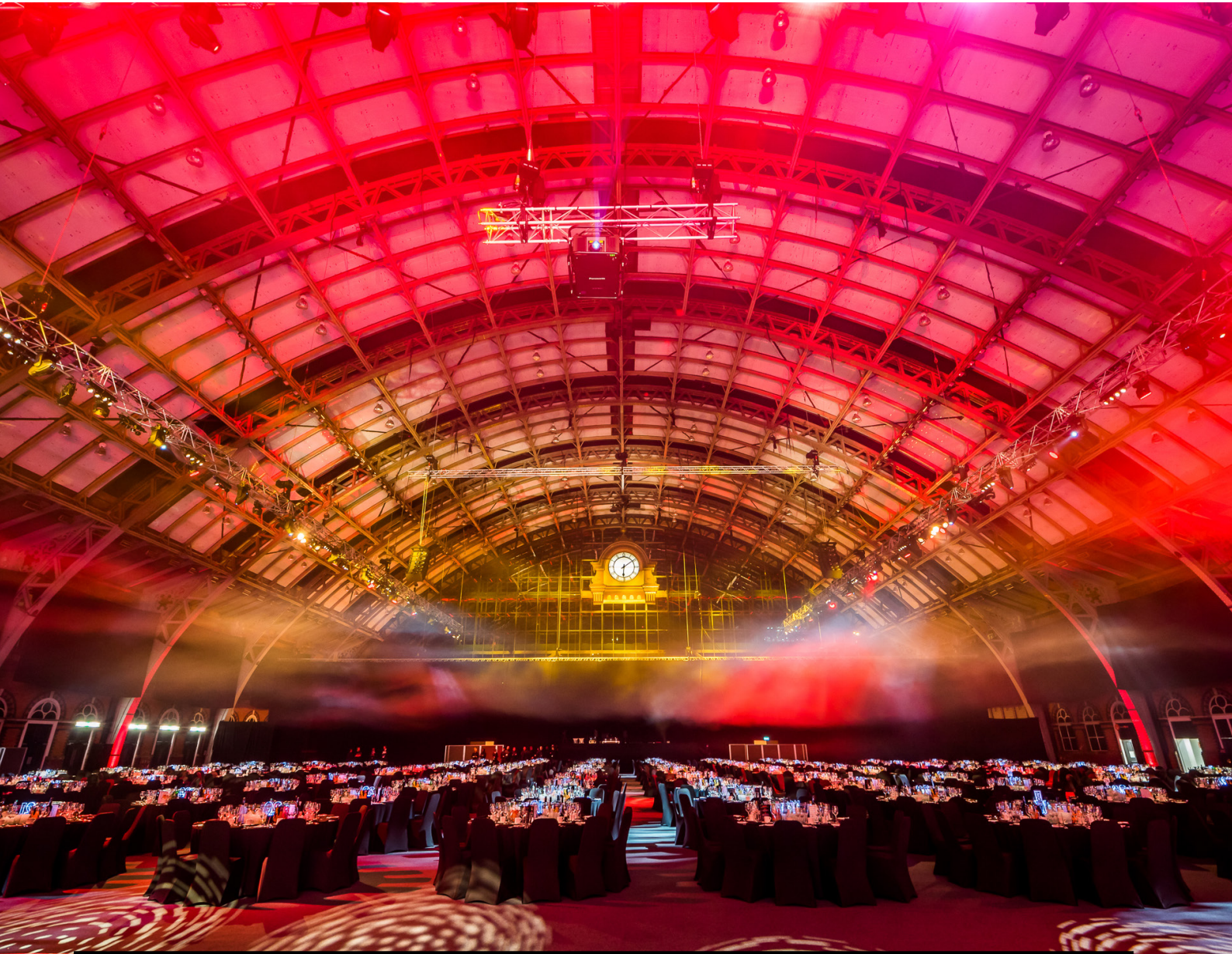




Manchester
Central



The Great Escape

Taking events out of London

Taking events out of London

London has long had a reputation as the best UK city for hosting business events, but a recent study has revealed event planners are taking more and more of their events outside of the capital, driven by a desire to reduce costs, delegate travel time, boost engagement and offer something different.

And with investment in state-of-the-art conference and event facilities, city regeneration, improved infrastructure and an exciting social offering, regional cities such as Manchester and Birmingham are in a good position to capitalise on this trend. Both ranked as one of Cvent's top European meeting destinations, while stats released by Reach PLC show that the rate of people relocating from London to Manchester is the highest it's been for five years.

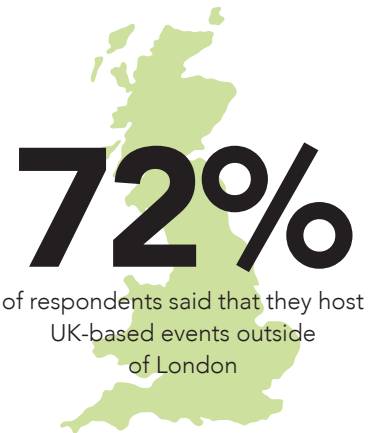
Steve Gaskin, managing director at event management agency Right Angle Corporate says he is seeing more demand for events to be held outside of London. "Three years ago, most of our business was in London," he says. "However, there have been more bookings in Manchester, Birmingham and the Home Counties."

Jef Robinson, category manager, meetings & events, at Citrix agrees, noting that he too is seeing increased meeting requirements outside London, to both support the business' regional client base and to attract more interest in its offering. "Good transport access and costs are strong considerations as are the quality and flexibility of venues," he says.

To fully understand this trend, C&IT, in association with Manchester Central, asked event planners for their views on how important geography is to their event success. The study looked at what factors drive choice of venue, the importance of fringe events and what makes a destination such as Manchester attractive for business events.

Research was carried out via a survey among industry stakeholders, including corporate and association event planners, agencies and venues, with follow-up interviews conducted within the industry. A broad range of events were considered, including conferences, forums, workshops, gala dinners, awards, exhibitions and incentives.

According to the survey, 72% of respondents said they host UK-based events outside of London; with just over half (51%) saying that they've already brought their events to Manchester.



When asked about what made Manchester such an attractive option, responses from those surveyed ranged from 'it's a great mid-way destination between the north and the south of the UK'; 'it's well-connected, with good facilities and solid infrastructure'; to 'it's a creative hub', with 'excellent venues and service providers'





It comes down to costs

Survey respondents were asked to consider a number of factors when determining a venue, such as cost, in-house catering facilities and transport links.

Unsurprisingly, cost is an overriding issue, with 48% of those questioned saying it was 'very important'; while a further 80% said that limited budgets and cost pressure is the biggest challenge faced when delivering successful events. Personal costs to the delegate or exhibitor, such as travel, accommodation and parking also rated highly, with just over 62% saying it was either important or very important.

Planners revealed that destinations out of London tend to offer more value. Recently named the most liveable city in the UK, Manchester was praised for the reduced travel costs in and out of the city, cheaper hotel rooms, and the compactness of the city centre negating the need to pay additional travel costs within the city. They also believed that it was very encouraging to see companies such as the BBC and ITV announcing a move to a city outside of London, as a result of Manchester's media and creative sector strengths.

"Transport to and hotel costs in London are increasingly more expensive, as opposed to Manchester" says Helen Murray, who organises events as part of her role as marketing & business development coordinator at M+W Hargreaves. She added: "These destinations are also 'halfway points' for all UK customers – it's quicker for customers and suppliers from Scotland and North Wales to attend events here without needing an overnight stay."

Hotel costs are to continue to have a significant bearing on venue choice in the future; figures released in August from hotel benchmark service HotStats showed that rates per room reached a record high at UK hotels in July.

Steve Gaskin from Right Angle Corporate reiterates that costs are often much lower outside of the capital. He also believes that with the rise of experiential activities, millennials are being drawn to different environments. This, according to Steve, is why non-London venues are beginning to rate so highly.



Transport links

Infrastructure in terms of available transport is also proving important for choice of venue, with just under half (47%) of those surveyed stating it was 'very important'. Delegate travel time (to and from an event) was also seen as significant, with 67% saying it was either important or very important.

Lucy Hackett, location coordinator at Space-2, which promotes and manages a range of locations, believes transport to cities such as Manchester is a bonus, specifically, she says, with the two-hour distance from London via the Pendolino train.

Additionally, Ann Gurnell, marketing director at Ideas Group, says that cities such as Manchester can deliver 'brilliant venues' and often more unusual ones when compared to London, while agreeing their compact nature can have benefits in terms of transport and logistics.

Another planner noted that 'there are always issues getting in and out of London by rail and it's commonly considered just not worth it'.

"If people can lift share from the same organisation, locale, team or region, this rapidly cuts down the cost of travel as does hosting outside of London," the planner says. "Events outside of London often have more and cheaper parking as well as good transport links for non-drivers."



67%

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The social factor

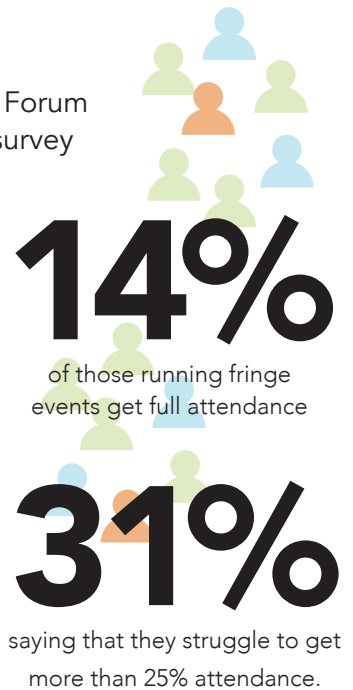
While combining an event with a packed social programme is considered important, the survey also revealed that participation rates for fringe events is currently low. Of those surveyed, only 14% of those running fringe events get full attendance with 31% saying that they struggle to get more than 25% attendance.

Choosing a destination outside of London can also be a benefit in this case, with other cities seen as more 'compact' in terms of the distances delegates may need to travel from conference to fringe activity.

One events and communications manager says she struggles with her delegates getting lost in London due to the multiple ways of reaching a social event which are often held a considerable distance away from the event venue.

Other planners, meanwhile, believe it is easier than ever before to combine an event with an exciting social activity beyond the capital. With reference to Manchester, those surveyed pointed to how the city's connections to music, culture and football provide interesting themes for social programmes.

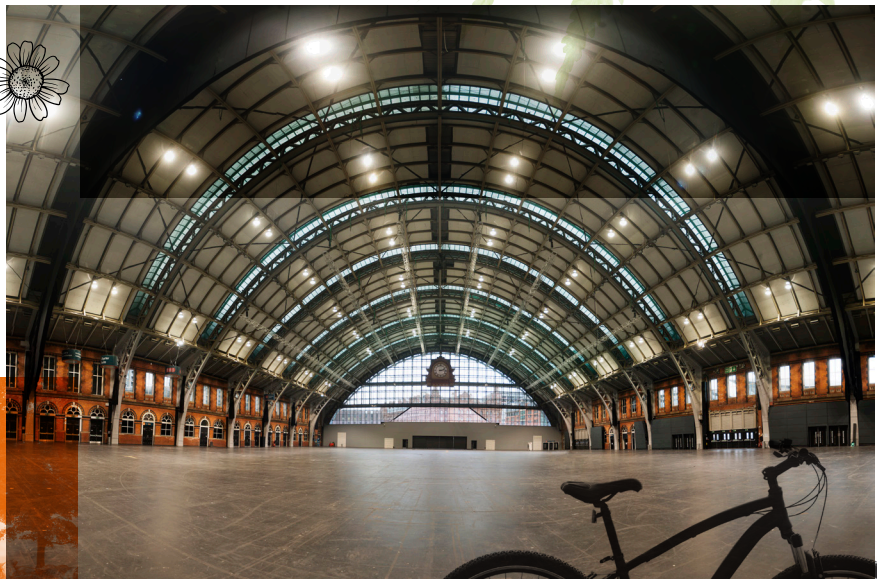
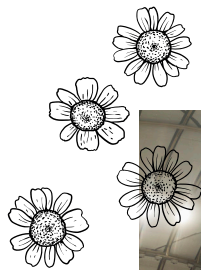
C&IT hosted their 2017 Agency Forum in Manchester with a feedback survey revealing that 90% of delegates rated the location as good or excellent. The two day event incorporated fringe activities at Old Trafford and The Monastery with the main event taking place at Manchester Central, ensuring that delegates got to experience everything that the city had to offer. One of the London based event planners remarked: "We found that delegates were really excited about coming to Manchester and it's definitely somewhere we'll consider for future events."



Sustainability is also making its mark

One interesting finding with regards to why planners may be looking to take events outside of London is the greater availability of green spaces. Joanna Irving, project manager at Métier UK DMC, pointed to how destinations outside of London offer the potential to combine a city and country location.

This desire for 'green spaces' is good news for a destination such as Manchester – according to findings released by Royal Mail Group earlier this year, the city has the second-best access to green space out of 12 UK cities surveyed, with exciting projects such as RHS Garden Bridgewater opening next year.



Conclusion

When it comes to hosting a UK-based event, London has historically been the obvious choice, but these findings demonstrate that this is no longer the case.

As one event manager concludes: "I feel strongly that other main cities are more suitable than London [for hosting events]; not only are they easier to get to and cheaper, but they also provide the same standard of service as most hotels/destinations in London. The staff are also generally friendlier, more helpful and more conscientious in these types of venues outside London."



Seven reasons to take your event to Manchester

1

A warm welcome

It's true what they say, a 'Mancunian welcome' is always a warm one. Your delegates are guaranteed to be welcomed with open arms making them feel at home in the city no matter how long they are staying.

2

A compact city centre

There's no need to worry about delegates having to navigate their way around the city. Central Manchester is easily accessible by foot, meaning that you're never too far away from where you need to be.

3

A leading convention centre

Located in the heart of the city, the award-winning Manchester Central is the perfect location for any event – whether a meeting for ten or a conference for 10,000! The iconic Central Hall – a converted train station – provides the perfect backdrop for your event.

4

A wide choice of hotels, for every budget

With 22,000 hotel rooms (and counting) across the city, Manchester is more than well equipped to make your delegates stay a comfortable one.

5

A vibrant nightlife

Your event doesn't have to end after the conference doors are closed. With lively bars and restaurants just a stone's throw away from Manchester Central, delegates can network long into the night.

6

A city that's investing in itself

With an economy that's growing faster than anywhere in Britain, Manchester is a city that continues to back itself. Improvements to infrastructure, transport connections, plus an ever-growing talent pool have already seen many businesses relocate their headquarters to the city.

7

A well-connected city

Regarded as the 'Gateway to the North', Manchester is easily accessible from across the UK. Right at the heart of the UK's motorway network and just over two hours from London by train, with trains every hour. If you're coming in from further afield, Manchester airport serves over 200 global destinations with direct flights.



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