

## Unique Meeting Venues

### PMM5 Postscript<sup>™</sup> Number 16

**Background Information:** Meeting venues are as varied as meetings themselves. Site selection is a preliminary step in the meeting planning process. Chapter 11 of *Professional Meeting Management*<sup>®</sup>, fifth edition, addresses:

- The value of knowing meeting objectives, history, physical requirements and attendee expectations
- The eight basic steps in the site selection process
- Different meeting facilities
- Items to include on a site inspection checklist

**PMM5 Postscript<sup>™</sup> Use:** This PMM5 Postscript<sup>™</sup> discusses unique meeting venues as options for meetings. Unique meeting settings have built in "features" that allow meeting managers to build a theme, create unique interaction among participants and construct an innovative meeting. The PMM5 Postscript<sup>™</sup> also includes additional group discussion or research projects to supplement the PMM5 chapter.

**Learner Outcomes:** At the completion of this reading, you should be able to:

- List the seven aspects of unique meeting venues.
- Describe the relationship between unique meeting venues and "experiences."
- Assemble a list of at least ten unique meeting venues.
- Identify a minimum of three potential challenges for meeting managers in using unique meeting venues.

**Related PMM5 Chapter:** Chapter 11, Site Selection  
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### What Unique Does for Meetings

A unique meeting venue offers seven elements:

1. **Ambiance** — the feeling or mood of a particular setting
2. **Emotional appeal** — the ability to invoke positive feelings in the participants or contribute to an emotional mood
3. **Atmosphere** — the distinctive but intangible quality surrounding a place
4. **Novelty** — the uniqueness of the place
5. **Treasures** — elements not found anywhere else
6. **Legs** — the staying power or ability to support the meeting beyond simply serving as the venue
7. **Remarkableness** — unique qualities of a different venue that allows it to be more remarkable and memorable

Whether adapting the words of Pine and Gilmore from *The Experience Economy* or Wolf's *The Entertainment Economy* or Schmitt's use of the term "experiential marketing", the buzz in marketing is that products and services should create an experience. The elements of a unique meeting venue cited above help to create a meeting that is more of an experience.

The creation of an experience is critically important in delivering innovative meetings. Three elements work in combination to create that experience:

- Mechanics of the environment
- Humanics
- Emotions

Mechanics of the environment includes all the sensory stimuli present including sounds, smells, textures and visual elements. Angela Nichols states, "...the message can be magnified with elements such as scented candles or potpourri, background music or natural sounds, and lighting." Unique meeting venues naturally lend themselves to enhancing the "mechanics" of the environment (Nichols, 2006).

Humanics are the interactions that guests have with staff or with other meeting participants. Nichols gives this example, "Think of the quality a skilled waiter or waitress can bring to an otherwise ordinary meal, or how a rude one can ruin the experience even when the food is outstanding." While service quality is not dependent upon the uniqueness of a venue, a unique meeting venue can definitely enhance the interactions between meeting participants. Experiencing a different setting with associates can be a bonding experience. Capitalizing on a unique venue can create new opportunities for improved interaction (Nichols, 2006).

Unique meeting venues also have the ability to create or encourage a specific emotional response. Emotion is highly influenced by sensory stimuli. A unique meeting spot inherently offers the advantage of sensory stimuli. Fiona McPherson researches how the brain thinks and remembers. On her website, she cites that:

- Emotionally charged events are remembered better
- Pleasant emotions are usually remembered better than unpleasant ones
- Positive memories contain more contextual details (which in turn, helps memory)
- It's the emotional arousal, not the importance of the information, that helps memory

The bottom line: Unique meeting venues typically offer the ability to craft an emotional, more memorable meeting experience.

More information on emotionally-charged meetings is covered in PMM5 Postscript™ Number 27. Also the role of the five senses is discussed in Sensory Meetings, PMM5 Postscript™ Number 35.

### **Types of Unique Meeting Venues**

Unique meeting venues are only limited by a meeting manager's imagination. Use this list to spur ideas and creativity in site selection.

#### **Attractions**

- Aquariums and zoos
- Amusement parks
- Theme parks
- Wildlife parks

#### **Entertainment Venues/Performance Spaces**

- Arcades and virtual reality centers
- Children's theaters
- Movie theaters
- Performance spaces
- Theaters

#### **Museums/Cultural Spaces**

- Art museums
- Children's museums
- Film and media museums
- Science and natural history museums
- Concert halls
- Historic facilities
- Historic houses
- Manor houses
- Mansions and plantations

#### **Outdoor Spaces**

- Botanical gardens
- Camps
- Fairgrounds
- Farms
- Game preserves
- Parks and outdoor centers
- Terraces and roof gardens

#### **Public Space/Retail Spaces**

- Airports
- Art Spaces and auction houses
- Ballrooms

- Galleries
- Libraries
- Photo studios
- Screening rooms
- Retail venues
- Vineyards and wineries

**Schools**

- Cooking schools and tasting venues
- Dance class venues
- Horseback riding centers
- Universities

**Sports Venues**

- Arenas
- Bowling alleys
- Game complexes
- Golf courses and golf clubs
- Horse parks and horse tracks
- Pool and billiard halls
- Racecourses
- Stadiums

**Miscellaneous**

- Sailing ships, docked ships and yachts
- Decommissioned military bases (also ships)
- Factories and factory tours
- Railroads
- Religious spaces

**Traditional but still Unique**

Meeting or hospitality venues can still be unique (not a hotel). Consider this list of more traditional venues that still spark a bit of uniqueness:

**Hospitality/Meeting Venues**

- B&Bs
- Bars and lounges
- Breweries and pubs
- Clubs
- Comedy clubs
- Conference centers
- Convention centers
- Executive training center
- Independent event spaces
- Lofts and raw spaces
- Mediation retreats and healing centers
- Night clubs
- Private clubs

- Spas and relaxation places
- Sports bars
- Wine tasting spaces
- Wine and champagne bars

### Unique Challenges

The reality is that many, many unique meeting venues are very well prepared to host meetings and events. This list of challenges should not deter anyone from using a unique meeting setting. Rather this list is designed to prepare a meeting manager and ensure that meetings or events in a unique setting are truly innovative and successful. The more “unique” the venue, the more pre-planning required.

- **Read the contract carefully** — Does the contract contain language regarding exclusive use and buyout?
- **Follow venue guidelines of invitations** — Are there any restrictions that will impact the wording or define what must be printed on the invitation?
- **Secure permission** — What special permits or licenses are required?
- **Be aware** — What other activities surrounding the meeting itself (pre- and post-event activities could compete with the event or impede set up)? Is there the necessary access for staging, lighting or set up crews?
- **Bring in what’s not provided** — What comes with the space? What equipment is readily available? What equipment must be rented?
- **Budget wisely** — What necessities are not included that must be brought into the venue and also be budgeted for?
- **Double check utilities** — Will the existing utilities and infrastructure support the meeting? Consider lighting, sound and power needs.
- **Determine support** — What level of internal support will the venue provide through internal staffing? The level of support will vary at a unique venue. Event management may not be a core function or responsibility of anyone on staff at the venue.
- **Ensure ADA compliance** — Is the site compliant with the American Disabilities Act?
- **Address privacy** — Does the public nature of the venue impact the meeting?
- **Confirm event security, safety and health accommodations** — What are plans for police, fire, emergency plans and health care professionals like Emergency Medical Services or nurses? What arrangements exist for parking or signage? What is the plan for traffic (car and people movement)? Are there sufficient “facilities” for the number attending? And how is clean-up (during and post event) handled?
- **Check into the catering facilities** — Does the space boast a single large industrial kitchen or a less elaborate set up? Does the space allow efficient food preparation and serving (pre-event, during and clean-up) to accommodate the meeting?
- **Resolve lighting needs** — Will existing lighting be adequate for the meeting? Will the existing lighting make the space look appropriate? Will participants be comfortable in the environment? Color, angles and positions of lights can make guests feel quite at home or can have the complete opposite effect.

- **Establish clean-up plans** — How can equipment and materials brought in be retrieved and returned? Does the venue practice any recycling?
- **Take nothing for granted** — Finally, take nothing for granted. Communicate often and clearly with the unique venue.

### Summary

Great meeting sites are not limited to hotels and other traditional venues (conference centers, convention centers). Unique meeting venues typically offer the ability to craft an emotional, more memorable meeting experience. For the right meeting, a unique venue will enhance the mood, invoke emotions, support the meeting at a conscious and subconscious level and be more remarkable and memorable. With proper pre-planning to avoid some of the inherent challenges in a unique venue, a meeting manager can elevate meetings to new levels.

### Group Discussion or Projects

1. Research unique venues in a city of your choice. What types of meetings might be suited for three of the venues that you find.
2. Research the following websites for searching for unique venues.  
www.alltimefavorites.com  
www.conventionplanit.com  
www.eventective.com  
www.uniquevenues.com  
www.venuedirectory.com  
  
Select two of the websites and document three similarities and differences between them. State which site you prefer and why.
3. What other reasons exist for utilizing a unique meeting venue?
4. Select a unique venue (you may search for a venue using the websites included in #2 above) and analyze what the venue offers in terms of the seven elements (Ambiance, Atmosphere, Emotional Appeal, Novelty, Treasures, Legs and Remarkableness).
5. Create a list (or subset) of unique challenges associated with unique venues.

### References

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2. McPherson, F. *The role of emotion in memory*. Retrieved May 2007 from <http://www.memory-key.com/NatureofMemory/emotion.htm>.
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3. Pine, J. and Gilmore, B. (1999). *The Experience Economy: The Experience Economy: Work Is Theatre & Every Business a Stage*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard Business School Press.
4. Tinnish, S. (2006, November). Be Unique. *Tips for Innovative Meetings and Events*. Retrieved May 2007 from <http://www.suetinnish.com>.

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