

## “Not all cities in the world are blessed with a unique venue selection from the 4th century as well as sanctuaries from all three major religions.”

The city of Istanbul has built upon its reputation as the perfect blend of Europe and Asia, to offer tourists the best of both worlds. In an exclusive interview with *Aanchal Dhawan, ExM Magazine, Özgül Özkan Yavuz, General Manager, Istanbul Convention and Visitors Bureau*, talks about the unique offering that the city extends as a historical meeting point spanning two continents and why the city poses as the perfect venue to host your next MICE activity.



“A metropolis with a rich history of 8,500 years, the natural beauty of Istanbul, its exciting scene blending a metropolitan way of life and its modern infrastructure make it a unique meeting place for businesses”

### ÖZGÜL ÖZKAN YAVUZ

General Manager, Istanbul Convention & Visitors Bureau

centers and 3 exhibition centers, the city can host every type of event, from bespoke incentives to meetings for up to 30,000 for corporate and leisure visitors alike. Combined with its historic venues, palaces, museums, bazaars, hamams and cisterns, it offers a variety of special options to create truly outstanding events. Not all cities in the world are blessed with a unique venue selection from the 4th century as well as sanctuaries from all three major religions. With its unique venues, Istanbul offers numerous creative and innovative ideas to create for their events.

Istanbul is also one of the world's top foodie destinations with eateries offering fabulous quality traditional Ottoman fare, haute cuisine and fusion, many in such sumptuous locations as overlooking the Bosphorus with views across the historic peninsula and beyond.

### Q. What assistance (in terms of services provided) does the bureau offer to planners across the globe?

A. Istanbul CVB is an impartial information clearing-house and contact point for requests for proposals (RFPs). In this role, the Bureau offers a wide range of services designed to help promote Istanbul as a congress, meeting and incentive destination and also to assist organisers in creating fabulous events in the city.

Founded in 1997, Turkey's first destination marketing bureau, the Istanbul Convention & Visitors Bureau (ICVB) offers a wide range of services designed to:

- Help promote Istanbul as a congress, meeting & incentive destination

- Assist organizers in creating fabulous events in the city
- Arrange site inspections for association representatives & meeting planners
- Support the congress candidature process of Istanbul by preparing the official bids
- Provide promotional materials and city maps
- Coordinate the support of local and national authorities
- PR and marketing support for congresses.

Istanbul CVB has also released its updated and comprehensive 200-page Meeting Planners Guide for 2015. Produced annually, the guide is the complete guide to planning meetings and events in a city that is one of the top MICE destinations in the world. Istanbul CVB also released a Delegate Boosting Kit, a marketing tool that contains all the materials convention and congress planners require to effectively promote their next event in Istanbul, as well as its venues and attractions. Besides this, Istanbul CVB has been given the management of Istanbul's first official online guide, [www.howtoistanbul.com](http://www.howtoistanbul.com). The management of this official website has increased the services that Istanbul CVB provides for visitors making Istanbul CVB a one-stop guide for all things in Istanbul, with further large projects in the pipeline for [howtoistanbul.com](http://howtoistanbul.com).

It is relevant at this point to highlight that most of our developments have been made not only to follow technological trends but to also take part in such sustainable projects for our industry as uploading guides online and free of charge, avoiding printed invitations while preferring digital communications and even the planting of a forest for ICCA congress delegates.

### Q. Tell us about the new convention centres and hotels set to open in the coming years?

A. Istanbul currently has 7 convention centres and 3 exhibition centres, across four independent, yet linkable, meeting clusters: the Congress Valley, Golden Horn, Airport area and the Asian area.

Currently 46,500 beds are under investment and 107 more five-star and four-star hotels are expected to be open. Some of the hotels that will be opening in 2015 are; Hilton Double Tree Tuzla, Sheraton İstanbul Ataşehir, Fairmont Hotels İstanbul, Mercure İstanbul Airport, Hilton Garden Inn Kasımpaşa, Clarion Hotel İstanbul Haliç and Mövenpick Golden Horn. Moreover, St.Regis Hotel and Soho House are recently opened hotels as well.

With the current convention centers and accommodation with venues, Istanbul has the capacity to host any type of event up to 30,000 delegates. However, the investments in Istanbul are growing rapidly. Many international and local brands are opening or expanding their facilities in the city. The recent openings are our newest hotel members Karaköy Morgans Hotel, Hyatt Regency Ataköy, Mövenpick Golden Horn, The Vault House Hotel, Dedeman Bostancı, Wyndham Grand Levent and the list goes on.

### Q. Green tourism or eco-tourism is a popular theme that's coming up all over the world. What's Istanbul's take on the same?

A. As the host of the 5th World Water Forum in 2009, Istanbul put environmental concerns at the forefront of its agenda. Incentives, sustainability in the meetings, events and conference industry in general have become a key issue

for meeting planners, national associations and corporations in the city.

Istanbul has many environmental sustainability projects on the go, including expanding its public transport network, developing cycle lanes and a rental bicycle scheme, park and ride schemes, electric vehicles, the Hotel Greening Project and tree-planting projects.

Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality (IBB) is one of the major authority giving great importance to a sustainable environment. Metropolitan Municipality have also installed electrical vehicle charging stations at its open and multistorey car parks. Ready for service at 12 points, charging stations are to be found around the city. Istanbul Energy Department carries out maintenance, repair, construction and architectural illumination activities for the city using fuel derived from marine debris projects.

ICVB supports green initiatives so that Istanbul can move forward on the corporate social responsibility front. Several meeting venues in Istanbul lead a variety of initiatives that create a natural environment, reduce energy usage and that use minimal non-renewable resources.

### Q. There has been some major shift in the strategy of tourism marketing and social media plays a remarkable role. How effectively does ICVB use Social Media as a tool of communication? What is the kind of response you have recorded?

A. Istanbul CVB's website has been completely revised for the first time since 1997, now including a destination video of the city and a congress city map for international delegates. The website is angled to promote Istanbul's historical and natural beauties, as well as the facilities it offers the meetings and events industry. It includes visuals and detailed information and is easy to use as well as being interactive and informative. Annual guides such as the Istanbul Meeting Planner's Guide, Istanbul Visitor's Guide and promotional kits have been uploaded so as to be more accessible to meeting and event planners as well as to our own members.

We believe in the power of social media usage in our industry and since July 2014 ICVB has started to use social media more effectively as a channel of communication especially on Facebook and Twitter. With its use of social media and investments in other technology it is providing up-to-the-minute information for both meetings and event planners and also for its members.

ICVB has extended their visual brand identity across various social media platforms through up-to-date content, presence and interactions. This includes Istanbul's first official online guide, [www.howtoistanbul.com](http://www.howtoistanbul.com), which provides up-to-date information on the city. With more 1 million visitors to date, it will be available in German, Russian and Arabic (as well as the current English and Turkish) and as a mobile application and will also include downloadable maps and more. Extensive social media campaigns are planned around the world so as to introduce this brilliant new resource on Istanbul. ICVB will also be increasing its interaction in online platforms with its involvement in How to Istanbul's forthcoming Instagram competition.