

Designing as a Sustainable Knowledge Hub

Positioned as one of the top cities in the world in terms of hosting the most international conferences, Barcelona is continuously attracting association conferences. But look around the city and it appears that nature mandated its rise as a knowledge hub for sustainable and socially responsible associations and conferences.

Words Samantha Shankman

Barcelona hosts more conference delegates than any other city despite there being fewer meetings, according to 2018 data collected by ICCA, which suggests the city hosts larger events than its peers. Barcelona is ranked 4th by ICCA and 10th by UIA in terms of numbers of conferences alone.

In addition to its stunning environment, cultural profile, and attractiveness, Barcelona Tourism has taken incredible steps towards becoming environmentally sustainable and socially responsible. Barcelona is the first city in the world to be awarded the Biosphere certification, which recognizes the city as a sustainable tourism destination committed to developing responsible tourism and including sustainable, environmental, cultural and socio-economic management criteria.

Barcelona is positioned to become an even more desired destination as sustainability comes to the forefront of the meetings industry - and not a simple add-on. Venues and planners are making an effort to reduce their environmental footprint, integrate the outdoors into the usual indoor arenas, and better align with attendees'

values surrounding social responsibility. Sustainable practices are even expected to become one of the most important elements for event sites by 2024, coming in only after access to interactive technology, according to a report by venue-based association IACC.

SUSTAINABLE GEOCHEMISTRY

Given all of this, it is not surprising that the city is attracting organizations and conferences that are aligned with sustainable initiatives and looking for a knowledge hub that furthers its missions.

Goldschmidt, the foremost annual, international conference on geochemistry, was held at the CCIB, Barcelona International Convention Center in August 2019. The event was organized by the European Association of Geochemistry and the Geochemical Society who were particularly conscious and concerned about the environmental impact of the conference.

Geochemistry touches everything from life on other planets to maintaining clean

drinking water, explains Marie-Aude Hulshoff, Chief Operating Officer at the European Association of Geochemistry.

"We made the decision to host the event in Barcelona four years ago. We have very specific criteria when we look for our conference centres and not many meet it", says Hulshoff. In considering destinations, the association needs a venue with 17+ lecture rooms with at least 150 seats, a main hall with at least 1,500 seats, and an exhibition hall. *"The event is held during the summer as most attendees are academics. We also look at the attractiveness of the location, and needless to say Barcelona is very attractive for many delegates",* Hulshoff adds.

As scientific and professional societies organizing a large-scale meeting, the hosts worked hard to take all possible measures to minimize carbon emissions, waste, and pollutants. The event website urged attendees to take the train instead of a plane or to purchase carbon offsets. Once in Barcelona, the organizers encouraged delegates to travel with public transport and offered a 50% discount on travel passes for the week of the conference. There were



steps taken to replace or reduce plastic throughout the catering and registration experience and recycling containers were found throughout the venue.

It was important for the organizers to select a destination and venue that aligned with their efforts and intentions. Hulshoff describes Barcelona as a leader in sustainability, but is hopeful that all destinations and venues will continue to improve their sustainability efforts and opportunities.

LUNG IN BARCELONA

The IASLC 2019 World Conference on Lung Cancer was held also held in Barcelona at the Fira Gran Via in September 2019.

Fira Gran Via is one of the largest and most modern venues in Europe and designed by the Pritzker prize winner and Japanese architect Toyo Ito. In addition to its stunning architecture, the venue stands apart for its commitment to sustainability - it has one of the largest rooftop photovoltaic installations. Fira Gran Via is also located

in a new business development area, very close to Barcelona airport and connected to the public transport network.

While there was data, research, and collaborations discussed within the venue, the attendees also took their message directly to the people. Women Against Lung Cancer in Europe, a non profit organization to make women aware of the significant increase of lung cancer in women, aims to be the first association to take action on a European scale in the fight against lung cancer. Their exhibition featured a giant cigarette which pedestrians could walk through to learn about lung cancer and smoking cessation. Participants received free educational materials and a free spirometry test.

BARCELONA AS A SUSTAINABLE LEADER

Barcelona strives to be a city where nature and the city interact and enhance each other to the benefit of residents and visitors.

More than a third of Barcelona is made up of green spaces. There are 54 spaces of natural interest, 86 parks and gardens, and

235,000 trees in the city and 12 nature parks in Barcelona province. There are 4.5 km of beaches in Barcelona city and 100+ beaches very close to the city which are all accessible.

This all serves as an addition to the business-friendly location and amenities available for conference organizers. Mobility is a key factor in considering an event destination. In addition to private cars, coaches and minibuses, the city is widely connected through public transportation. Attendees regularly arrive in Barcelona El Prat Airport and arrive at the hotel on the same metro that can bring them to dinners and outdoor events throughout the city. There are more than 1,000 hotels suited to business travelers spread the city, which hosts more than 2,000 congresses, conventions, workshops and symposiums every year in a variety of large and small-scale venues.

Contact

bcb@barcelonaturisme.com /
www.barcelonaconventionbureau.com

