions.
- The guests have spacious, ergonomic seats.
- The indoor climatization (including humidity) is adjustable.
- The acoustics are optimal. You have had them inspected and made any necessary changes.





SMOOTH OPERATOR

Offering flexibility.

An excellent meeting venue can respond to the requests of the organisers in terms of infrastructure and layout. You should be able to change a pre-agreed hall configuration at the last minute. During a conference, e.g. during breaks, the set-up of the hall should be adaptable. With a flexible basic structure, it's much easier to rearrange halls.

Wireless meetings.

Wireless meetings are gradually becoming the norm. Chairs and tables that conceal a wireless charging point provide a technical solution for low batteries. Using software applications (e.g. Zoom and ClickShare), there are numerous options to share knowledge and network wirelessly and virtually.

Check how your venue scores:

- You can convert your large hall into smaller meeting rooms.
- The technical infrastructure is flexible (mobile projection screens and projectors, mobile podium etc.).
- The chairs or floors have built-in connections for electronic devices.
- Satellite conferences and live streams are possible.
- Technical support is always available.



6.8 MEETING AND BREAK-OUTS

In addition to plenary sessions, conferences also often include workshops, brainstorming sessions or poster sessions. The organisation can use smaller halls or break-out rooms for these activities. 'Third spaces', such as a terrace, reception area, exhibition area, foyer and other outdoor areas can be used for this purpose. It is important that the total capacity of the individual rooms is proportional to the capacity of the largest hall. Is that not the case? Provide a tent outdoors, rearrange the large hall or come up with another creative solution. In all the spaces, the comfort of the participants and the ease of use of the technical equipment is paramount. Provide a useful kit with basic materials.



Check how your venue scores:

- The number of rooms corresponds to the capacity of the largest hall.
- There is a plug-and-play infrastructure: sufficient power sockets, bandwidth, rigging systems etc.
- The indoor climate is adjustable.
- The spaces are acoustically comfortable, have daylight and adjustable lighting.
- The spaces are high enough or have extra screens.
- There are good lines of sight and the space is pillar-free.
- The additional meeting spaces have sufficient and flexible layout options.
- The furniture is ergonomic, easy to manage, stackable and mobile.
- The spaces have a conference kit: a whiteboard on a stand, markers, a (mobile) screen and projector, paper and pens, a clock and a mini buffet with water, coffee and tea.



SPECIAL ROOMS

Sometimes organisers may want to reserve rooms for special activities. A control room for the organisers, dressing rooms for musicians and performers, press areas, a place for board meetings or a space where participants can work individually. These rooms should be comfortably furnished, have a good atmosphere and enough privacy. People may leave valuables in these rooms, so they should be able to be locked.

Check how your venue scores:

- The space can be locked, so the users can secure their belongings.
- The space contains ergonomic furniture, is acoustically comfortable, has daylight and adjustable lighting.
- The space has power sockets and WiFi.
- If the space is used as a temporary control room for organisers, it should have a telephone, a copy machine, office supplies etc. at the very least.
- If it is used as a dressing room, there should be a table, sofa, wash basin, mirror etc.



6.9 FACILITIES

Facilities for visitors, such as the cloakroom, lockers, baggage areas and sanitary facilities should be easy to reach from the foyer and clearly signposted in various areas of the meeting location. They should ideally be located in the entrance hall or be accessible from the entrance hall. Your meeting location should have other facilities such as a storage room, server room etc. The layout and fittings in the space for employees should be carefully considered.

Sanitary facilities

Your sanitary facilities should have a comfortable and high-quality appearance. There should be enough toilets for all participants. Take care to ensure they are accessible and gender-friendly. Are there multiple floors? Make sure the signage and accessibility are optimal.

Check how your venue scores:

- The sanitary facilities have a luxurious appearance.
- There is at least 1 toilet per 25 seats (capacity of large hall).
- Two thirds of the toilets are reserved for women.
- There are separate toilets for people with disabilities close to the halls (see also the legal standards).
- There are gender-neutral toilets, indicated with a symbol (X).
- Every toilet has coat hooks.
- There are no unpleasant smells.



Cloakroom and luggage

The cloakroom is ideally always manned. If that is not possible, provide lockers for small luggage items and laptops. Some guests will arrive at your venue straight from the airport, so they have not yet had a chance to check in at their hotel. For them, it is essential that there is a secure luggage area.

Storage space

In the run up to a conference (easily up to two weeks in advance), goods may arrive that need to be temporarily stored. During the conference, you also need space to safely store materials belonging to the organisers. You also need a space to store your own furniture, kitchen materials and stock out of sight.



Check how your venue scores:

You have a large enough cloakroom	<input type="radio"/>
You have lockers with sufficient space for small luggage and laptops.	<input type="radio"/>
You have a secure luggage area.	<input type="radio"/>
You provide storage space for the organisers' materials.	<input type="radio"/>
You have sufficient storage space for your furniture and stock.	<input type="radio"/>



Offices

You should have an employee area. In this room, your team can carry out preparatory work and relax after peak moments. Arrange this environment in a practical and pleasant way, and ensure that it is inspiring. We recommend providing sanitary facilities that are reserved for employees.



Check how your venue scores

You have a furnished employee area.	<input type="radio"/>
You provide separate sanitary facilities for your team of employees.	<input type="radio"/>



BE INSPIRED!

Combine hygiene and sustainability.

In innovative sanitary rooms, hygiene and sustainability are perfectly paired. Hands-free sanitary facilities with sensors in doors, toilets, taps, hand dryers etc. guarantee a hygienic visit to the toilet. Sensors also prevent water and energy waste. Hands-free toilets are big in Japan, where music and aromas make the visit to the toilet a unique experience.

Lockers with chargers.

Are your lockers due for an update? Consider installing lockers with built-in power sockets for charging mobile phones. Or provide special lockers for this. This means participants can charge their phones without missing their meetings. Guarantee that the participants' phone data is protected while charging.



TIPS FOR VENUES WITH A LARGE CAPACITY

Organise your cloakroom.

Are several meetings being held with different organisers? Ensure that the cloakroom is well organised. Provide extra capacity, permanent cloakroom staff and, if desired, separate cloakrooms or compartments



6.10 KITCHEN

Your kitchen should be equipped according to the regulations for the hospitality industry. Important things to consider: hygienic storage of food and separation of the meeting rooms from the kitchen to prevent noise pollution and the spread of kitchen odours. Ideally, the foyer, large halls and meeting rooms should be easily accessible from the kitchen. If you work with external caterers, the kitchen must be adapted and equipped for this

Check how your venue scores:

Your kitchen has all the necessary utilities (electricity, water, sewage).	<input type="radio"/>
Your kitchen has a ventilation system.	<input type="radio"/>
You have a cold store or freezer room and storage room for the organiser/caterer.	<input type="radio"/>
You have sufficient storage space.	<input type="radio"/>
You effectively screen off sounds and odours.	<input type="radio"/>
The kitchen is large enough, so food can be prepared for multiple meetings (for multiple organisations).	<input type="radio"/>



TIPS FOR VENUES WITH A LARGE CAPACITY

Install a kitchenette.

Having a kitchenette in or close to the foyer, and on different floors, is very convenient. Here you can prepare coffee, cold drinks and other refreshments. You can also use it for receptions, lunches, dinners etc. With a catering elevator, you can easily distribute meals from the kitchen to the different floors.





OUTDOOR SPACES

Arrange outdoor spaces in a pleasant layout and use them multifunctionally. If the weather is nice, you can hold a break-out session, lunch or reception there. If the weather is bad, provide shelter, so participants can still get some fresh air. Schedule garden maintenance outside of meeting and conference hours!



Check how your venue scores:



There is comfortable seating outdoors.	<input type="radio"/>
You can host receptions, breaks and lunches outdoors (covered area / sunscreens).	<input type="radio"/>
You can use the outdoor space as a break-out room.	<input type="radio"/>
Smoking is forbidden the terrace. There are clear signs to the areas where smoking	<input type="radio"/>



BASIC REQUIREMENTS FOR A STATE-OF-THE-ART VENUE

7

Want a state-of-the-art venue that attracts international associations? Then, you must meet the following basic expectations.

- 1 You have a strategic vision regarding the meeting industry and sustainability. You actively communicate this vision and implement it.
- 2 Your meeting location generates a local impact and maximum spillover via a network model with a diverse range of partners.
- 3 Your whole team displays masterful hospitality.
- 4 You have a multilingual and dedicated team that provides top-level service.
- 5 Your meeting is safe and accessible for everyone
- 6 The catering is sustainable with exquisite food.
- 7 The appearance, quality and comfort are to a high standard.
 - plug-and-play equipment in all meeting room: flexible set-up options, entry points and cable covers. Back-up equipment is available
 - comfortable furniture
 - hygienic sanitary facilities
 - no sound pollution or unpleasant odours
 - quick and secure internet
 - flexible climate system and flexible lighting
 - free water



PROFESSIONALISATION PROGRAMME

VISITFLANDERS wants to promote Flanders as an international top destination for meetings and conferences. To better respond to international expectations, VISITFLANDERS provides the Flemish meeting and conference sector with a professionalisation programme: a combination of quality tools, information, inspiration and education.

Under the name, Meet in Flanders Academy, VISITFLANDERS organises training sessions for a wide audience of meeting locations, conference hotels, conference agencies and professional conference organisers etc. Our venues are important 'ambassadors for Flanders' in the international meeting industry.

COLOPHON

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