Istanbul Continues To Attract Prestigious Congresses

Istanbul has always been a center of attraction for both leisure and business travelers. Hicran Ozbuk, General Manager of Istanbul Convention Visitors Bureau, speaks on how challenging it is to make Istanbul one of the leading destinations for international conventions, and a meeting point offering a unique experience for its guests.

Istanbul hosted 181 international congresses with 84,200 delegates and 288 domestic congresses with a total number of 78,600 delegates in 2016. The successful congresses left happy attendants at the 8th most visited city in the world.

Metropolises have been going through challenging times and Istanbul was not an exception. The city has been affected largely and, as a result, has decreased in the 2016 ICCA rankings. However, from the broader perspective, Istanbul hosted several high-profile congresses in 2016, such as the World Energy Congress with 10,000 delegates; the World Investment Conference with 350 delegates; the World Humanitarian Summit with 9,000 delegates; and the World Congress of the Universal Federation of Travel Agents’ Association.

Hicran Ozbuk, General Manager of Istanbul Convention Visitors Bureau says, “Istanbul has always been a center of attraction for both leisure and business travelers. We are fully aware that the challenging situation for Istanbul is temporary and we will bounce back. In addition, we are continuing our efforts with high motivation to make Istanbul one of the leading destinations for international conventions, and a meeting point offering a unique experience for its guests.”
So how important is India market? What are your growth expectations from India this year?

In terms of MICE, there is a huge potential in the Indian market and we are working on this to be able to get more business in to our city. Moreover, Istanbul is also one of the most popular destination for Indian wedding planners and corporate events. The city is hosting number of Indian weddings, especially in its unique venues such as mansions, palaces etc. On the other hand, we are aware of the fact that Istanbul is also needs to be discovered for Indian association congresses. Thus, as Istanbul CVB we are also promoting Istanbul as an international MICE destination on Indian market to attract more congress business.

Istanbul offers unique points for Indian market such as; being easily accessible and an understanding of the needs of the Indian market from well experienced PCO&DMCs in the city. Istanbul is home well known companies offering a huge variety of options and alternatives to hold the best-planned event possible for Indian groups.

On the other hand, Turkey’s e-visa system offers a quick and easy way to travel to the country. Indian groups / individuals can obtain their e-visa with only 3 clicks away. Worth to mention as the World’s number 1 airline flying to most countries, Turkish Airlines offers direct flights from Istanbul to more than 300 destinations and also connects Istanbul with India directly. Turkish Airlines has direct flights to following Indian cities; Ahmedabad, Amritsar, Bengaluru, Chennai, Delhi, Hyderabad, Kolkata and Mumbai. To sum up, we believe we will have more rising numbers in the upcoming years.

Could you please highlight the facilities your city has for MICE travelers?

Istanbul can host every type of event, from incentives to meetings for up to 30,000 for corporate and leisure visitors alike with 7 purpose-built convention centers & 3 exhibition centers which are spread out in the city. Combined with Istanbul’s historic venues, palaces, museums, bazaars, hamams, cisterns and high-tech modern venues, it offers meeting planners lots of options to create truly unique 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 and that you can enjoy your events in two continents. Whether a gala dinner or a social event, for any program you may conduct, ’World’s World’s Leading Congress Destination’ Istanbul is ready for a promise of an unforgettable experience for your events and congresses with its unique venues in the city.

What makes Istanbul a special destination for MICE?

Istanbul is one of the most visited places in the world, where West meets East and modern meets traditional, blending the past and the future, bringing together cultures and people from all over the world. A metropolis with its rich history of 8,500 years. The natural beauty of the city, its exciting scene blending a metropolitan way of life and its modern infrastructure makes it a unique meeting place for businesses. A magnet for dynamic and talented people from around the world, Istanbul is the ideal MICE destination with its vibrancy, modernity, swathe of new infrastructure and enviable geographical position.

How is the city encouraging MICE groups to visit the country?

Besides the attractiveness that the city offers to the planners. As Istanbul, we have resources to provide some subventional support for pre-qualified meetings, conventions, incentives and trade exhibitions like welcome receptions at the town hall, banners in the town, welcome desks at airports/rail stations and public transport for delegates (free or discounted). As one of the top players in the meetings industry, we provide some different kinds of subvention packages to the meeting planners upon request and the criteria defined previously. Free marketing and promotional materials are available for all kinds of events, meetings and conferences. However, travel, venue or reception costs may be covered depending on the significance of the meeting and strong collaboration with the local institutions.

Furthermore, as Istanbul CVB, we offer the following supports for the qualified meetings & conferences:

- Discounts on venue costs
- City receptions
- Contribution to marketing
- Providing printed brochures and materials for the conferences

Tell us about the popular Convention Centres / Convention Hotels in Istanbul?

Istanbul offers a superior capacity in terms of convention centers and hotels. Istanbul has 4 independent meeting clusters spread around the city – The Congress Valley which accommodates Istanbul Congress Center - ICC and Istanbul Lutfi Kirdar - ICEC, the Golden Horn accommodates Halic Congress Center, the Airport Area accommodates the Istanbul Expo Center and the Asian side.

Accommodation in Istanbul is both numerous at 106,000-plus beds and varied with a selection across the spectrum including 217 five-star and four-star hotels. The hotels, including both international and local brands, are ready to offer the highest standards to your delegates combined with the convenience of extensive meeting and conference facilities. The hotels in
Istanbul spread widely across the city from the Bosphorus shores on the historical peninsula to the suitable lofts near the central areas with easy access.

What are the special activities offered to MICE travelers?

Istanbul is home to a diverse culture and vibrant populace. The city offers an infinite number of possibilities for incentive ideas which meeting delegates can only experience in Istanbul. Some examples are a boat tour between two continents, eating like sultans from a menu of century-old Ottoman recipes, shopping at the 500-year-old iconic Grand Bazaar, a treasure hunt in the Sultanahmet neighborhood (which has been called an open-air museum), relaxing in a Turkish bath, experiencing Turkish hospitality, and witnessing the ceremony of Mevlevi Whirling Dervishes. You can do any or all of these while enjoying an event.

Also, with its unique venues, the city offers numerous innovative ideas to create events. Not all cities in the world are blessed with such a unique venue selection from such a rich, long history as well as temples from all three of the major monotheistic religions.

Is the government offering some special incentives for large groups?

As Istanbul CVB, we are taking the industry needs or in other words our suggestions to the related ministries attention in order to create new services and possibilities for the congress and meeting industry. Currently, there are several topics that took into consideration by the ministries and in the process of approval.

Any special events planned for this year?

Istanbul continues to host prestigious congresses in 2017 as well, just to name a few; World Petroleum Congress (WPC) with 5,000 delegates, Apimondia International Apicultural Congress with 8,000 delegates, World Conference of the International Association of Science Parks (IASP) and WFNS World Congress of Neurosurgery.

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