

Native conference





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Meetings can be more effective, enjoyable and memorable if organisers plan programmes that include suitable physical activities

5 TIPS for organising an active conference

Conference organisers are increasingly realising the benefits of scheduling programmes that include sessions of physical activity and wellbeing treatments.

Even if all of a meeting's presentations and discussions are highly motivating, participants invariably gain from a well-timed opportunity to stretch their muscles and take a breath of fresh air. Activities can be timed to provide a fresh start to the day, a nice way to wind down after hours of brainwork, or a welcome break during long sessions in the same space.

Shared physical activities, such as team games, make networking easy and enjoyable by giving everyone a chance to get to know each other informally. Some of the best memories of conferences are formed from such extra-curricular activities.

Employers can also take advantage of the opportunity presented by having many members of staff together in the same place by getting experts to provide tips on health, exercise and nutrition that will benefit them later back in their workplaces.

To find out how conference-goers can be effectively activated, Meet in Finland spoke to three people who help to organise active conferences in Jyväskylä, Central Finland. Jyväskylä has two major spa hotels and is a centre for expertise in sports science.



Tuula Poutanen (TP)

• Director of Jyväskylä Convention Bureau



Vesa Väänänen (VV)

• Manager of conference programme provider 4event's wellness centre at Spa Hotel Rantasipi Laajavuori, Jyväskylä



Pietari Sorri (PS)

• Marketing manager of Spa Hotel Peurunka, Laukaa, near Jyväskylä



1

Get physical!

VV: "Sporty sessions suitable for all kinds of people can be included in event programmes. It's a good idea to have different group activities going on at the same time so everyone can participate in activities they like."

TP: "Activities can be included in conference programmes in different ways. Brief aerobic sessions or outdoor walks can be interspersed through programmes, or physical activity can be made into an integral element of the entire conference through programmes like PoweRed [see box]."

PS: "After an intensive meeting session it's nice to relax with sports. Team

sports are especially suitable, since they enable people to spend time together in a more relaxed atmosphere. At Peurunka we have facilities for sports, including badminton, tennis, bowling and archery. Many participants also enjoy trying new kinds of guided exercises, such as zumba, stretching, aerobics, aqua jogging, water aerobics and curling."

2

Enjoy the great outdoors!

TP: "The beautiful lakeside and forest settings near our venues can be experienced in any of our four very different seasons. Skiing or snowshoeing lessons can be fun, and Nordic pole walking is a Finnish activity that can be enjoyed at any time of the year. Popular summer activities include fishing and whitewater rafting."

PS: "Our foreign guests usually appreciate a chance to admire Finland's beautiful natural scenery. At Peurunka we arrange outdoor activities such as hiking, skiing, Nordic walking, cycling, frisbee golf, swimming in the lake, rowing, canoeing, and even ice swimming! These

are excellent ways of introducing our country to foreign guests and offering them something unique."

VV: "In Jyväskylä we have perfect natural areas for outdoor activities. Just a few minutes after putting on a pair of snowshoes or skis right outside the hotel at Laajavuori you can be surrounded by silence out in the wild woods. In summertime guests can use the same tracks for hiking, jogging or mountain biking into the wilds. Lake Tuomiojärvi is also nearby for fishing or kayaking."

3

Build up team spirit and togetherness!

PS: "Team sports and activities like bowling are nice ways for people to get to know each other. The traditional Finnish skittle games Kyykkä and Mөлккy are also fun ways to arrange playful competition."

TP: "Group activities can be planned to enable guests to share common experiences that increase the feeling of togetherness. Small group activities during breaks allow people to get to know each other without realising it. Such ac-

tivities also refresh people and improve their capacity to learn and share ideas, which helps conferences to achieve their main goals.”

VV: “We organise many different kinds of team events and outdoor and indoor games, including funny ballgames and problem-solving activities. We often reward winning teams with ‘nuts’ for fun.”



Make sure everyone is included!

TP: “Active programmes should always be organised by people with professional expertise. Activities should be offered sensitively so no one feels embarrassed about not being able to join in some activity. People must not be forced to participate; instead, the activities should be made so attractive that everyone wants to join in. It’s important to get a profile of participants beforehand so programmes can be planned to suit as many people as possible.”

VV: “Different activities should be available to suit different interests and people of all ages and abilities, with some easy activities and also some more ‘extreme’ sports if needed.”

PS: “It’s important to be able to meet

special needs and have a lot to offer, so everyone can find something they thoroughly enjoy. We’re proud that all our facilities are also accessible for people with disabilities.”



Help participants to feel good!

VV: “It’s a good idea to offer lessons in healthy nutrition and exercise routines. Professional and enthusiastic instructors should work with participants on a personal level and gain feedback, doing everything to make clients feel important. Our aim is to wake people up to take an interest in their wellbeing for the rest of their lives.”

PS: “Wellbeing is something we emphasise in Peurunka in everything we do. Our restaurants offer healthy alternatives. Leisure activities for guests include spa treatments, relaxation and yoga. Our staff includes medical specialists who can give talks to conference participants.”

TP: “Activities should be followed by something rewarding and relaxing, like a massage, a spa session or a sauna. Other kinds of rewards include certificates, results of physical tests, trophies for competition winners, or gifts of local delicacies that participants can take home as souvenirs to share with their families.” ●

More power to your meeting

Lahti-based event programme organisers 4event have built up a model schedule for active meetings known as PoweRed. The schedule incorporates well-timed breaks, during which participants learn from expert instructors how they should enjoy suitable physical exercise and a healthy diet.

“Our model schedule is for a two-day meeting, but we can easily tailor this for shorter or longer meetings. We can also call in any of our 150 specialists who can run different activities, depending on our clients’ wishes,” says **Vesa Väänänen**, Manager of 4event’s wellness centre in Jyväskylä.

Typical activities include training in DIY neck, shoulder and back exercises, which are vital for those of us who spend most of our working day hunched up in front of computer screens.

“We also typically provide nutrition tips just before lunch and work with event caterers to ensure that healthy meals and snacks are provided,” adds Väänänen. Fresh cranberry juice and apples are available throughout PoweRed meetings.

Sports activities of all kinds can be included in programmes, often in combination with the use of sauna, pool and spa facilities at venues. Gym and massage sessions are also popular.

During the early stages of many PoweRed meetings, participants are put through a set of physical tests whose results are analysed through a computer programme to find out the ‘physical age’ of their bodies, as opposed to their actual biological age. “Many of our middle-aged clients find that their bodies are ‘older’ than their biological age,” says Väänänen. “Today many people of working age particularly suffer from high blood pressure or are overweight. The results of these tests may encourage them to look after themselves better in future.”

See the model PoweRed meeting schedule at http://www.jcb.fi/media/PowerRed_English.pdf