

Finding the perfect venue

With so many boxes to tick, how do you find the ideal venue? Each event is different and has its own unique elements, however there are a number of factors to look out for when selecting or shortlisting your choices. Below we have documented the various key areas to look out for, which will make all the difference to your event and the delegate experience.

Location

It may be an obvious statement, however the very first question to ask yourself is "where are my attendees travelling from?". For a local event, a location near their place of work or homes is the norm, however if you have attendees travelling for far afield it is important to consider how they are travelling. Train and air transport means additional travel to the destination upon arrival, unless a venue is a convenient walking distance. Consider the total travel time. When traveling from across the UK concentrate on locations with good train links – Birmingham and Manchester are good examples.

Capacities

Important to consider, and often overlooked, is the size of the room(s) you are looking at using. First off, look at your expected numbers – is it likely they will increase or even decrease? A room needs to have flexibility for change. The last thing you want is to be in a room that holds 300 pax for a meeting of 75, unless your presentation requires the additional space. There's little point in having the right look and feel of a venue if the room does not suit your requirements.

Layout

It's always recommended to study the floor plan beforehand, or preferably visit the venue. From arrival, your delegates gather in a communal area ready to head into the meeting room(s). Is this area shared with other events? How will the venue control the separation? When breakout rooms are required, the ideal would be to have them conveniently located close to your main plenary space; no one wants lost delegates. Also consider the flow of delegates and how the layout of your tea / coffee and registration areas may affect this.

Atmosphere

A venue's décor can have a large impact on the atmosphere and ambience inside. Matching a venue to the identity of your event is crucial. A traditional venue wouldn't reflect a forward thinking innovative IT company, for example, unless the content is based around a historic nature. The atmosphere within a venue is dictated by the staff, surroundings and other guests within the hotel. This highlights the importance of a site visit; you get a 'feeling' about the place, something which pictures cannot convey.

Delegate welcome area

First impressions mean everything. Is there clear signage? Can you place signage in the lobby and will there be staff on hand to direct? Is your registration desk hidden around a corner? If you get lost on your site visit, chances are your attendees will too. This wouldn't generate the ideal first impression. Ensure you ask these questions – the importance of signage cannot be underestimated.

AV capabilities

AV requirements vary dramatically depending on what is needed. Most events tend to require a projector / screen and flipchart. Usually included in a Day Delegate Rate (DDR), it is important to check with the venue, and to see if they can offer any additional elements such as lectern, microphone, PA systems and stage blocks to name a few. The more they can include, the more it keeps costs down. For any set builds, don't forget about ceiling heights.

Continued overleaf...



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Costs

Negotiating on costs can be tricky at times, however at Hippo we believe that 'if you don't ask, you don't get'. Using an agency for your venue finding can prove extremely beneficial, given the experience and relationships we uphold, often with key personnel and final decision makers. Always ask a venue for a list of any additional costs – they are often hidden in rates such as security, cloakroom, fire marshals, furniture hire etc. The perfect venue is one which matches your budget and shows flexibility in their rates.

Off-site options

If you're looking at conducting off-site activities or dinners then it's important to note nearby locations and venues which can provide this. Speak with the hotel sales department for suggestions if you haven't had any success in your own research - often they're a source of local knowledge. For off-site activities (or dinners), we wouldn't suggest much more than a 30 – 40 minute transfer.

Service from the off

Here at Hippo we prioritise customer service levels, and therefore expect the same from our venues. The initial contact with the venue is a good indication of their standard of service. If struggling early on to receive clarity on questions or if you find yourself constantly chasing for responses, you can only imagine what the service levels will be like on the day. Strong communication and a proactive positive nature gives confidence that everything will be seamless on the event day itself.

Desire for your business

Linked with the above point, if during the sales stage a venue shows flexibility and a 'can do' attitude, it brings a positive mentality to the customer. The perfect venue for you finds solutions, offers suggestions and negotiates on rates. It shows a venue is willing to go the extra mile to win your business, rather than making you feel like you are another cog in the wheel. It's a good indication of how the venue see your event from within, and for a successful event, this is vital to find in your perfect venue.