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Embrace Your Inner Yogi: Meetings & Events in a Post-Covid-19 World

As countries continue to grapple with controlling the spread of COVID-19, the meetings and events industry has begun the long and challenging road to recovery. Around the world, including parts of Asia Pacific, restrictions are being eased and face-to-face meetings and events are gradually being allowed to resume. In Australia, for instance, both indoor and outdoor events have been allowed to restart since July, albeit with various restrictions around capacity and safe distancing. Similarly, Singapore recently announced that organisers can apply to hold events with up to 250 people from 1 October.

At CWT Meetings & Events, we are seeing positivity amongst our clients in various markets, with corporates starting to make domestic event inquiries and arrangements for Q4 2020. Companies are rethinking their meeting strategies for the last quarter of this year, as well as for next year, to ensure they're able to secure the venues and accommodation of their choice.

However, even as live events start up again, it's becoming clear that things aren't going back to "normal" – at least not for a while. Safety remains the top priority, and till a vaccine is developed we will have to take precautions that were not necessary prior to the pandemic. The choice of destinations and venues will be smaller. And we can expect to see a lot more events with hybrid formats that combine live and virtual concepts.

In this new and somewhat unfamiliar landscape, if our industry is to successfully re-build itself and emerge stronger from this crisis, we need to think and act differently.

Now, for those of you who read the headline, whipped out your yoga mat and assumed the downward dog position, I apologise – I was, of course, speaking analogically.

First, we need more flexibility. The situation remains highly unpredictable and restrictions can change at the last minute, so corporates are naturally cautious about planning meetings and events. In response, many airlines, hotels, venues and other suppliers have introduced simplified contracts, as well as revised policies to allow changes or cancellations at short notice without severe penalties. Hotels are also being more adaptable in how they allocate space – for example, giving organisers exclusive use of certain sections of the property in order to limit contact with attendees from other groups. These initiatives have certainly helped companies plan and book with more confidence.

We also need more patience. Many suppliers now have smaller teams, and in some cases junior staff with less experience have had to step up to handle sales. This has resulted in longer turnaround times for RFPs and made the negotiation process more time consuming. As such, it's a good idea for organisers to build in longer lead times when planning events.

And, of course, we need more wisdom. Never has it been more important for meeting and event management companies to step up our game and become

trusted advisors to our clients. Organisers are seeking clarity around restrictions. They want to know what options are available to them, and the risks involved. And they are looking for guidance on how to create unique, engaging and memorable experiences for their attendees in the safest possible way. Companies like ours need to leverage our extensive experience, our domain knowledge, and our vast network of supplier partners, convention bureaus and other stakeholders, to provide organisers with the heightened level of support and counsel they need during this period of uncertainty.

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