

GO GLOBAL

International travel doesn't have to be difficult or expensive. With many destinations offering direct flights, world-class convention centers, one-of-a-kind off-site venues and memorable hotels, there's a host of benefits to holding a meeting abroad—think record attendance, global influence and increased customer satisfaction. Take note of these six hot spots, which promise to have your attendees scrambling for their passports.

By Kate Parham





RIO DE JANEIRO

Few cities are able to achieve both a bustling, cosmopolitan atmosphere and a friendly, empathetic population. But Rio de Janeiro—Brazil’s second largest city, dubbed “Happiest City in the World” by Fast Company and Forbes, and the self-proclaimed “World Capital of Kindness”—does exactly that, making it a prime destination for international meetings. Included in the city’s vast hotel network are 32,500 rooms, expected to increase by another 12,000 units in the next two years. Add to that more than 60 consulates and commercial representatives and two well-equipped convention centers, including the largest in Latin America—Riocentro, which offers five interconnected pavilions providing a total of 936,000 square feet of roofed, leasable area and 28 meeting rooms. The city also is home to nearly 60 miles of postcard-worthy beaches and the largest urban forest in the world. It’s no wonder FIFA’s 2014 World Cup and the 2016 Olympic Games have chosen the city as their host. If you’re looking for a centrally located venue, consider Sofitel Rio de Janeiro Copacabana hotel, which has more than 18 meeting rooms (with the possibility of seven of the rooms being interconnected) alongside picturesque views of Copacabana beach, and an 8,000-sq.-ft. foyer ideal for receptions and trade shows. In 2010 alone, the hotel hosted more than 780 events from varying market segments such as medical, sports, government, and oil and gas.

QUICK FACTS

- ▶ **Convention centers:** Riocentro Exhibition & Convention Center and Sulamerica Convention Center
- ▶ **Airlift:** Rio de Janeiro-Galeao–Antonio Carlos Jobim International Airport operates with more than 20 airlines, linking the city to more than 80 countries with capacity for 15 million passengers per year and 520 flights per day.
- ▶ **Currency:** Real (BRL)
- ▶ **Public transportation:** Rio de Janeiro has a large, air-conditioned bus service linking all areas of the city, and a 26-mile metro system links Ipanema, Copacabana, downtown and the North Zone. As the city prepares to host the FIFA World Cup in 2014 and the Olympic Games in 2016, it will receive investments to improve its infrastructure for airports, roads, transport, accommodations, ports, leisure and services.
- ▶ **Getting in:** Visitors must obtain a Brazilian visa (\$150) in advance from the Brazilian Embassy or consulate nearest to their place of residence in the United States.

Ciragan Palace Kempinski



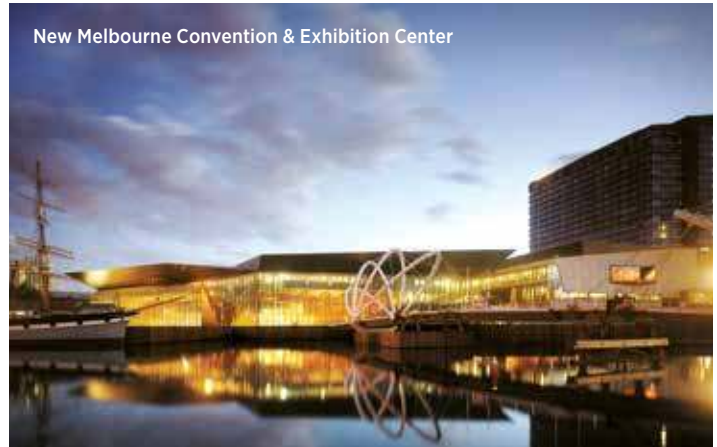
ISTANBUL

There's never been a better time to host a meeting in Istanbul, one of the world's fastest-growing cities. Not only will the transcontinental metropolis welcome 100 new hotels (nearly half of which are five-star) in the next two years, but Istanbul—Turkey's largest city—is home to dozens of modern facilities poised for events. The Istanbul Convention & Exhibition Centre has 25 halls and meeting rooms across two buildings and an open-air terrace. Istanbul's booming economy and growing infrastructure, including the new International Financial Center (set to be completed in 2016) has given the Turkish government a goal of making the country's economy one of the world's 10 largest by 2023. For a touch of luxury alongside some of the city's rich history, book the Ciragan Palace Kempinski Istanbul, a restored Ottoman Empire palace-turned-hotel complete with a ballroom overlooking the Bosphorus strait, 19 function rooms (16 of which are inside the palace) equipped with state-of-the-art technology, and two exhibition centers that hold up to 300. Three private dining rooms also are available. Better yet, the hotel is within close proximity to Istanbul's business district as well as the city's historic and cultural sites. The Marti Istanbul Hotel offers a more intimate atmosphere in Taksim Square, the commercial center of the city. The hotel has 7,400 square feet of meeting and event space including a ballroom, boardrooms and a new terrace, which is reserved exclusively for events and meetings and offers incredible views of the city.

QUICK FACTS

- ▶ **Convention center:** Istanbul Convention & Exhibition Centre
- ▶ **Airlift:** Turkish Airlines, Delta and United have nonstop routes to Istanbul Ataturk Airport from Houston, Washington D.C., New York, Chicago, Los Angeles and Atlanta.
- ▶ **Currency:** Turkish lira (TRY), but nearly every currency is accepted.
- ▶ **Public transportation:** The public transportation system currently is undergoing an upgrade known as the Marmaray Project, which will provide rail connections between Europe and Asia as well as roughly 47 miles of rail. Cards start at 4 TRY (about \$2). Ferries also take visitors between Asia and Europe for as little as 2 TRY.
- ▶ **Getting in:** Visa on arrival fee of \$20

New Melbourne Convention & Exhibition Center



Mercure Portsea Resort

MELBOURNE

Melbourne was voted Australasia's Leading Meetings and Conference Destination in the 2013 World Travel Awards for its fantastic infrastructure, intellectual capital, professional services and sheer beauty. Not only does the city's convention district offer more than 646,000 square feet of conference space and 15,000 guest rooms, but Melbourne also is gearing up to host three of the world's largest and most prestigious health and medical conferences beginning in December. The Melbourne Convention and Exhibition Centre, which has 52 meeting rooms, 98,425 square feet of pillar-less exhibition space and a more than 5,500-seat state-of-the-art plenary, is just the tip of the iceberg when it comes to outstanding facilities in Melbourne. Other gems include the newly opened \$90 million West End at Crown Entertainment Complex (great for teambuilding, downtime and one-of-a-kind off-site venues), and the freshly debuted Mercure Portsea Golf Club & Resort, a fully-integrated, multimillion-dollar development with 24 rooms, a comprehensive function complex for up to 150 guests, one of Australia's top golf courses and panoramic views of Port Phillip Bay.

QUICK FACTS

- ▶ **Convention center:** Melbourne Convention and Exhibition Centre
- ▶ **Airlift:** Qantas and Virgin Australia offer direct flights to Melbourne International Airport.
- ▶ **Currency:** Australian dollar
- ▶ **Public transportation:** The Melbourne Visitor Shuttle Bus makes 13 stops at key locations throughout the city; a bike share program rents 600 bikes from 50 docking stations around the city centre area; and the complimentary City Circle Tram travels the perimeter of Melbourne's city center every 12 minutes.
- ▶ **Getting in:** \$20 visa required



Downtown Jakarta

JAKARTA

Indonesia's capital city of Jakarta—the largest city in all of Southeast Asia, with a population of more than 9 million—has undergone dramatic growth as of late, and more is expected. It ranks No. 6 in metropolitan population among the world's largest cities and has a modern skyline of high-rises sitting above state-of-the-art shopping and recreational complexes. As the country's economic, cultural and political hub, the historic city has become a destination darling for meetings, especially for the financial, technology and manufacturing industries. In fact, 50 percent of the city's revenue is generated from meetings, conventions and exhibitions. If you want to stay in the Central Business District, consider Four Seasons Hotel Jakarta, a 320-room hotel with nine restaurants and meeting space that accommodates up to 1,250. The property also offers discounted group rates. Looking for something larger? The Ritz-Carlton Jakarta Pacific Place is home to one of the grandest ballrooms in Asia; its more than 81,000 square feet accommodates up to 10,000, or it can be divided for more intimate meetings. The Balai Sidang Jakarta Convention Center is more traditional, featuring the 5,000-seat Plenary Hall, a 42,000-sq.-ft. assembly hall, two exhibition halls and 13 meeting rooms. The center, which is located in the Gelora Bung Karno Sports Complex, is connected via underground tunnel to The Sultan Hotel & Residence Jakarta (formerly Jakarta Hilton International). Tangerang, a city west of Jakarta, will welcome the Indonesia International Expo & Convention Centre next year and the Jakarta International Congress and Convention Centre in 2016.

QUICK FACTS

- ▶ **Convention centers:** Balai Sidang Jakarta Convention Center, Balai Kartini Exhibition and Convention Center, and Jakarta International Expo
- ▶ **Airlift:** There are no direct flights from the U.S., but Jakarta is served by Soekarno–Hatta International Airport and Halim Perdanakusuma International Airport, which both have connecting flights from major European and Asian cities.
- ▶ **Currency:** Rupiah
- ▶ **Public transportation:** TransJakarta, a rapid transit bus, carries 310,000 passengers per day, and trips are roughly 30 cents each. The city plans to develop mass rapid transit within five years.
- ▶ **Getting in:** Visa on arrival fee of \$25



Golf hole at Four Seasons Resort Punta Mita



Takua Event Palapa

PUNTA MITA

Punta Mita has long been a vacation destination—the 1,500-acre Mexican village is surrounded on three sides by 9.5 miles of beaches, and the temperate climate means winters average 75 degrees. But the oasis recently has become a top destination for technology meetings and conventions as well, thanks to the Mita Institute and Tech Accelerator, a venture capital fund and strategic advisory program for early-stage tech companies that was launched there last year. Couple that with Four Seasons Resort Punta Mita, which offers 8,000 square feet of indoor meeting space and 14,000 square feet of outdoor space, and Punta Mita is an attractive spot for meeting planners. The hotel's newly debuted Takua Event Palapa, an elegant and modern venue with a thatched palapa roof and retractable walls alongside cutting-edge technologies, accommodates 400. Groups can set sail on the resort's private yacht for a day of snorkeling and watersports, as well as host a cocktail reception on the water.

QUICK FACTS

- ▶ **Convention center:** Takua Event Palapa
- ▶ **Airlift:** There are direct flights on nearly every major carrier from Los Angeles, San Francisco, San Diego, Seattle and Chicago to Puerto Vallarta International Airport.
- ▶ **Currency:** Mexican peso
- ▶ **Public transportation:** Cabs or rental cars are recommended.
- ▶ **Getting in:** No visa required, but a fee for a tourist card is generally included in the price of airfare

Time Travel

Take time zones, as well as flight durations, into consideration when planning an international meeting.



PUNTA MITA
10:00 a.m.
-2 hrs. (MDT)



NEW YORK
12:00 p.m.
(EDT)



RIO DE JANEIRO
1:00 p.m.
+1 hr. (BRT)



MARRAKECH
5:00 p.m.
+5 hrs. (WEST)



ISTANBUL
7:00 p.m.
+7 hrs. (EEST)



JAKARTA
11:00 p.m.
+11 hrs. (WIB)



MELBOURNE
3:00 a.m.
+15 hrs. (AEDT)



Spice shop in a souk of Marrakech

MARRAKECH

The most westerly of the North African countries, Morocco promises an exotic, yet familiar, international meeting to remember. In Marrakech, “The Red City,” visitors sit at the foothills of the snow-capped Atlas Mountains submerged in a completely unique culture that blends Islamic history with European lifestyle—think beautiful mosques, souks and Kasbahs alongside hip restaurants and nightlife. Access to mountains, beaches, a fertile valley region, the Saharan desert and a lively metropolis also means the off-duty options are practically endless. Marrakech is home to two convention centers, each with nearly 175,000 square feet of meeting space. Though the Palais des Congres, a center with 5,000 seats across 19 meeting rooms, a four-level auditorium and a nearly 22,000-sq.-ft. ballroom, has been around for more than 20 years (and is connected to the stunning 403-room Hotel Mansour Eddahbi), the city is renovating it next year. Ryad Mogador, the second convention center, just opened this year. The city’s most extensive function space can be found at Four Seasons Resort Marrakech, which has a nearly 12,000-sq.-ft. garden-facing ballroom that can be customized to your group’s theme.

QUICK FACTS

- ▶ **Convention centers:** Mansour Eddahbi Palais des Congres and Ryad Mogador
- ▶ **Airlift:** Direct flights from New York to Menara International Airport are less than seven hours. Most European cities also have connections with flight times less than three hours.
- ▶ **Currency:** Dirham
- ▶ **Public transportation:** There is a bus system, but it’s often crowded.
- ▶ **Getting in:** A valid passport is required to enter for fewer than 90 days.