

# 2019 Annual Destination Report

**Dundee & Angus**  
CONVENTION BUREAU  
WORKING WITH YOU FOR YOU



It's been a year since I shared our annual destination report with you, and I started then by quoting that 'statistics is the science of learning from experience'. Perhaps this is a statement which holds even more true for us in 2020 as we look towards a future changed by Coronavirus.

Despite being undertaken before the pandemic, our annual destination survey gives us an excellent focus for examining what we do and how we will deliver successful, appealing business events in future. Feedback from ten events throughout 2019 provides valuable food for thought for a post-corona business events world – a world where destinations, venues and suppliers will have to emphasise making organisers and delegates feel comfortable around areas they may perceive as having risk attached.

Every business involved in business events will have to make their sanitisation philosophy clear in future and particularly in relation to food and drink and accommodation.

When given free rein to comment on their event venue, many of the key points raised by delegates were around the quality and availability of the food offering and associated green issues.



Delegates tell us that they want increased healthy food options and variety throughout a conference. They'd like vegetarian, vegan and non-dairy dishes to form a larger proportion of the total food offering at events, with the point being made that it's not just vegetarians who select the vegetarian option. A wider choice of healthy options than currently available is highly important to many delegates surveyed. More fruit and vegetables are a delegate's number one request.

For most, they'd like to see the healthy, vegetarian, vegan and non-dairy options integrated wholly into the food offering – many reported that the 'healthy' options are often served 'off to one side'. In a post-pandemic world, we'll all have to consider whether the buffet has a role to play in the event catering of the future. At Pathfinders events in 2019 we trialled quality catering boxes which offer a grab and go lunch with a difference. The lids of the boxes or the base of the box can include information about the conference and can further develop the story and creative engagement of the event.

The 'throw away' nature of some catering utensils and the desire for more recycling and less food waste was frequently mentioned in the survey. We believe that this will take on even more significance for future business events. Organisers will want to know in advance how all aspects of catering will be more contactless in nature. It will also be important that delegates on site have a clear understanding of the processes.

As partners, can we collaborate to look at the spaces where delegates take their meals? We can't alter the physical size of our venues, but, post COVID-19, we will all need to put our heads together to look at the whole experience of conference dining in small spaces; bearing in mind that delegates in our survey

report that, pre-pandemic, the experience of dining while standing up in a small space is not a great one for them. It is challenges like this that we will have to work together to develop solutions as we look to travel opening up and business events restarting.

We should also all be considering the 'diversity of food' provided over the entirety of a conference. A message which comes across loud and clear is that delegates are bored with the same food each day – for example, sandwiches every lunchtime over several days with the only difference may – or may not be – the sandwich fillings. Although often a budgetary consideration by event organisers, having cold food each day, particularly in winter, is commented on by delegates. Are there ways to offer more variety of menu items and hot and cold offerings on some days? And, is there a way we can all collaborate during an event on menu planning? Delegates report varying experiences from having no hot food at all during the course of a conference between event catering and the evening events and conference dinners. Others report the best part of a week eating chicken dishes only.

Delegates highly rate the experience of conference dinners, welcoming the chance to participate in an evening of Scottish culture. However, some feel that the opportunity for them to try local Scottish food is missing from these events. How can we demonstrate the provenance of our wonderful Scottish larder and showcase our approach to food miles?



It's recognised by many survey respondents that the region of Dundee, Angus, Fife and Perthshire has fabulous opportunities to celebrate Scottish and local culture with domestic and international delegates. Conference dinners which

have an element of local/Scottish entertainment and food and drink rate very highly in their comments. We can work together to create more of these highly memorable experiences in partnership ensuring that the whole experience, including transportation of delegates to and from their hotels, pre-dinner drinks receptions and speed of serving those with dietary requirements for example, is a seamless one. Delegates who attended this type of event also note the civic pride that everyone demonstrates in the region.

It's not just show piece Scottish dance demonstrations and bagpipes on arrival which provide cultural enrichment for delegates. Delegates were delighted with the 'Oor Wullie' trail in the city and considered it to be an excellent example of 'raising the game'. It's important that we continue to work together to develop more ideas like this, and further engage our visiting delegates in the region's cultural experience.



It's the type of feedback that conferences in our area regularly receive. For example, joint conference chair of the British Association for Victorian Studies 2019 Conference (BAVS2019) Kirstie Blair said of their event, *"Dundee was selected for the conference because of the combination of new and exciting developments going on there, such as the V&A, and its important Victorian heritage."*

*"We knew that delegates would enjoy experiencing places like Verdant Works and the McManus and that the conference would tie in well with Dundee's history. Dundee is also easily walkable and has the advantage of a centrally located university campus."*





Delegate comments reflect the issues during their visits which, whilst not spoiling their experience, detract from it and these include:

Toilets – toilets are a regular feature in delegate comments, from the numbers available to their accessibility and the lack of toilet roll. In a post-Covid world, it's expected that customer expectations around the whole experience of toilets will take on even more significance.

Audio Visual quality – poor audio-visual quality is more than a minor irritation for many delegates.

Poor access to or unstable Wi-Fi is another key concern for delegates. 45% of those surveyed said that access to WIFI during their event was essential and 38% said it was useful. Many of these delegates will have multiple devices with them throughout. According to a different survey of international event professionals more than 50% of them (52.6%) are investing more in event tech than the previous year so it's important that we keep up with this relentless tech development.

Poor access to venues and within venues for wheelchair users and the visually impaired is also raised in the survey.

Signage – for many delegates, their experience is hampered by either poor signage or lack thereof. It's a perennial problem but many delegates noted the helpfulness of volunteers in orientation.



Some of the highlights of the survey are around the collaboration opportunities for domestic and international delegates. 75% of those surveyed state that they have met people they wish to collaborate with in future at their event. 49% say that they have made between four and six new connections, with 6% stating that they had made 10 new connections. This shows that our strategy of Pathfinders, forging new links and nurturing the future for academic, social and economic success for our region is an appropriate and well timed one.

As one delegate at the BASES2019 conference in April 2019 said, *"It allowed me to connect with people I had previously only read/heard about. The invited speakers were very relevant to the respective sessions and meant we got a chance to talk to experts in every field."*

Wider research by Event MB shows that 73% of conferences include a collaborative workshop within their agenda – but we can go further and deliver a more immersive experience. Tie ups with other world research oriented or regulatory bodies for hosting conferences and making the visit of participants into a whole package can add significant value for private organisations to nominate delegates to attend conferences. Packages like this may include a technical tour of University of Dundee laboratories and research works and a local visit. We can work together and lead in creating collaborations and partnerships with institutes, private businesses and local authorities to deliver ambitious, impactful and broader conference experiences. We're uniquely placed to match history, culture and technical innovation.



We're experienced in delivering this type of collaborative, immersive event and we can build on this. The EAD2019 conference held in 2019 for example, wasn't simply a design conference rather, it was billed as a 'playground'– with three days to explore new work insights through workshops, live research projects and outdoor adventures. In a conference experience that each attendee could design and influence, there were eight tracks to pick and mix from, with a complementary series of walks, workshops, posters and research activities to engage in. Conference delegates later commented that *"The intellectual stimulation, the meeting of people, Dundee, spirit of friendliness, organisation and care that pervaded the whole conference"* and *"It was great to meet so many people, from such diverse design disciplines, who were open to discussion and possible collaboration."*

The World Community Development Conference 2019 organiser Claire McGillivray said of their experiences, *"Dundee as a city is small enough and friendly enough to host an international conference, but also big enough and bold enough to really shake things up ... it's fierce, feisty and confident ...Right at the start we knew this had to be more than just an academic conference. Dundee is strong in its communities, and there was a real willingness from them to get involved. When we decided that we were going to take delegates out into local communities to see first-hand what is taking place in the region, we knew we couldn't pack all that into a short conference."*

Over 80% of the conference delegates stayed in a hotel, with Airbnb being the second most popular accommodation choice with 8% of delegates staying in one. Factors which delegates take into consideration when booking accommodation include price (24%), proximity to venue (22%) and locations (20%). The facilities

available at the hotel are important to delegates – not so much major facilities such as a gym, but in room facilities such as robust Wi-Fi and international power sockets or adapters and USB charging points.

The helpfulness of staff at the accommodation was noted throughout delegate comments, indicating the importance of this to the whole experience. Another regular comment however was about the delegates' perceived poor provision of restaurants. Can we link this delegate feedback and work together to make sure that we're providing delegates with the information they want when they want it? One concept could be for us all to work with local restaurants to develop a 'Sign and Dine' model which allows delegates to pre-book their place at a participating restaurant to network with colleagues and make new connections in a relaxed setting with great local cuisine.



Looking forward, it's clear that international experts consider that 'transient leisure' visits will be one of the first elements of tourism in the UK to recover, with business events taking longer.

However, there is a positive for our region here as in our 2019 survey, a highly significant 86% of delegates said they'd return to the area for leisure visits. This is one route to recovery and resilience for many of our partner businesses.

And, with 90% of all those surveyed saying that they'd rate the region as a conference destination as very good or good, there is a longer term positive for us to explore for our future business events.





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