

KCB

KYOTO CONVENTION BUREAU

Kyoto MICE Market Report

Doing MICE Business in Kyoto: Overcoming the perceived hurdles

Doing MICE Business in Kyoto: Overcoming the Perceived Hurdles

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Doing MICE Business in Kyoto: Overcoming the Perceived Hurdles

About the report and how to use it

Kyoto Convention Bureau (KCB) has produced the following report to address your questions on potential challenges when conducting business here from outside of Japan. The document is unprecedented in the way it details the current situation of the inbound meetings, incentives, conventions and exhibitions (MICE) business in Kyoto from within the industry. It is hoped that the information becomes a reference enabling you to create an even more successful event accessing the vast opportunities on offer in Kyoto.

The document is divided into three sections comprising: this introduction; detailed reports on specific business challenges; and a summary of practical tips written by your colleagues around the world and in Kyoto.

We thank you for taking the time to study the contents and by all means we welcome your consultations and offer our expertise in support of your event.

How the survey was conducted and about its added value

This report combines the input of colleagues at the spearhead of the MICE industry both overseas and in Kyoto. Hotels, ground operators, special event providers, government tourism officials, incentive houses, and multinational corporations all contributed to the contents. In order to respect requests of individual privacy this report does not contain reference to our sources of information. Each person who cooperated in the research remains actively involved in the MICE industry.

During 2006 KCB interviewed high-profile buyers of MICE services who have organised a successful event in Kyoto from outside of Japan. They were surveyed on the practicalities of planning and operating an event here and were asked to comment upon the following: hurdles encountered, methods employed to overcome challenges, rewards of doing business in Kyoto, advice to event planners based overseas. KCB published the results and made them available to the local industry. We then interviewed leading players in the Kyoto MICE industry to get their response to comments from overseas. The findings of both surveys are presented in the following pages.

This report adds to your other research by giving a frank review of the business environment in Kyoto today. It empowers you with knowledge on the intricacies of the local industry that will allow you to achieve the full potential for your event and successful business dealings.

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OVERVIEW

For those who are ready to take on the challenge of a new destination, the rewards of Kyoto are numerous and deeply fulfilling. Immerse your participants in the birthplace of Japanese culture and know why, “people who took part in the Kyoto incentive still talk about it more than one year later: it was one of the most successful and rewarding incentives that the company have ever organised”. This in-depth study into the view from overseas reveals hard facts about the state of the international MICE business in Kyoto, Japan. Recurring challenges by professionals based outside of this country include: language, cost performance, flexibility, differences in business practice, information flow, and other notable factors.

Language was the most frequently cited perceived hurdle in the survey by both buyers and sellers who expect the international language of business to be English. The resounding conclusion of this report is that language issues are in reality only a fraction of the size of the perception and that Kyoto is one of the leading cities in Japan regarding ability to negate language barriers. See pages 5 & 6 for details.

It is arguable that overcoming an “expensive” image continues to be a long term challenge for the Japanese inbound MICE industry. The key message that this article aims to portray is Japan costs are generally very reasonable and your focus should be on the high quality of services and products delivered by the industry in Kyoto. See pages 7 to 9 for details.

Differences between culture, thinking, and business practice in Japan regarding the concept of special events are often misread as a flexibility problem. Kyoto offers so many cultural masterpieces that potential abounds to produce the motivational event that suits your distinct aim. With effective communication and proper time allowance Kyoto suppliers are fully qualified to assist you in attaining your goals. See page 10 & 11 for details.

International business is surprisingly still a new element of the Japanese MICE industry – except in Kyoto, which has pioneered the industry in Japan. There remain one or two Japan-characteristics that planners from overseas commonly find to be challenging. Time spent researching the market prior to contract negotiations is sure to set you in good stead for success. See pages 12 & 13 for details.

Other factors brought to our attention by the VIP overseas buyers include: time lags in communications, level of understanding of Western tastes; standard of hotel rooms; designated smoking areas; Kyoto seasonality; amount of exhibition space; public transport and large luggage; incompatibility of mobile phone networks. See pages 14 to 17 for details.

Each of the above factors is examined in detail in a separate chapter in the following pages. Through these in-depth discussions KCB offers you a manual for success.

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LANGUAGE

Overview

Language was the most frequently cited perceived hurdle in the survey. Buyers and organisers expect the international language of business to be English. Stated language concerns cover three main aspects: doing business direct with suppliers, the ability of participants to enjoy the city independently, and the affect on service in hotels and restaurants. The resounding conclusion of this report is that language issues are in reality only a fraction of the size of the perception and that Kyoto is one of the leading cities in Japan regarding ability to negate language barriers.

In fact, the Japanese education system requires that people leaving high school at 18 will have six years of grounding in English; and longer for university graduates. People attracted to the hospitality industry generally have a deep interest in communication and the result is that front-line staffs and sales teams are competent users of English. Furthermore many people in the Kyoto MICE industry have experience of living abroad, which gives them an insight into the culture of language and brings great benefits to your clients.

Hotel

Kyoto hotel managers note a positive trend: recent university graduates have highly developed verbal skills in foreign languages. This means that there will always be English-speakers on hand to assist your guests in the hotel and staffing rotas will be set to provide specific support that you need. Not only do the hotels have international outlook in their language but also each staff member is tuned into to the tastes and requirements of each individual guest.

Restaurant

Japan leads the world in strategy to overcome language challenges at the dinner table. Certain approaches to communicating menus are special to Japan or unique to Kyoto. An example is the famous replica food displays that are also a niche in the souvenir market! Many restaurants in Japan display entire menus recreated in celluloid and this even includes the daily special. Also, intrepid diners from overseas are able to find a plentiful supply of restaurants and cafes that present pictorial menus to do away with wordy explanations of feasts on offer. The catering industry has long been a leader of communication technology in Japan.

Now Kyoto authorities have begun a novel approach to menu presentation that aims to encourage the enjoyment of Kyoto specialties. The tool for doing this is an online database

of foods, types of cuisine, preparation techniques and the culinary culture of Kyoto for presenting menus in English. This is set to become an essential tool to enable event planners to make the most of delicious Kyoto gourmet culture.

In summary, there are a number of resources to guide your event participants through their Kyoto gourmet experience and consulting your Kyoto agent will prove fruitful. You should expect that when it comes to holding banquets and parties off-site your Kyoto agent and restaurants will work together to make sure that menus are geared towards your group's needs and that an English speaking staff is on duty.

Business negotiations

Carrying out business negotiations in English was predicted to be a problem by most respondents in the survey. Concerns are shared by both overseas buyers and Kyoto suppliers. Reality on the ground shows that pre-negotiation apprehensions are unfounded and, since both parties bring to the table open and positive attitudes, there are rarely any language hurdles in business negotiations.

Certainly many suppliers and buyers put the success down to the expertise and professionalism of Kyoto agents. Hotels, in particular, appreciate three-way dialogue between their sales team, Kyoto agent and buyer. Thereby you can be assured of rewarding and effective business meetings. Further Kyoto suppliers like to see agreements drafted in writing to allow full and deep consideration before final commitments are made.

Conclusion

Conversations with both international event planners and Kyoto MICE industry suppliers have shown clearly that despite the perception language is in fact not a significant hurdle when conducting business in Kyoto. Indeed, planners may rest assured that clients and their guests will receive first class language and culture barrier-free service. Kyoto is indisputably one of the leading cities in Japan for doing business in English with international clients.

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COST PERFORMANCE

Overview

It is arguable that overcoming an “expensive” image continues to be a long term challenge for the Japanese inbound MICE industry. While this view is not shared 100% across the world today, it is still a significant concern of many buyers from overseas. The key message that this article aims to portray is that planners must be careful which countries they are comparing with Japan; and in appreciating the quality of services and products delivered by the industry in Kyoto. It is also important to draw attention to the fact that Kyoto especially is highly competitive within Japan. Indeed when taking account of the costs of services that are essential to travellers like accommodation, dining and transport, Kyoto is clearly no more expensive than anywhere else in the world.

Meeting Facilities

The Japanese room-rental system is perhaps different from other countries; for example preparation time is chargeable as is extended use but these are technicalities that are viewed in the context of the whole meeting package and can be negated by negotiation especially when accommodation, banquets and refreshments are factored in. Kyoto agents that KCB spoke with countered that organising a MICE event in nearby Asian countries is no cheaper than in Japan.

For those familiar with the US market there are certain features of the Japanese hotel business that it would be worthwhile understanding. Whereas in North America a hotel might use free function space as a tool for selling guestrooms, Japanese hotels treat function rooms and guestrooms as completely different entities. Function rooms and accommodation rooms attract different customers in the domestic market. Function rooms are popular within the local community for ceremonies and special occasions like weddings. The result is that accommodation and function space have different accounts within the business. A buyer planning a MICE event in a single property will however have negotiating power across the whole package. Survey results show that this is especially so during a low season in domestic travel to Kyoto.

Accommodation

Accommodation is one area of event planning that is very competitive in Kyoto. All

accommodation, whatever the price, is of the highest standard of comfort, hygiene and cleanliness. Compare this with some notable European cities and it becomes a pleasure to do business in Kyoto. Hotels and agents boast that they can offer very attractive group rates to buyers from overseas.

Receptions, Attractions & Social Programmes

Kyoto is the heart of Japanese cuisine and this allows planners to cater to their group's exact needs. An often cited request is to experience the most traditional of Kyoto cooking called kaiseki ryori at a heritage-rich traditional Japanese restaurant called a ryotei. Such an experience can be expensive but an authentic full multi-course meal can be enjoyed for around 100 dollars, which is highly competitive in international terms. Therefore the argument that Kyoto is expensive falls flat in when considering food and beverage.

It would be true to say that since inbound MICE is a new industry in Japan that this affects the price of attractions and entertainment options on offer at receptions. It is being observed that as the industry develops and costs are lowered these savings are being passed on to buyers. The pride Kyoto has in being the culture heart of Japan also has an influence. It is unthinkable to introduce anything but the genuine article in the city that is home to schools of tea ceremony, flower arranging, Noh theatre, and other fine arts that define a nation's cultural achievements. Whereas some destinations around the world might be satisfied to put on summary versions of well known cultural arts, Kyoto welcomes its guests only with the real thing. Furthermore the sales presentation techniques of Kyoto suppliers sometimes are the source of surprise. When no budget range is given they will present their highest quality service to show what they are capable of. This will be used to start an exchange of ideas with the buyer to create an event to your specifications.

To DMC or not to DMC

Meeting planners the world over shy away from using destination management companies (DMC) and local agents for fear of increasing cost to their clients. However Kyoto is one place where professional agents actually reduce costs for a group. The market knowledge and negotiating power allows costs to be controlled and lowered below the level that many clients had originally budgeted for. When you start to get off the beaten track to add uniqueness to your event the traditional way of doing business by introductions in Kyoto becomes a factor and agents come in to their own.

Other factors – seasonality

Kyoto hotels are heavily affected by seasonality in the domestic travel market. Every single interviewee has appealed that this message be conveyed to buyers from overseas so that they are aware of the conditions within which negotiations can take place. The autumn colours viewing season in November and the cherry blossom celebrations in April as well as a Japanese holiday period in May are difficult times to obtain accommodation rooms in the city. However if buyers are willing to evaluate winter and summer for MICE events then hotels will be very willing to negotiate to help with your cost control.

Other factors – Weddings

Planners who are looking for low prices on meeting facilities should avoid weekends in Kyoto. A particular feature of Kyoto is that hotels are generally fully booked with wedding parties at weekends. Therefore meeting space needs to be as profitable as wedding party space and so room-rental prices rise at weekends. Furthermore a large number of sleeping rooms are occupied by tourist trade. The hotels advise planners who want to control meeting costs to consider scheduling their event for weekdays. In addition including receptions where food and beverage are consumed is a method to bring to the negotiating table.

Conclusion

When considering the potential costs involved in doing MICE business in Kyoto many buyers are influenced by the image formed in the 1980s of Japan being expensive. Planners who look at European and North American prices are always pleased to find that times have changed and Kyoto is highly competitive on the international market. Thorough preparation and reasonable flexibility in both buyers and suppliers are the fundamental keys to rewarding and successful MICE event planning here in the culture heart of Japan, Kyoto.

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FLEXIBILITY

Overview

Overseas buyers of MICE services want to, expect to, and are used to being able to organise special events at special locations. An often cited comment is that there seems to be a difference between culture, thinking, and business in Japan regarding the concept of such events. Particularly in regards to special event planning - and in other aspects of the business as well - outside buyers call for a high level of flexibility from Kyoto suppliers. In this section of the report Kyoto suppliers discuss the issues and give their advice on business styles, event potential in Kyoto, the power of a DMC and the fundamental role of effective communication.

Different ways of doing business?

Analysis of comments on flexibility suggests that effective communication is the key to overcoming hurdles regarding this issue. In this, Kyoto suppliers are making great advances in understanding the way that overseas buyers think and operate. Indeed Kyoto suppliers are more and more able to fit to your business model. One hotel strives not only to be multilingual, but to be multicultural too.

Kyoto, the potential

Local suppliers stress that Kyoto is one of the most flexible industries in Japan because it has been hosting visitors for a large part of its 1200 year history. In fact going out to entertain is an integral part of city culture. As a result the Kyoto catering industry is particularly well developed. All insist that it is much easier to organise a special event in Kyoto than in other cities where attractions with wow-factor are rarer. There is a great wealth of ideas and potential for memorable receptions in Kyoto that do not exist in other places. It is therefore the responsibility of the industry to continue to create such events and cultivate an environment where new ideas can be developed. Thus Kyoto has a lot of experience with event organization. Furthermore there is a vast choice of activities on offer. The most difficult aspect of event production here is making a selection from that choice.

Using a DMC

In order to help you understand and manage the breadth of potential in Kyoto a local DMC (destination management company or agent) is to be highly recommended. The concern

that a DMC will add to costs also does not ring true when planning a special event in the city. DMCs will use their contacts to offer you rates that you could not achieve alone thanks to their long term relationship with suppliers in the city. They remove the language barrier thereby giving access to greater resources and most importantly flexibility to create the event that you are imagining

Effective communication

It is very important that there is effective information exchange from the initial contact, argue suppliers to the Kyoto MICE industry. Buyers looking for compelling suggestions in the first response should consider giving at least information on the group size, group dynamics, the aim of the event, and examples of past events. Suppliers do understand the need for client privacy in the beginning. However they do note that limited information in the initial contact results in a conservative first proposal that might not appeal to your group. Kyoto suppliers constantly reiterate that the first step towards success is to give them as much detailed information at the outset as is possible. Experienced buyers support this adding that visual aids such as photographs of past events are a powerful communication tool. It is in the nature of Kyoto people to put the guests at the centre of the planning and to create a programme together with their client.

Conclusion

Kyoto the culture heart of Japan offers so many genuine articles from centuries old shrines and temples to heads of schools the tea ceremony and flower arrangement to celebrated performing arts to a distinct gourmet cuisine. Potential abounds therefore to produce the motivational event that suits your distinct aim. With effective communication and proper time allowance Kyoto suppliers are fully qualified to assist you in attaining your goals.

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INTERNATIONAL BUSINESS

Overview

The Japanese travel industry was born to serve a customer base of domestic business and has developed such that the majority of travellers with Japanese firms both in Japan and worldwide are Japanese. Kyoto suppliers, on the other hand, have a much more outward approach as a result of the city kick-starting the inbound MICE industry in 1966 and its ongoing status as must-see Far East destination. There are some local business practices to be aware of, since in limited cases these can lead to interesting and rewarding challenges for buyers of MICE services based overseas. The following discussion includes tips by Kyoto suppliers on how to produce the MICE event that you want in the city

Kyoto business tradition

Doing business successfully in Kyoto will be assisted by having an understanding of and a respect for its time honoured (indeed a millennium in the making) business etiquette and practice. A key to remember in doing business here is that Kyoto people prefer that time is taken in building relationships therefore suppliers might seem cool at first contact. This does not mean however that new international business is not sought after, valued and appreciated. Allow appropriate time to set up an event and outstanding success is certain. Another factor that overseas buyers might be surprised at is the indirectness of Kyoto people when doing business. This may frustrate the uninitiated but does not take long to get used to and understand.

Distinct seasonality in the Kyoto domestic tourism industry has a significant influence on suppliers' ability to take on group business. During some periods of the year procuring desired room blocks is very difficult. If an event must be held during the autumn domestic high season, planners should be working at least a year in advance to secure accommodation blocks. On the other hand moving an event to summer or winter brings welcome business to the industry and with it more flexibility at the negotiating table.

One of the fundamental appeals of Kyoto also has an affect on accommodation rooms. That is planning law restricts building height. It has two effects: A traditional and historic skyline that enthralls event participants; and a limit to the number of rooms a given hotel can provide.

In some situations MICE planners are urged to consider the use of multiple nearby hotels to cover their accommodation needs.

International MICE – a new concept

Due to the above mentioned factors of traditional business methods and a domestic customer-centred travel industry, the expansion into the international MICE market is a relatively new venture and still very much under development. Here in lies a great appeal for event planners from overseas who like to know that they are the first to provide a Kyoto experience and their clients are the first to benefit. Now Kyoto suppliers are enthusiastically adapting to overseas interest in doing business here. For example hotels welcome the introduction of formal contracts that serve the interests of both parties that has been brought by demand from overseas. This situation is gaining momentum with the entry of international brands into the Kyoto market place and growing confidence in participation in international MICE market. Kyoto will very much be in the limelight and taking a leading role in making the business environment more geared towards overseas buyers needs because this city more than any other represents the nation's appeal worldwide.

Conclusion

The Japanese inbound MICE industry is surprisingly still new and gaining experience fast. Kyoto in particular has distinct local characteristics that planners from overseas find to be challenging. Time spent researching the market prior to contacting suppliers is sure to set you in good stead for success. In addition effective communication with your prospective suppliers will enable you to create the perfect event in Japan's former imperial capital.

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EFFICIENCY OF INFORMATION EXCHANGE & RESPONSE TIME

Overview

Overseas buyers who spoke with Kyoto Convention Bureau (KCB) mentioned minor difficulties in getting appropriate information in a timely fashion. The MICE Industry in Kyoto is concerned by the negative image that this might create. Suppliers in Kyoto recognise the importance of fast and efficient information exchange and the leaders, without exception, have a same-day response policy. The following article discusses factors affecting information exchange and response time and suggests some strategies to employ in order to get the information you require.

Quality of service

One factor that Kyoto suppliers identify as affecting the speed of response from here is the world famous Japanese dedication to high quality of service. This means that Kyoto operators will take the time to check all details before sending out any information. This can be complicated by rates that vary according to day of the week and season etc. A particular feature of Japanese agents is that they will specify a venue in a proposal only after securing its availability for a client. In Japan there is no such thing as a clause in the proposal stating “this hotel, or similar”. Overseas buyers can be assured that Kyoto suppliers send only correct and confirmed details. It is clearly demonstrated here that perceived slow response is not because Japanese DMCs are not interested in overseas business but due to the very fact that they are interested in providing the best for business partners.

Information load and language factors

A number of suppliers point out that they have faced misunderstandings when buyers have not explicitly asked for essential information. The tip from Kyoto is to be as specific as possible when making enquiries. It is a great help to suppliers in providing useful answers if they understand the event you are trying to produce – sufficient information flowing into Kyoto is also a key to successful planning.

A recurring concern of Kyoto suppliers is confidence in their level of English. This can result in reticence to send out information, which materialises in delays for checks or limited contents. Most detailed information sources are originally in Japanese so suppliers dealing with overseas buyers inevitably have to balance limiting information and taking the time to translate.

It must also be remembered that in certain specific situations information is simply not available. An example of this is restaurant menus. The art of Kyoto chefs is to produce a delicious menu with ingredients bought at the market that day. It follows that exact menus are not written months in advance. Samples, of course, are always on hand.

Other comments

There is one further factor that affects response time in doing business that has particular influence in Kyoto. That is the traditional business practice here of contacts growing organically through introductions. Some of the more specialised suppliers to the hospitality industry prefer to accept new business through a well trusted source. In such cases the value of a local agent and the KCB comes in its own. When you plan a special event in Kyoto, it is worth consulting with the KCB in advance to help you formulate the best strategy for success.

Conclusion

The policy of every Kyoto supplier interviewed in this survey is to respond to enquiries with appropriate speed. Most have a policy to respond within 24 hours. This goes for Japanese enquiries as well as those in other languages. Further, it is certain that the situation in Kyoto is on par with the rest of the world. Indeed minor delays when dealing with contacts in other countries are read as a positive because it is a sign that they are busy with other work and hence have a good reputation and earned popularity.

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OTHER FACTORS

Overview

This chapter gathers together some miscellaneous minor hurdles that our VIP overseas buyers pointed out. They are listed in no particular order of weight and are summarised as: level of understanding of Western tastes; standard of hotel rooms; designated smoking areas; Kyoto seasonality; amount of exhibition space; public transport and large luggage. The aim is to make you aware of what challenges might exist and suggest strategies on how to reap the rewards.

Level of understanding of Western tastes

Kyoto suppliers concede that regarding the country as a whole, businesses of all types provide Japanese-style interpretations of products from other countries. However taking restaurateurs as a specific example, Kyoto attracts the top chefs in Japan who have experience of working overseas and create authentic dishes from any region. It is true that many typical unlimited drink menus are chosen for Japanese customers and this is a result of demand-side factors. This means that your demands will be readily met through varying the menu and this should be discussed at the planning stage. Effective communication is the key to providing for the tastes and needs of incoming groups.

Standard of hotel rooms

The demands of the Japanese market have dictated that hotel accommodation had focused on single and twin rooms with double, queen and king-sized beds being in the minority. This is brought up as a logistics challenge by planners. Now that the international market is becoming a priority to Kyoto the situation is changing rapidly. Recent years have seen large-scale refurbishment programmes by city hotels that are introducing international standard beds. Provision is set to improve further as more and more refurbishments are completed. In the mean time effective communication with your hotel and agent should iron out most accommodation challenges.

Smoking

Seen from Europe and North America, Asia seems to be smoking paradise. The prevalence of smoking is recognised as a concern held by groups coming in from overseas and action is being taken to service your needs. The domestic market still demands a significant proportion of smoking accommodation rooms but now most hotels in Kyoto hold 50% or more of their capacity as no-smoking and this figure is rising constantly. Agents and hotels are keen to provide the maximum comfort for their non-smoking guests, so make your group's needs clear at the planning stage.

Eating out culture in Japan retains a large smoking element but this should not necessarily affect visitors who prefer a smoke-free dining experience. Reception venues will cater to your every need. For people enjoying a free evening there are plenty of restaurants in the city that are completely smoke free as in the West. At the very least restaurants must

provide segregated smoking and no-smoking areas by law in Japan.

Kyoto seasonality

It can be difficult to explain the effect of seasonality on the Kyoto hospitality industry, but as an example some weeks in mid to late November see hotel occupancy rates at 100% across the city. It presents challenges for planners who need to secure accommodation for a group. There is no single solution but several things to consider; for example avoid weekends during the peak seasons, and ask your agent to help you secure multiple hotels for accommodation. Importantly Kyoto has a particular charm associated with each season, and familiarising yourself with these is a very powerful tool to have at a planning session. Holding your event during a less-busy season like summer or winter is well worth considering for creating the exclusive feeling that your client aims for - and for maximising value at the negotiating table. You can gain some excellent ideas for getting the best out of Kyoto by talking with an expert in the Bureau or at an agency.

Public transport and large luggage

Many planners assumed that because Kyoto does not have an airport bearing its name that it is a difficult city to access. If this were the case its position as one of Japan's focal points would be untenable. In fact Kyoto is equally accessible from three international airports: Kansai International, Itami Osaka, and Central Japan International. Transfer services are well developed from all of these gateways. Kyoto is also on the Tokaido Shinkansen bullet train line. Kyoto agents add that they are able to provide very attractive packages that significantly cut the price of travel for group members up to 50% in certain cases. While it is true that luggage space can be limited on some transport networks, the Japanese courier system is one of the most technologically advanced in the world and can deliver your baggage to your next destination in time for your evening check-in – at low cost too!

Conclusion

This series of reports on the Kyoto MICE industry has shown an overview of the perceived hurdles to business that are cited by experienced planners of international events. It has also shown that there is still a significant gap in perception and the actual situation in Kyoto. This can be overcome by suitable background research, a thorough inspection and effective communication with carefully chosen Kyoto counterparts. Finally, this series of reports can only provide a concise overview of what you might expect to find here in Kyoto. Developments are taking place all of the time. So please make the Kyoto Convention Bureau one of your first ports of call in your Japan event planning process.

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PLANNING TIPS

Having outlined the major features of the Kyoto MICE industry in section two, the following section will focus on practical advice to planners on how to reap the rewards of a successful event here in the culture heart of Japan. In all cases consulting with Kyoto Convention Bureau is highly recommended.

On communications

With language concerns the top of everyone's priority list KCB offers the following tips towards effective communication: budget ample time for planning and negotiations; be methodical in your explanations; share model contracts and courses – in fact all the information you can - to convey your ideas; use all your contacts to your best advantage; consider the use of an agent for technically challenging talks; perform ample research in advance of negotiations.

On cost management

First and foremost buyers are encouraged to have a realistic view of the level of costs they expect to face in Japan. It is important to view Japan in European and North American prices since it is a developed industrialised country and the world's second largest economy. With that firmly in mind it is clear how reasonable pricing is in Kyoto. To further manage your event costs and forge success at the negotiating table consider the following tools at your disposal: choose weekdays for controlling meeting space cost; consider holding your event in January, February, March, June, July, August, September, December for most negotiating power; evaluate the power of a local agent to assist in planning receptions, social programmes and attractions.

On maximum flexibility

Flexibility, communication, and cost control are all inextricably linked. Therefore consider the following to increase the power of your dealings: effective communication is the key to flexible event planning; seasonality affects flexibility therefore plan events in the off season when ever possible; use a ground operator to aid negotiations when budget allows.

On international business

Kyoto businesses are increasingly outward looking. We suggest the following to aid your success: budget ample time for careful set-up; use hotels that are confident in dealing direct; use a local ground operator when you can; consult the Kyoto Convention Bureau because a simple introduction goes a long way in historic Kyoto.

On information exchange & response time

Fact: there is a vast array of information available on Kyoto and a plethora of sources and media presenting it, however the large majority is in Japanese, which makes it unavailable to many. With that in mind your planning ability can be increased by: understanding there might be a language barrier; being specific with enquiries; giving as much information as possible about your planning needs.

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Advice from colleagues around the world

The following list is a collection of comments unedited from the interviews. Here your colleagues from around the world give their words of advice on how to succeed in Kyoto. There is no order of merit.

On cost control

- Extensive and detailed planning took more than one year and allowed effective cost management

On quality control

- Where ever possible direct contact with suppliers allowed complementary creative juices to flow resulting in great improvements to original ideas. The incentive achieved its goal of experiencing real Japan.
- Identify local contacts that you can work with effectively.
- Work with a number of suppliers who are specialists in their field.
- We worked with a local ground operator for transfer and tours.
- We have worked throughout with a local agent, and they offered a very good and helpful service. In fact, it would have been impossible to arrange without the help of a local agent.

On information gathering

- Advance research is very important. Use all available resources: websites, travel literature, tourism bureaux, convention bureaux, contacts at hotels, etcetera. This allows you to form an idea of what to expect before your inspection
- Use the inspection thoroughly to get to know each supplier and contact; also general and individual working practices and styles.
- Do a lot of research. Enlist the assistance of hotels, local agents, the Convention Bureau and other sources of information from past events held.
- Initial contact with the KCB. The level of service received from the KCB, and good command of English, greatly facilitated our site inspection visit, so it would be useful to have the Bureau involved in at least part of the site inspection process.

On communication

- Personal contacts nurtured through research, inspection and preparation are highly valued. The input by hotel staff was especially valuable for their understanding of the way a European incentive planner thinks and operates. This support at the initial stages caused the company to make the decision to hold the Japan incentive.
- I simplified demands and gave more time for planning when dealing with Kyoto suppliers.

- Be methodical and do not pile of too many new demands at one time.
- Work well in advance. Give ample time to the suppliers for them to be able to assist you. Let them know what you have created in the past and explain clearly what is required from them.
- Be patient. Try using sample photographs to relay what you want to create.
- Utilize an international hotel brand like Westin or Hyatt to assist with direct negotiation for contacting.
I would always recommend using a local intermediary where budget allows.
- When dealing direct, I would advise meeting planners to allow extra time for the meeting planning to allow for the occasional communications 'time lag'.

In a nutshell

- I would recommend commence planning early, site inspections are mandatory, and use an experienced destination management company.
- I would always encourage meeting planners to incorporate opportunities to experience Kyoto's traditional culture in their event programmes.

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Rewards of doing business in Kyoto

This final summary is a collection of comments unedited from the interviews. Here your colleagues from around the world tell of the numerous rewards of doing business in Kyoto.

For participants

- People who took part in the Kyoto incentive still talk about it more than one year later: it was one of the most successful and rewarding incentives that the company have organised.
- From the participants' point of view Kyoto was a truly unique location – people took photographs of everything and it was a challenge to keep the programme running to the planned time schedule!
- Kyoto is without doubt a very beautiful place with an overwhelming number of places that would be desirable to visit. In fact, there are so many the biggest difficulty is to make the choice.
- Kyoto is a very beautiful destination and has a strong traditional Japanese image for Westerners. It is a desirable location for our Western clients.

For planners

- Excellent quality of: food, decoration, service – Japan has a lot to offer and a lot to do
- For the planner – a deeply fulfilling learning experience that I would like to build upon by using Kyoto for a future incentive.
- We found Kyoto and Japan as a whole very helpful and pleasant to work with
- We felt that each supplier was very reliable and we were confident that each task would be properly taken care of
- We did find dealing with Kyoto Convention Bureau most helpful. They facilitated the site inspections.
- Consistently high standards of refined service, impeccably-maintained meeting facilities, a wealth of tourist attractions, ability to offer delegates the chance to experience traditional Japanese culture and lifestyle while enjoying all the amenities of a modern and sophisticated city.
- Tourist information services in Kyoto are excellent, and the excellent security and standards of hygiene make for consistently trouble-free stays for convention delegates and accompanying persons.