

# Event Planners' Ratings Of Destination Selection Variables: A Comparison Between Members Of Three Professional Association Groups

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EVENT PLANNERS' RATINGS OF DESTINATION SELECTION VARIABLES:  
A COMPARISON BETWEEN MEMBERS OF  
THREE PROFESSIONAL ASSOCIATION  
GROUPS

by

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the degree of Master of Science in Hospitality and Tourism Management  
in the Rosen College of Hospitality Management  
at the University of Central Florida  
Orlando, Florida

Fall Term  
2006

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## **ABSTRACT**

Several researchers have attempted to understand the destination selection criteria that are important to event planners (Crouch & Ritchie, 1998; Getz, 2003; Oppermann, 1996). However, an examination of the previous studies indicated that only limited understanding of the destination selection criteria has been provided. There is little research that compares event planners belonging to different professional associations and their rating of destination selection criteria. This study examined the differences that exist between three groups of event planners in rating thirteen destination selection variables.

The study provides more understanding in the search of an optimal combination of destination selection mix based on multiple dependent variables. This study found significant differences in ratings of five out of thirteen destination selection variables by event planners who were the members of three different associations. Therefore it is providing a valuable contribution to the existing body of literature.

From a practical standpoint, this study can help by providing information about how planners of different events feel about certain destination criteria at the time a destination selection is made. All parties with a vested interest in the event industry may use this information to appropriately position their services in the market and tailor their products to better compete for the limited number of events in an environment where the space to host such events continues to grow.

I would like to dedicate this thesis to my grandmother, mother and sister.

“They change their climate, not their soul, who rush across the sea” Horace

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

First, I would like to thank Dr. Deborah Breiter, my committee chair, for guiding me through this process. I would not have been able to motivate myself to finish this project without her ongoing support and understanding. The encouragement and praise that she has given me at the time the first draft of chapter 1 was ready, inspired me and stayed with me throughout this journey. The ability to work for Dr. Breiter as her research assistant enabled me to accomplish more than I ever expected.

To Dr. Robin DiPietro I would like to give thanks and show my deepest appreciation for she has kept the door to her office unlocked, her books and manuals available, and her mind open from the time of my first research idea, and every time thereafter. Her linguistic abilities have proven to be of great support to me. Dr. DiPietro's guidance as well as prompt response to my questions throughout this study will never be forgotten.

I would also like to thank Dr. Paul Rompf who, not so long ago, took the time out of his busy schedule in order to visit a sick student in an intensive care unit of a local hospital. At that time the student could only dream that a day would come, when she would be able to go back to the university and enjoy every challenge and every day given her. Dr. Rompf, thank you for helping me in making the transition from a hospital bed, to a seat behind a school desk, an easy one. Henry B. Adams once said that "A teacher affects eternity; he can never tell where his influence stops".

Beyond the committee, special thanks are extended to my friends at the Rosen College and those who are scattered all over the globe, you have been there for me always and your friendships are precious.

Last, but not least, I am thankful for my family, they have constantly encouraged and believed in me. My grandmother Halina has worked hard for many years in order to support and bring her children and grandchildren to this country; she has given us all that she could and all that we have. My mother Bozena and her husband Leon were able to provide their love and support. My lovely sister Monika and her husband Darek have been the greatest friends and the most patient roommates I have ever had. Thank you all.

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## CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

The meetings, expositions, events and conventions (MEEC) industry, also known as the meetings, incentives, conventions, and exhibition (MICE) industry, has shown tremendous growth in the past decade (Chacko & Fenich, 2000; Weber & Roehl, 2001; Kim, Chon, & Chung, 2003). The growth can be attributed to various factors including the increasing globalization of the economy, growth of business, and technological advancements such as the use of the Internet (Kim, Morrison, & Mills, 2003). In the beginning of 2001, after a sustained growth of almost a decade, the industry did experience a slowdown in its growth. Research conducted at the beginning of the year 2001 by the National Business Travel Association indicated that worsening economic conditions resulted in corporations cutting back on travel to meetings and conventions. The results of that study demonstrated that there was a downturn in demand for certain types of meetings even before the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001. In addition to the poor economic conditions, the terrorist attacks further amplified the decline in demand for many kinds of meetings. In a biannual "Meetings Market Report" published in the *Meetings & Conventions Magazine*, it was reported that there were 1,058,800 meetings held in the year 2003, and 1,243,600 meetings in the year 2005. Also, the 2005 report pointed out that attendance at corporate events increased by 34 percent from 2003. The MEEC market as a whole has improved since 2001, and continues to recover from the slowdown caused by the terrorist attack of September 11 of that year.

Due to the economic benefits that the MEEC industry brings with it, many destinations compete to receive a share of its business. According to the Convention Industry Council, in 2004 the MEEC industry generated \$122.3 billion in direct spending accounting for a large

portion of the \$1.3 trillion U.S. travel and tourism industry. As the competition grows it will become more important to destinations and various facilities where the meetings are held to better identify the main factors influencing the event planners' site selection decisions. This knowledge will allow potential hosts to appropriately position and promote their services in the market (Go & Govers, 1999).

The Convention Industry Council also reported that in the year 2004 the MEEC industry employed 1.7 million people on a full-time basis and was the 29<sup>th</sup> largest contributor to the U.S. gross national product. The Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS, 2006) reported that in the United States event planners held about 43,000 jobs in 2004 and the employment of meeting planners is expected to grow faster than the average job growth. BLS estimated the growth to reach anywhere from 18 percent to 26 percent. In the year 2004, about 30 percent of event planners worked for religious, grant making, civic, professional and similar organizations; 17 percent worked for hotels and other accommodation establishments; 9 percent worked for public and private schools, colleges, universities, and training centers; 6 percent worked for governments; and 6 percent were self-employed. The remaining 32 percent were employed by convention and trade show organizing firms and in other industries as corporate meeting and convention planners (U.S. Department of Labor, 2006).

The expectations of event planners remain high and they have to provide the best possible service in a professional manner. Whatever the event type, however many attendees, the main objective of the event planner is to match the characteristics of the destination to the objectives set for the event. One of the most important decisions that event planners have to make is selecting an appropriate site for their event (Vogt, Roehl & Fessenmaier, 1994). The decision

they make will often influence the number of attendees that decide to attend the event, and in turn determines how successful the outcome of the meeting will be (Lee & Back, 2005).

Previous research in the area of the site selection process shows that understanding event planners and the criteria they take into account while making decisions was crucial for both meeting buyers and meeting suppliers (Vogt et al., 1994). In a review of literature on site selection criteria there were seven factors most frequently identified in studies. The factors were accessibility, availability of facility, quality of service, affordability, destination image, attractions/entertainment, and safety/security (Comas & Moscardo, 2005; Taylor & Shortland-Webb, 2003; Chacko & Fenich, 2000; Crouch & Ritchie, 1998; Oppermann & Chon, 1997; Oppermann, 1996).

Event planners work in many different sectors of the industry and the jobs that they perform may be placed into categories based on the type of meetings that they typically plan. According to Julia Rutherford Silvers and the Event Management Body of Knowledge (EMBOK) project that she created, event management encompasses a multitude of different types of events. Even though the industry has delineated itself into various categories, all represent the planning and production of an event that brings people together at a particular time, in a particular place, for a particular purpose. EMBOK is one of the most comprehensive studies so far conducted and Silvers created an EMBOK matrix in which she divides the industry into eleven sectors based on the type of events. The eleven sectors identified in the matrix include the following event types: business and corporate events, cause-related and fundraising events, entertainment and leisure events, exhibitions, expositions and fairs, festivals, government and

civic events, hallmark events, marketing events, meetings and conventions, social/life-cycle events, and sport events.

Previous studies on the site selection process have failed to investigate whether event type influences the event planner's destination selection decision making process. This area is understudied as researchers have typically failed to identify which destination selection variables are important to planners based on the type of event that they are planning. According to Comas and Moscardo (2005) there are few studies which acknowledge the possible differences in the sets of variables most important to planners when determining which destination will be appropriate for the given type of event.

There are many associations representing event management professionals. These organizations were established to provide member services such as education, networking opportunities, research reports, and information on the trends in the industry. This study investigates the perceptions of members of three of these associations regarding destination selection criteria; the first association is the International Association for Exhibit Management (IAEM). The second association is Meeting Professionals International (MPI), and the third association included in this study is Professional Convention Management Association (PCMA). There are also three sectors in which the members of those associations conduct most of their work. The three sectors included in this study are; the business and corporate events to include incentive meetings. The second dominant sector is exhibitions, and the third is the meetings and conventions sector which includes sales and training meetings as well as annual conferences. Thirteen site selection variables are investigated: ease of accessibility by air, ease of accessibility by roads, choice of restaurants, variety of nightlife, number of first class hotel rooms, brand

name hotels, amount of dedicated exhibit space, image as a desirable place to visit, reputation for hosting successful events, safety and security, support services for events, overall cost, and perceived value for money.

### **Definition of Terms**

**IAEM:** International Association for Exhibit Management is the leading association for the global exhibition industry. IAEM represents over 5,500 individuals who conduct and support exhibitions around the world.

**MPI:** Meeting Professionals International is the largest association for the meetings profession with more than 20,000 members in 68 chapters and clubs across the USA, Canada, Europe and other countries throughout the world. MPI empowers meeting professionals to increase their strategic value through education, clearly defined career pathways, and business growth opportunities.

**PCMA:** Professional Convention Management Association is a nonprofit international association of professionals in the meetings industry whose mission is to deliver breakthrough education and promote the value of professional convention management. PCMA has more than 5,000 members representing all facets of the meetings industry.

**Event:** An organized occasion such as a meeting, convention, exhibition, special event, gala dinner, etc. An event is often composed of several different yet related functions (APEX glossary, Convention Industry Council, 2006).

**Planner:** Person whose job it is to oversee and arrange every aspect of an event. Person can be an employee or hired ad hoc by large companies, professional associations, or trade associations to plan, organize, implement, and control meetings, conventions, and other events (APEX glossary, Convention Industry Council, 2006).

**Conference:** 1) Participatory meeting designed for discussion, fact-finding, problem solving and consultation. 2) An event used by any organization to meet and exchange views, convey a message, open a debate or give publicity to some area of opinion on a specific issue. No tradition, continuity or periodicity is required to convene a conference. Although not generally limited in time, conferences are usually of short duration with specific objectives (APEX glossary, Convention Industry Council, 2006).

**Convention:** An event where the primary activity of the attendees is to attend educational sessions, participate in meetings/discussions, socialize, or attend other organized events. There is an exhibit component that is secondary to the event (APEX glossary, Convention Industry Council, 2006).

**Incentive Event:** A reward event intended to showcase persons who meet or exceed sales or production goals (APEX glossary, Convention Industry Council, 2006).



- Sales Meeting:** Event to introduce new products and their applications or to motivate sales staff (APEX glossary, Convention Industry Council, 2006).
- Exhibition:** 1) An event at which products and services are displayed. The primary activity of attendees is visiting exhibits on the show floor. These events focus primarily on business-to-business (B2B) relationships. 2) Display of products or promotional material for the purposes of public relations, sales and/or marketing (APEX glossary, Convention Industry Council, 2006).
- Board Meeting:** A meeting of the governing body of an organization (APEX glossary, Convention Industry Council, 2006).
- Training Meeting:** Structured learning session in which instructor presents specific information and techniques (APEX glossary, Convention Industry Council, 2006).
- Event Management:** Is the process by which an event is planned, prepared, and produced. As with any other form of management, it encompasses the assessment, definition, acquisition, allocation, direction, control, and analysis of time, finances, people, products, services, and other resources to achieve objectives (EMBOK, 2003).

### **Research Objective**

The main objective of this research is to determine if there is a significant difference between members of three associations in their ratings of destination selection variables.

### **Hypotheses**

Hypothesis 1. Members of IAEM rate destination selection variables differently than the members of MPI.

Hypothesis 2. Members of MPI rate destination selection variables differently than the members of PCMA.

Hypothesis 3. Members of PCMA rate destination selection variables differently than the members of IAEM.

### **Research Significance**

There is a need for research which will help to identify the specific sets of variables that event planners view as important in selecting destinations for different types of events. This type of research could help determine whether there are any differences in variables that event planners feel are important when selecting destinations for different types of events. Such research would shed more insight into the event planners' destination selection process and could help sales and marketing professionals in hotels, convention centers, conference centers, and

other suppliers better serve their customers by attracting the type of business that best fits the scope of services they are able to provide. It will also help the destination marketing organizations such as Convention and Visitor Bureaus (CVB) understand the planners' needs since event planners are one of the two primary customers for CVBs' convention/meeting business function (Weber & Roehl, 2001). Another benefit of this type of research is that the main focus of this study is placed on the three largest associations of event planners. The results of this study may help identify if there are specific destination selection criteria of unique importance to members of each association. This information could further aid all of the suppliers in their marketing efforts and in providing services that better fit the associations and their members' needs.

### **Dependent (Continuous) Variables**

The dependent variables in this study are destination selection variables and they include: ease of accessibility by air, ease of accessibility by roads, choice of restaurants, variety of nightlife, number of first class hotel rooms, brand name hotels, amount of dedicated exhibit space, image as a desirable place to visit, reputation of hosting successful events, safety and security, support services for events, overall cost, and perceived value for money.

### **Independent (Categorical) Variables**

The independent variables in this research are the three groups of event planners. The first group is composed of the association members of IAEM, the second group is composed of the association members of PCMA, and the third group is composed of the association members of MPI.

### **Summary**

In this chapter an overview of the event industry was provided in order to present important aspects of the event industry, such as its growth and economic impact on the hospitality industry. The role of the event planner in destination selection was introduced, as well as that of the associations that represent the event management professionals. Definitions of terms were provided, followed by the objective for this research, and the stating of hypotheses. It was explained why such research is important, and the selection of dependent and independent variables included in this research were provided.

## **CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Introduction**

According to Comas and Moscardo (2005), effective development of the event management sector of the hospitality industry requires an understanding of how planners choose destinations for their events and what services they seek. The following review of literature will help to better understand how the research of this topic has progressed through time, and will shed more insight into the current trends in research on the topic of event planning. In addition, the following discussion will define the segmentation of event planners based on the types of events they plan. Furthermore, the literature review will look at site selection factors so far deemed as important to planners and compiled throughout years of previous investigations and studies.

This section will describe the role that professional associations play in the event industry, as well as look at three associations in particular that are included in the current study.

### **Inconsistencies in the Definition of the Event Industry and Resultant Impact on Economic Impact Measures**

It is important to note that researchers who have attempted to measure the economic impact of the event industry have had many problems in the past and will continue to do so as long as there are inconsistencies in the definition of the industry and what it encompasses.

According to Crouch and Ritchie (1998), estimates of the size of the industry in terms of annual direct spending should be treated with caution because they do not reflect the true impact of the industry. To some extent, this has to do with researchers having very dissimilar definitions of what a meeting is and which types of meetings they consider in their definitions. Therefore, comparing estimates of the impact this industry has is complex. This has been evident in many studies conducted in the early 1990's where the gaps between the estimates were much more significant. For example, the study conducted by a consulting team for the *Convention Liaison Council* in the year 1993 reflected very different figures from a study conducted by a different consultant for *Meetings & Conventions*, even though both studies were investigating the same time period. Because of the growth the industry has experienced in North America, as well as other parts of the world, it is important that more attention be given into making the industry consistent, especially when developing definitions.

### **Towards Making the Event Industry More Uniform**

In an effort to make the event industry more uniform, Silvers (2003), in her Event Management Body of Knowledge (EMBOK) project presented an event management knowledge domain structure as a starting point for further research on multi-national and multi-disciplinary scale. According to Silver's taxonomy (2003), the site selection and site selection criteria of event planning fall under the site management, which in turn is a part of the taxonomy of the operations knowledge domain. One of the main objectives of the EMBOK is to aid in the

development of standard practices which will lead to more legitimate and more consistent ways of performing event management and help recognize event planning as a true profession.

As stated previously, the eleven sectors identified in the EMBOK matrix include the following event types: business and corporate events, cause-related and fundraising events, entertainment and leisure events, exhibitions, expositions and fairs, festivals, government and civic events, hallmark events, marketing events, meetings and conventions, social/life-cycle events, and sports events. As defined in the EMBOK matrix, the first sector business and corporate events includes any event that supports business objectives, including management functions, corporate communications, training, marketing, incentives, employee relations, and customer relations. The second sector cause-related and fundraising events, is an event created by or for a charitable or cause-related group for the purpose of attracting revenue, support, and/or awareness. The third sector entertainment and leisure events encompass one-time or periodic, free or ticketed performance or exhibition event created for entertainment purposes. The fourth, exhibitions, expositions and fairs is defined as an event bringing buyers and sellers and interested persons together to view and/or sell products, services, and other resources to a specific industry or the general public. The fifth sector which is the festivals includes a cultural celebration, either secular or religious, created by and/or for the public. Sixth, the government and civic events include events comprised of or created by or for political parties, communities, or municipal or national government entities. The seventh, hallmark event sector, is defined as an event of such significance and/or scope that its image or stature assures national and international recognition and interest. The eighth sector, which is the marketing event, has been defined as a commerce-oriented event to facilitate bringing buyer and seller together or to create awareness of a

commercial product or service. The ninth sector is the meetings and conventions and it is defined as the assembly of people for the purpose of exchanging information, debate or discussion, consensus or decisions, education, and relationship building. The tenth sector which includes the social/life cycle events is a private event, by invitation only, celebrating or commemorating a cultural, religious, communal, societal, or life-cycle occasion. And the last sector of sports events is a spectator or participatory event involving recreational or competitive sport activities.

### **Professional Associations**

According to Messmer (2005) association membership can have many benefits. The benefits include the ability to meet people who have similar interests and work in the same sectors of the industry. Taking advantage of educational programs offered by professional associations, and taking advantage of discounts and cost-saving opportunities available to members of such organizations are also reasons why individuals join professional associations.

The largest association for professionals in the event industry is Meeting Professionals International (MPI). The association was established in 1972 and at that time had 159 members. There currently are over 20,000 members in the U.S., Canada, Europe, Mexico, Japan, and other parts of the world. The members of the association include event planners and the suppliers to the event industry. The stated mission of MPI is to help meeting professionals in career development by increasing their value through education, as well as to help them in business growth opportunities. MPI has its own publication, *The Meeting Professional*, in which the



members can find the latest news and learn about the trends that are relevant to the industry (MPI website, 2006).

The Professional Convention Management Association (PCMA) is also an international association, and it was established in 1957 as a nonprofit organization. The first members were health care associations' executives and they decided to welcome affiliate members such as hoteliers, convention and visitor bureaus, audio-visual companies, and professional planners in fields like science, education, and engineering. The membership was extended to all not for profit organizations and then corporations; however PCMA still focuses on the association market. Since 1986 the organization has been publishing *Convene*, which is a monthly trade publication. The *Convene* provides the latest trends in the industry as well as information on research that has been conducted in the industry. The association currently has over 5,000 members (PCMA website, 2006).

The International Association for Exhibition Management (IAEM) was founded in 1928 and its main goal was to represent the interests of trade show and exhibition managers in the U.S. It has more than 5,500 members from the U.S. and over forty other countries. IAEM is open to individual members as well as firms and organizations that have business interest in the exhibition sector of the industry (IAEM website, 2006).

The above associations continually conduct research on issues of interest to association members and others in the event industry. *Future Watch* is a study conducted on annual basis by MPI in partnership with American Express. The main purpose of this survey is to determine future global trends in the industry. Similar research is also conducted by numerous trade publications. Some of the topics deal with the issue of site selection and the criteria important to

the event planners in selecting sites for their events. PCMA also conducts research on trends and issues of concern to the convention planners.

In August of 2006, *EXPO Magazine* together with Exhibit Survey Inc. conducted a study that found three most critical site selection criteria for trade associations to be the size of the exhibit hall, geographic location, and the number of meeting rooms, whereas planners of for-profit shows were mostly concerned with the size of exhibit hall, geographic location, and potential attendance draw for city or region (EXPO, 2006).

“Meetings Market Report” (2005), found the most important factors for convention planners evaluating a destination were: availability of hotels or other facilities suitable for meetings, affordability of the destination, safety and security of the destination, ease of transporting attendees to the location, and distance traveled by attendees. Planners of other association meetings chose affordability of the destination as the top concern and the second most important was the availability of hotels or other facilities suitable for meetings.

### **Previous Research**

The decision making process and understanding of event planners’ use of information they possess about facilities and destinations, as well as what is important to them are not new subjects of investigation. For many years researchers have attempted to gain more information in order to better understand the event planners.

Vogt, Roehl and Fesenmaier (1994) wanted to better understand event planners in order to help convention centers and hotel meeting facilities become successful in attracting more

event business. The study investigated how meeting planners use internal and external sources of information, as well as the preferred means of receiving information about meeting facilities. The results of the study suggested that the information source most frequently used by event planners when selecting a facility for the event they were planning was prior experience. Other sources of information frequently used in facility selection were professional and social networks.

In a study conducted by Clark and McCleary (1995), which involved interviews with association professionals who were familiar with the purchasing process for meeting site selection, it was found that there may be many people involved in the process. The identification of those people involved will be essential for marketing communication that will need to reach all of the decision makers. Meeting planners have also expressed that understanding risk factors facing association meeting planners and reducing those factors will improve a site's chances at being selected. In a study conducted by Clark, Price & Murrman (1996) the authors argued that meeting planners for associations will have different selection criteria for choosing convention sites because often they are not the sole deciding power. Literature on the site-selection process demonstrated that the organizational buying process tends to be more complex than that of the consumer's buying process. Associations' planning and site-selection processes vary according to the size and budget of the association (Kim et al., 2003).

Oppermann (1996) found that previous experience with a destination city influences the perception that event planners have when choosing destinations for their future events. In his study, by comparing perceptions of meeting planners without experience and those with previous experience with the cities, Oppermann (1996) investigated the image differences of 30

convention cities. His findings were that meeting planners with previous experience perceived destinations as better than those without previous experience with the given cities. These findings supported those of a study by Vogt et al. (1994). When Oppermann (1996) looked at destination attributes and their importance in the planning decision process for event planners of conventions his findings revealed that event planners of conferences placed most importance on meeting room facilities and hotel service quality. Safety/security, hotel room availability and the cleanliness/attractiveness of the destination were also important. Those deemed as least important were nightlife, climate, and scenery/sightseeing opportunities.

Grant and Weaver (1996) conducted a study in which they looked at the attendees of conferences and factors that attendees consider when selecting a meeting. There were four factors that, according to the research, attendees look for: networking, education, leadership, and destination/recreation/social. The authors further analyzed the data by conducting a cluster analysis and the results led them to the conclusion that there are three homogeneous groups of people which were formed by selection criteria representing each factor. They were: those who enjoy conferences for networking opportunities, those who enjoy conferences for educational opportunities, and those who enjoy conferences for leadership opportunities. The results of this research were deemed important by the authors in that they shed more insight on what the attendees of conferences were looking for. This in turn can aid associations and event planners of such meetings by ensuring that after a demographic profile of the association members is conducted, the event planned can include activities that the attendees are looking for.

Oppermann and Chon (1997) looked at the decision making process from the perspective of the main three players: the association, the destination, and the potential delegates, where

most emphasis was put on the last group. In that study two models were presented. In the first model the authors illustrated the interrelationships between the main players and the minor players in convention tourism. In the second model the authors showed what they believe to be the four sets of variables influencing the participant decision process, the association/conference factors, locational factors, personal/business factors and intervening opportunities.

Crouch and Ritchie (1998) identified a number of factors and developed a descriptive model to explain the variables involved in the site selection process important to event planners in charge of planning association events. The site selection factors presented in their model included; accessibility, local support, extra-conference opportunities, accommodation facilities, information, and site environment.

Upchurch, Jeong, Clements, and Jung (1999) did research that tried to determine the event planners satisfaction with facilities that already existed in the Korean market. They investigated event planners' perceptions of six conference hotels by looking at eleven site selection factors combined from previous studies (Oppermann, 1996; Crouch & Ritchie, 1998). The results of the study agreed with Oppermann (1996) in that they revealed the following to be of most importance; the availability of meeting room facilities, hotel room availability, hotel service quality, ease of transportation access, and safety/security. The least important factors were nightlife opportunities and the hotel brand image.

Chacko and Fenich (2000) examined the importance of destination attributes which had to do with an overall destination image as a convention host city. The study focused on the North American market and conference planners in that region. This study argued that previous research failed to assess the relative importance of destination attributes to meeting planners, and

instead mostly focused on the attributes that were important to attendees. They used twelve attractiveness attribute variables which have been identified by Crouch and Ritchie (1998) as well as others before them. The findings of this research suggested that meeting planners deemed quality as more important than factors such as hotel availability and cost. The most important finding in the study was that “the promotional appeal of a site is a vital contributor to overall convention destination attractiveness” (p.218).

Fenich (2001) looked at destination selection decision making and studies conducted previously in order to find out what the elements which attracted convention attendees to certain destinations were. In his study he tried to identify those elements and rank them according to importance. He developed a scale to evaluate cities based on attributes that they possess and matching them to the important criteria of a convention.

Lee and Hiemstra (2001) show another aspect of destination selection that has been explored in the concept of Customer Relationship Management (CRM). Their study investigated the perceptions that event planners have of their relationship with hotel salespeople during the meeting planning negotiation period. They argued that many business possibilities lie in creating long lasting relationships between the salesperson of a hotel facility and the meeting planner. The findings of the study indicated that event planners value certain characteristics that salespeople should possess and those are; expertise, power, and willingness. Those characteristics could be a determining factor in building a lasting relationship between the event planner and the sales person. The researchers have also found that meeting planners believe that high turnover in the sales personnel at facilities does not help in building quality relationships.

Jago and Deery (2003) used the model developed by Oppermann and Chon (1997) to investigate the relationship and the factors influencing convention decision making and the relationship between the three main players identified in the model. However, their study involved international convention associations, international attendees and professional conference planners. The findings of the study suggested that the model developed by Oppermann and Chon (1997) should be built upon to include more processes and more players. Jago and Deery (2003) suggested that when international attendees and international associations are involved in the decision making processes the model should include players such as the local government organizations, convention centers, and CVB's.

Kim, Morrison, and Mills (2003) investigated the role web-based marketing plays in the site selection process of main convention centers in the U.S. The authors argued that web-based marketing is not used to its full potential by convention centers. At the time of the study, none of the websites under investigation used software for customer relationship management which would enable a two way communication between the supplier and event planners. Therefore the relationship building process, which happens to be an important aspect of the site selection process, could be easier if the web-sites were redesigned to allow for two way communication.

Hinkin and Tracey (2003) conducted a study in which they looked at service characteristics that may have an impact on meeting effectiveness especially when looking at the services that properties or facilities provide to their customers. Their study compared the critical factors that were important to event planners with those factors that were of importance to the meeting participants. The results indicated that similar factors were of importance to both groups and security was ranked as the most important factor for both. Other variables that the

study revealed to be of importance included: staff, meeting rooms-sensory, meeting rooms-physical, guest rooms, pricing and billing, food and beverage, public areas, recreational amenities, and convenience.

Getz (2003) looked at the destination selection criteria from a different point of view, and investigated how bidding on events influences the city's recognition. He looked at the event bidding process and sets of criteria that a destination must possess in order to be able to win the bids and bring certain special events to their cities. In particular, special events such as the Olympic Games tend to bring recognition and business to the cities and nations that host them.

Crouch and Louviere (2004) conducted a study in which they provided statistical evidence of the most important site characteristics which influence the choice of picking certain cities as convention sites as opposed to picking other destinations. The authors argue that convention facilities and the availability of rooms that destinations provide are important factors but in their study they have found that destinations must offer additional features to successfully compete.

Breiter and Milman (2005) conducted a study to determine which services and features of convention centers attendees view as important when attending a tradeshow or an exhibition at a large convention center. The data was collected from attendees of five different exhibitions at different conventions held at a major convention center in the U.S. The findings of the respondents' perceptions of facility services at the convention center indicated that the three most important aspects of the facility were the overall cleanliness of the venue, a well maintained facility, and the helpfulness of guest services personnel. Respondents were also asked to rate the actual performance of the facility and to rate the facility features at the convention center. The



findings indicated that the features most important to the attendees were the directional signage within the convention center, availability of high quality lodging facilities near the convention center, sufficient restrooms throughout the convention center, and the ability to get cell phone signal in the convention center. When asked about the actual performance, the respondents rated sufficient restrooms throughout the convention center the highest followed by availability of high quality lodging facilities near the convention center, and sufficient public telephones.

Wu and Weber (2005) also investigated the delegates' perceptions of the variables important in the selection of facilities by looking at services, attributes and facilities provided to the delegates by convention centers. Attendees of two conventions at a convention center located in Hong Kong were the respondents. This study was conducted in order to gain a better understanding of the attributes and practices perceived as important by the attendees to conventions in Asia. This study and its results could be compared with the results gained through similar studies conducted in different market segments (Breiter & Milman, 2005), namely the United States and the United Kingdom. The results of this study suggested that the convention attendees in Asia are mostly concerned with the: availability of ventilation, availability of state-of-the art audio-visual equipment, comfort of seating, adequacy of restrooms, and helpfulness of staff.

A qualitative study conducted by Comas and Moscardo (2005) where the authors utilized the Crouch and Ritchie's (1998) conceptual model to create questions for interviews was aimed at assessing destination image and site selection preferences. The researchers wanted to identify why planners of conferences considered certain attributes important, as opposed to the studies that focused primarily on what planners considered important. The results of this study suggest

that extra components should be added to the model presented by Crouch and Ritchie (1998). The model is missing a very crucial part of the process which involves the preplanning stages of the procedure. This provides additional areas for research such as the decision to host the conference, the bid process and presentation with extensive CVB support, and the process involved in picking the organizing committee. The site selection factors component of the model should include factors such as the CVB support and promotion. Comas and Moscardo (2005) also suggest that the model should include antecedent conditions such as the budget constraints, time constraints and staff workload.

Baloglu and Love (2005) conducted a study in which the aim was to examine association meeting planner's site selection criteria and performance of five major convention sites. In their study, 21 attributes were used to assess meeting planners' selection criteria for convention sites. The study revealed strengths and weaknesses for Las Vegas, Orlando, Chicago, Dallas, and Atlanta as perceived by association event planners. When it came to the impact of previous experience on destination image, it was indicated that there was no connection between previous experience and image of the destination. The findings of the study were contrary to the findings in studies previously conducted (Oppermann, 1996; Vogt et al., 1994).

Lee, Su and Dubinsky (2005) examined the role of trust and satisfaction in the relationship between event planners and hotel salespeople. They analyzed event planners' perceptions in order to observe the intentions on future relationship between the hotel sales personnel and event planners. The findings of the study suggest that salespeople can benefit if they try to improve the degree of perceived trust and satisfaction, expertise, willingness and power. Event planners want to deal with professionals who understand event planners' needs

and are willing to learn and be aware of the plans, as well as those that are responding quickly to their requests. These findings were similar to the ones found in a previous study which investigated the relationship between salespeople and event planners (Lee & Hiemstra, 2001).

Three major research areas were identified by conducting the literature review on site selection. The first area of research deals with the destination attributes and the venue attributes, the second area of research investigates the conference/event attendee motivation, and the third area explores the customer relationship management in destination selection in particular hotel/destination/venue salesperson and event planner relationship. The review on site selection criteria helped identify seven destination selection factors most often used in previous studies. The factors were accessibility, availability of facility, quality of service, affordability, destination image, attractions/entertainment, and safety/security.

### **Gap in Research**

Despite the large amount of research done on event planners and site selection, there is no research which focuses on the comparison among members of the major associations of the event industry. The words convention, conference, meetings have been used almost interchangeably with no definitions supplied. In order to get a better understanding of differences in destination selection criteria by event type, professionals who plan those events should be stratified by association membership. The existing gap in research provides an opportunity for studies in which a comparison is conducted between the associations.

## **Summary**

This chapter provided information on the inconsistencies in defining an event and its impact on measuring the economic contribution of the event industry, as well as the steps some researchers have taken in order to minimize those inconsistencies. The role of professional associations in the industry was described in more detail, and the three associations included in this study were compared. An in-depth overview of previous studies was presented, providing a strong framework for this study in addition to valuable information on where the gap in existing research was found.

## CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

### Research Framework

The preceding chapters presented the proposed area of research for this study and relevant research in the areas of destination selection and event planning. The primary objective in the following research is:

- To determine if there is a significant difference in how members of three event industry associations rate destination selection variables.

The current research focused on three leading event planners associations and the destination selection variables that those association members deemed important in selecting destinations while planning for their largest event held in calendar year 2004. Therefore the following specific research hypotheses were generated:

Hypothesis 1. Members of IAEM rate destination selection variables differently than the members of MPI.

Hypothesis 2. Members of MPI rate destination selection variables differently than the members of PCMA.

Hypothesis 3. Members of PCMA rate destination selection variables differently than the members of IAEM.

## **Survey Instrument**

The survey used in this research was designed and developed by professors at the University of Central Florida's Rosen College of Hospitality Management. It was pre-tested for face validity with a regional chapter of one of the three event professional associations. The overall purpose of the survey was to investigate site selection factors event planners used for two events they held in the year 2004. The current study focused only on the largest event for the year.

The survey was conducted in the summer and fall of 2005. Respondents were asked to provide details on two events they held in the year 2004, one being the largest for this period. In order to develop an understanding of issues related to the event planners that belong to three professional associations, the questions created for the survey were based on an extensive literature review. The questions were in regard to operative information on the event and the event planner and destination attribute requirements, including those found in previous studies.

## **Survey**

The instrument contained items intended to measure the responses related to the two events planned by the respondents, destination attribute requirements (destination selection criteria), and demographic information on the event planners. The questionnaire consisted of 73 questions; including open-ended and closed-ended questions.

The questionnaire was divided into four different sections. The first section included questions relevant to the largest event held in calendar year 2004. Some of the things that the

respondents were asked were to select the type of event that they held as the largest of that year, the number of attendees, the number of guest rooms used on the peak night, square footage of exhibition space utilized, and the location where the event took place. They were also asked to rate destination selection variables and how important they were at the time the destination decision was made. The questions were asked on a 1-5 Likert scale, 1= Not at All Important to 5= Extremely Important. The respondents were also asked if they intended to return to the destination for the same or different type of event.

The second section of the questionnaire asked the same type of questions as those found in the first section except the respondents were asked to describe any other event they planned and held that year.

The third section included questions regarding cancellations due to an Act of God or Force Majeure. The respondents were asked to answer whether they had to cancel events between January 2000 and December 2004 due to incidents outside of their control. If respondents answered yes to that question they were asked a series of open-ended questions regarding the cancellation circumstances.

The fourth section of the questionnaire asked for some additional information regarding the respondents' meeting planning experience. Some of the questions had to do with the job duties of the respondents, their length of service and if they belong to other associations.

### **Variable Selection**

The dependent variables for this study were different destination selection criteria and all variables used for the data analysis were selected from the first section of the survey questionnaire, which specifically focused on the largest event held in the calendar year 2004. The questionnaire contains several questions which are partly relevant and some not relevant to the objective of the current study. Therefore, only certain questions were selected to meet the objective for the purpose of the current study. This current study was aimed at determining if there were differences between how the members of the three associations rated the destination selection criteria for their largest event. Fourteen out of seventy three questions were used in order to answer the research objective and questions. The questions used had to do with the ratings respondents gave to the different destination selection variables for the largest type of the largest event held in calendar year 2004.

### **Dependent (Continuous) Variables**

The dependent variables in this study are destination selection variables and they include: ease of accessibility by air, ease of accessibility by roads, choice of restaurants, variety of nightlife, number of first class hotel rooms, brand name hotels, amount of dedicated exhibit space, image as a desirable place to visit, reputation of hosting successful events, safety and security, support services for events, overall cost, and perceived value for money.



### **Independent (Categorical) Variables**

The independent variable in this research was memberships in the three groups. The first group is composed of the association members of IAEM, the second group is composed of the association members of PCMA, and the third group is composed of the association members of MPI. Some respondents held memberships in more than one association, in case respondents were contacted twice, they were asked to complete only one survey.

### **Sample**

The reason why the three associations were chosen for this study include: 1) the reputation of the associations; 2) the number of members, all three are represented by more than 5,000 members each; 3) the areas of interests of the association members; 4) the scope of the jobs duties of the members, they are in charge of planning annual conferences/conventions, tradeshows, consumer shows, sales meetings, board meetings, incentive meetings, exhibitions, and training meetings. The members of the three associations are believed to be representative of the event planners in the U.S. market.

A stratified random sample of event planners was derived from the membership of three leading event planners' associations. The associations included: International Association for Exhibit Management (IAEM), Meeting Professionals International (MPI), and Professional Convention Management Association (PCMA). An electronic survey format was selected in

order to reach a large sample of the U.S. members of these associations. Respondents were initially sent a personalized email that stated: 1) the purpose and importance of the study, 2) a request for their participation in the study, and 3) the survey link. Since event planners may belong to more than one of the associations, they were asked to complete only one survey if they held multiple memberships. The survey was sent three times in order to maximize the response rate.

### **Data Collection**

Data was collected during August, September, and October of 2005. A modified three contacts Schaefer and Dillman (1998) approach to e-mail surveys was implemented. In the first contact an e-mail was sent to the subjects in order to alert them about the project and what would follow, in the second contact an e-mail was sent with a link to the survey, and in the third contact a reminder e-mail with a link to the survey as well as a thank you note. The multiple contact survey method was conducted in order to maximize the potential of responses (Deutskens et al., 2004; Schaefer & Dillman, 1998)

A stratified random sample was drawn from approximately 10,000 planners with membership in the three associations within the U.S. The sample consisted of every 4<sup>th</sup> member (IAEM=680; MPI=2,714; PCMA=856) and this resulted in a proportional representation within the sampling frame. Two hundred and nine useable questionnaires were submitted via web resulting in a 5% response rate. According to previous research the low response rate may be attributed to the lack of personalization of the survey at the time it was sent, the fear associated

with getting a virus from the file, and some of the potential respondents may not want to deal with multiple steps involved in the completion of the survey (Dommeyer & Moriarty, 2000; Hanna et al., 2005).

### **Summary**

This chapter presented information on the research design which included the primary objective as well as the specific research hypotheses. Information on the survey instrument was provided as well as a description of what types of questions were included in the survey instrument itself. The variables, participants, and sampling procedures were presented, as well as a description of how the data was collected.

## **CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS**

For the purpose of this study a stratified random sample was drawn from approximately 10,000 planners with membership in the three associations within the U.S. The sample consisted of approximately every fourth member and therefore included 680 IAEM; 2,714 MPI; and 856 PCMA members. This resulted in a proportional representation within the sampling frame. Two hundred and nine useable questionnaires were submitted via web resulting in a 5% response rate.

### **Data Analysis**

Several steps were taken in order to explore the primary objective:

- To determine if there is a significant difference in how members of three associations rate destination selection variables.

In order to answer this question a quantitative method of analysis was applied. The 209 responses with the variables contained in the survey were assessed and analyzed using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 14.0. Data was analyzed by employing frequency analysis and a One-way, between groups Analysis of Variance (ANOVA). The ANOVA analysis was employed along with a post-hoc test to determine if and which selection variable means were significantly different from one another.

## Descriptive Statistics

The 209 respondents that participated in the study represented event planners that belong to three different professional associations. The member distribution between IAEM, MPI, and PCMA was 17.7%, 56.0%, and 26.3%, respectively (Table 1).

**Table 1: Profile of Respondents**

Association Name	Number of Respondents	Percent of Respondents
IAEM	37	17.7
MPI	117	56.0
PCMA	55	26.3

(N = 209)

When describing the largest event held in 2004, MPI respondents indicated that they plan events in all of the six categories with 73.2% indicating annual conference or convention, 8% planned sales meetings, 8% training meetings, 4.5% planned incentive meetings, 3.6% indicated exhibition, and 2.7% board meetings. PCMA and IAEM respondents indicated only two types of events and those are the annual conference or convention, and exhibitions. IAEM members indicated that almost 53% of IAEM members conducted annual conferences or conventions, and about 47% organized exhibitions. PCMA respondents' organized the most annual conferences out of the three groups (94.3 %) of respondents and the rest of the PCMA members (5.7%) planned exhibitions (Table 2).

**Table 2: Largest Event Held in 2004**

<b>Event Type</b>	<b>IAEM Respondents</b>	<b>MPI Respondents</b>	<b>PCMA Respondents</b>
Annual Conference or Convention	52.8%	73.2%	94.3%
Sales Meeting	-	8.0 %	-
Board Meeting	-	2.7%	-
Incentive Meeting	-	4.5%	-
Exhibition	47.2%	3.6%	5.7%
Training Meeting	-	8.0%	-

The participants were asked to rate the level of importance at the time of destination selection of thirteen destination selection variables. A Likert type 1-5 scale was used, where 1 represented “Not at All Important” and 5 represented “Extremely Important.” The findings will be illustrated in 13 tables as well as brief descriptions of the findings will be provided.

The ease of accessibility by air was indicated as important and extremely important aspect by more than 70% of respondents in each of the associations. Only 11.2 % of MPI and 3.8% of PCMA respondents indicated the ease of accessibility by air was not at all important at the time the destination selection was made (Table 3).

**Table 3: Accessibility by Air**

Ease of Accessibility By Air	IAEM		MPI		PCMA	
	Frequency	(%)	Frequency	(%)	Frequency	(%)
Level of importance at the time of destination selection						
Not at All Important	-	-	13	11.2	2	3.8
Somewhat Important	2	5.4	3	2.6	1	1.9
Neutral	6	16.2	14	12.1	4	7.5
Important	17	45.9	34	29.3	16	30.2
Extremely Important	12	32.4	52	44.8	30	56.6
<b>Mean/S.D.</b>	4.05	.848	3.94	1.301	4.34	.979

Accessibility by road was an important aspect of destination selection for about 60% of the respondents in all of the groups. Only about 3% of IAEM respondents thought that it was not at all important at the time of destination selection but close to 7% of MPI, and 6% of PCMA responded that it was not at all important (Table 4).

The choice of restaurant was an important factor to over 50% of the PCMA respondents and to over 30% to both the IAEM and MPI participants. Only about 2% of PCMA respondents thought that it was not at all important at the time of destination selection but close to 14% of MPI and 8% of IAEM responded that it was not at all important (Table 5).

**Table 4: Accessibility by Road**

Ease of Accessibility By Road	IAEM		MPI		PCMA	
	Frequency	(%)	Frequency	(%)	Frequency	(%)
Level of importance at the time of destination selection						
Not at All Important	1	2.7	8	6.9	3	5.7
Somewhat Important	4	10.8	16	13.8	7	13.2
Neutral	11	29.7	25	21.6	13	24.5
Important	14	37.8	31	26.7	13	24.5
Extremely Important	7	18.9	36	31.0	17	32.1
<b>Mean/S.D.</b>	3.59	1.013	3.61	1.249	3.64	1.226

**Table 5: Choice of Restaurant**

Choice of Restaurant	IAEM		MPI		PCMA	
	Frequency	(%)	Frequency	(%)	Frequency	(%)
Level of importance at the time of destination Selection						
Not at All Important	3	8.1	16	13.8	1	1.9
Somewhat Important	4	10.8	19	16.4	4	7.5
Neutral	18	48.6	38	32.8	21	39.6
Important	10	27.0	32	27.6	18	34.0
Extremely Important	2	5.4	11	9.5	9	17.0
<b>Mean/S.D.</b>	3.11	.966	3.03	1.176	3.57	.930



Variety of nightlife was important or extremely important to about 34% of PCMA, 26% of MPI, and close to 14% of IAEM respondents. Over 15% of MPI and about 8% of both PCMA and IAEM respondents said it was not at all important (Table 6).

**Table 6: Variety of Nightlife**

Variety of Nightlife	IAEM		MPI		PCMA	
	Frequency	(%)	Frequency	(%)	Frequency	(%)
Level of importance at the time of destination selection						
Not at All Important	3	8.3	18	15.5	4	7.5
Somewhat Important	7	19.4	29	25.0	8	15.1
Neutral	21	58.3	39	33.6	23	43.4
Important	4	11.1	24	20.7	15	28.3
Extremely Important	1	2.8	6	5.2	3	5.7
<b>Mean/S.D.</b>	2.81	.856	2.75	1.110	3.09	.986

The number of first class hotel rooms in the destination was indicated as important and extremely important by over 80% of PCMA, 60% of IAEM, and 55% of MPI respondents. Almost 15% of MPI respondents indicated that it was not at all important to them. The PCMA and MPI groups seem to have different views on the importance of the number of first class hotel rooms at the time the destination selection decision is made (Table 7).

**Table 7: First Class Hotel Rooms**

<b>Number of First Class Hotel Rooms</b>	<b>IAEM</b>		<b>MPI</b>		<b>PCMA</b>	
	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>(%)</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>(%)</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>(%)</b>
Level of importance at the time of destination selection						
Not at All Important	-	-	17	14.7	-	-
Somewhat Important	4	10.8	12	10.3	2	3.8
Neutral	11	29.7	23	19.8	8	15.4
Important	10	27.0	36	31.0	24	46.2
Extremely Important	12	32.4	28	24.1	18	34.6
<b>Mean/S.D.</b>	3.81	1.023	3.40	1.351	4.12	.808

Brand name hotels at the destination were rated as important by over 75% of PCMA, 65% of MPI, and about 50% of IAEM respondents. About 11% of the MPI respondents viewed it as not at all important, whereas PCMA and IAEM rated it at approximately 4%, and 3%, respectively (Table 8).

The amount of dedicated exhibit space was one of the variables that seemed to show the most difference in the level of importance for the three groups. IAEM rated it as important and extremely important with over 86% of respondents. Almost 79 % of the PCMA, and 53% of MPI respondents rated it as important and extremely important. Only 2.7% of IAEM and 11.5 % of PCMA respondents stated that it was not at all important, however over 32% of MPI group's

members indicated that it was not at all important at the time the destination selection was made (Table 9).

**Table 8: Brand Name Hotels**

<b>Brand Name Hotels</b>	<b>IAEM</b>		<b>MPI</b>		<b>PCMA</b>	
	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>(%)</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>(%)</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>(%)</b>
Level of importance at the time of destination selection						
Not at All Important	1	2.7	13	11.2	2	3.8
Somewhat Important	6	16.2	11	9.5	3	5.7
Neutral	12	32.4	18	15.5	8	15.1
Important	11	29.7	57	49.1	26	49.1
Extremely Important	7	18.9	17	14.7	14	26.4
<b>Mean/S.D.</b>	3.46	1.070	3.47	1.190	3.89	.993

**Table 9: Exhibit Space**

<b>Amount of Dedicated Exhibit Space</b>	<b>IAEM</b>		<b>MPI</b>		<b>PCMA</b>	
	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>(%)</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>(%)</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>(%)</b>
Level of importance at the time of destination selection						
Not at All Important	1	2.7	37	32.2	6	11.5
Somewhat Important	2	5.4	5	4.3	2	3.8
Neutral	2	5.4	12	10.4	3	5.8
Important	7	18.9	15	13.0	10	19.2
Extremely Important	25	67.6	46	40.0	31	59.6
<b>Mean/S.D.</b>	4.43	1.015	3.24	1.740	4.12	1.367

The respondents rated the variable called “image as desirable place to visit” as important or extremely important with over 85% of the PCMA, 83% of IAEM, and 77% of MPI responses. Only 7% of MPI and about 2% of PCMA respondents stated that it was not at all important as a variable when selecting a destination (Table 10).

**Table 10: Desirable Place to Visit**

<b>Image as Desirable Place to Visit</b>	<b>IAEM</b>		<b>MPI</b>		<b>PCMA</b>	
	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>(%)</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>(%)</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>(%)</b>
Level of importance at the time of destination selection						
Not at All Important	-	-	8	7.0	1	1.9
Somewhat Important	1	2.7	3	2.6	3	5.7
Neutral	5	13.5	15	13.0	4	7.5
Important	16	43.2	37	32.2	19	35.8
Extremely Important	15	40.5	52	45.2	26	49.1
<b>Mean/S.D.</b>	4.22	.787	4.06	1.149	4.25	.959

PCMA and MPI had about 80% of their members stating that “reputation for hosting successful events” was important or extremely important, whereas over 75% of IAEM respondents said it was important or extremely important. The main difference found was that about 8% of MPI respondents stated it was not at all important at the time of destination selection, whereas none of the other two groups’ members indicated that this variable was not important (Table 11).

**Table 11: Reputation**

<b>Reputation for Hosting Successful Events</b> Level of importance at the time of destination selection	<b>IAEM</b>		<b>MPI</b>		<b>PCMA</b>	
	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>(%)</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>(%)</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>(%)</b>
Not at All Important	-	-	9	7.8	-	-
Somewhat Important	-	-	2	1.7	-	-
Neutral	9	24.3	13	11.2	11	20.8
Important	12	32.4	37	31.9	17	32.1
Extremely Important	16	43.2	55	47.4	25	47.2
<b>Mean/S.D.</b>	4.19	.811	4.09	1.165	4.26	.788

The groups of respondents varied in how they rated the safety and security variable. This variable seemed to be most important to PCMA with a little over 90% of its members responding that it was important or extremely important. 81% of IAEM and 72% of MPI respondents rated this variable as important. To 7% of MPI respondents this variable was not at all important at the time the destination selection was taking place (Table 12).

Similarly the respondent groups differed in how they rated the variable of support services for events. It was rated as most important to PCMA, than IAEM and MPI, with the following ratings 90%, 84% and 73% respectively. A small percentage of MPI members rated it as not at all important (Table 13).

**Table 12: Safety and Security**

<b>Safety and Security</b>	<b>IAEM</b>		<b>MPI</b>		<b>PCMA</b>	
	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>(%)</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>(%)</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>(%)</b>
Level of importance at the time of destination selection						
Not at All Important	-	-	8	7.0	-	-
Somewhat Important	1	2.7	3	2.6	1	1.9
Neutral	6	16.2	21	18.3	4	7.5
Important	17	45.9	40	34.8	24	45.3
Extremely Important	13	35.1	43	37.4	24	45.3
<b>Mean/S.D.</b>	4.14	.787	3.93	1.137	4.34	.706

**Table 13: Support Services**

<b>Support Services for Events</b>	<b>IAEM</b>		<b>MPI</b>		<b>PCMA</b>	
	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>(%)</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>(%)</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>(%)</b>
Level of importance at the time of destination selection						
Not at All Important	-	-	4	3.4	-	-
Somewhat Important	-	-	8	6.9	1	1.9
Neutral	6	16.2	19	16.4	4	7.5
Important	20	54.1	37	31.9	21	39.6
Extremely Important	11	29.7	48	41.4	27	50.9
<b>Mean/S.D.</b>	4.14	.673	4.01	1.083	4.40	.716

About 85% of PCMA, 84% of IAEM, and 80% of MPI members rated “overall cost” as an important or extremely important aspect at the time the destination selection decision was made. Over 3% of MPI respondents indicated this variable as not at all important (Table 14).

**Table 14: Overall Cost**

Overall Cost	IAEM		MPI		PCMA	
	Frequency	(%)	Frequency	(%)	Frequency	(%)
Level of importance at the time of destination selection						
Not at All Important	-	-	4	3.4	-	-
Somewhat Important	1	2.7	3	2.6	2	3.8
Neutral	5	13.5	16	13.8	6	11.3
Important	13	35.1	36	31.0	17	32.1
Extremely Important	18	48.6	57	49.1	28	52.8
<b>Mean/S.D.</b>	4.30	.812	4.20	1.006	4.34	.831

The “perceived value for money” variable was rated as important and extremely important with IAEM at 89%, PCMA at 88% and MPI at 84% of respondents. Only the MPI respondents (approximately 3%) said that this variable was not at all important at the time the destination selection was made (Table 15).



**Table 15: Perceived Value for Money**

Perceived Value for Money	IAEM		MPI		PCMA	
	Frequency	(%)	Frequency	(%)	Frequency	(%)
Level of importance at the time of destination selection						
Not at All Important	-	-	3	2.6	-	-
Somewhat Important	1	2.7	4	3.5	1	2.0
Neutral	3	8.1	11	9.6	5	9.8
Important	14	37.8	43	37.4	24	47.1
Extremely Important	19	51.4	54	47.0	21	41.2
<b>Mean/S.D.</b>	4.38	.758	4.23	9.46	4.27	.723

### Analysis of Variance (ANOVA)

A one-way between-groups ANOVA was conducted in order to find out whether there were significant differences in the mean scores on the dependent variable, across the three groups. Post-hoc tests were used to find out where these differences lie. The Levene's test was significant, meaning that unequal variances were observed, therefore unequal-variance (Welch) version of ANOVA was also conducted. Out of the thirteen dependent variables, significant differences were observed on five variables with various levels of significance. The five variables were: choice of restaurant, number of first class hotel rooms, amount of dedicated

exhibit space, safety and security, and support services for the events. The in-depth presentation of the analysis of variance on the variables where significant differences were observed will be provided below. The results on the entire list of 13 variables are illustrated in Table 16.

A one-way, between-groups analysis of variance was conducted to explore the impact of choice of restaurant on the level of importance at the time of destination selection, as measured by a five point Likert type scale. Subjects were divided into three groups according to their association membership (Group 1: IAEM; Group 2: MPI; Group 3: PCMA). There was a statistically significant difference at the  $p < .05$  level in scores for the three association groups [ $F(2, 203) = 4.635, p = .011$ ]. Despite reaching statistical significance, the actual difference in mean scores between the groups was small. The effect size, calculated using eta squared, was .04. Post-hoc comparisons using the Tukey HSD test indicated that the mean score for Group 3 ( $M=3.57, SD=.93$ ) was significantly different from Group 2 ( $M=3.03, SD=1.17$ ). Group 1 ( $M=3.11, SD=.96$ ) did not differ significantly from either Group 2 or 3.

The impact of the number of first class hotel rooms on the level of importance at the time of destination selection was determined to show significant difference at the  $p < .05$  level in scores for the three association groups [ $F(2, 202) = 7.076, p = .001$ ]. The actual difference in mean scores between the groups was moderate. The effect size, calculated using eta squared, was .06. Post-hoc comparison using the Tukey HSD test indicated that the mean score for Group 3 ( $M=4.12, SD=.80$ ) was significantly different from Group 2 ( $M=3.40, SD=1.35$ ). Group 1 ( $M=3.81, SD=1.02$ ) did not differ significantly from either Group 2 or 3.

The impact of the amount of dedicated exhibit space on the level of importance at the time of destination selection was determined to show significant difference at the  $p < .05$  level in

scores for the three association groups [ $F(2,201) = 11.094, p = .000$ ]. The actual difference between the groups was moderate. The effect size, calculated using eta squared, was .09. Post-hoc comparison using the Tukey HSD test indicated that the mean score for Group 2 ( $M=3.24, SD=1.74$ ) was significantly different from both Group 3 ( $M=4.12, SD=1.36$ ), and Group 1 ( $M=4.43, SD=1.01$ ). Group 3 and Group 1 did not significantly differ from one another.

The impact of the safety and security on the level of importance at the time of destination selection was determined to show significant difference at the  $p < .05$  level in scores for the three association groups [ $F(2,202) = 3.225, p = .042$ ]. Despite reaching statistical significance, the actual difference in mean scores between the groups was quite small. The effect size, calculated using eta squared, was .03. Post-hoc comparisons using the Tukey HSD test indicated that the mean score for Group 3 ( $M=4.34, SD=.70$ ), was significantly different from Group 2 ( $M=3.93, SD=1.13$ ). Group 1 ( $M=4.14, SD=.78$ ), did not differ significantly from either Group 2 or 3.

The impact of support services for events on the level of importance at the time of destination selection was determined to show significant difference at the  $p < .05$  level in scores for the three association groups [ $F(2,203) = 3.117, p = .046$ ]. Despite reaching statistical significance, the actual difference in mean scores between the groups was quite small. The effect size, calculated using eta squared, was .02. Post-hoc comparisons using the Tukey HSD test indicated that the mean score for Group 3 ( $M=4.40, SD=.71$ ), was significantly different from Group 2 ( $M=4.01, SD=1.08$ ). Group 1 ( $M=4.14, SD=.67$ ), did not differ significantly from either Group 2 or 3.

**Table 16: Results of ANOVA Analysis of the Event Data**

Dependent Variable		df	Sum of Squares	Mean Square	F	Sig.
+Accessibility by air	Between Groups	2	5.823	2.912	2.186	.115
	Within Groups	203	270.356	1.332		
	Total	205	276.180			
Accessibility by road	Between Groups	2	.053	.027	.018	.982
	Within Groups	203	294.651	1.451		
	Total	205	294.704			
Choice of restaurant	Between Groups	2	10.846	5.423	4.635	.011*
	Within Groups	203	237.509	1.170		
	Total	205	248.354			
+Variety of nightlife	Between Groups	2	4.395	2.198	2.037	.133
	Within Groups	202	217.917	1.079		
	Total	204	222.312			
+1 <sup>st</sup> class hotel rooms	Between Groups	2	19.668	9.834	7.076	.001**
	Within Groups	202	280.742	1.390		
	Total	204	300.410			
+Brand name hotels	Between Groups	2	7.036	3.518	2.796	.063
	Within Groups	203	255.372	1.258		
	Total	205	262.408			
+Exhibit space	Between Groups	2	52.718	26.359	11.094	.000**
	Within Groups	201	477.571	2.376		
	Total	203	530.289			
Desirable image	Between Groups	2	1.520	.760	.696	.500
	Within Groups	202	220.656	1.092		
	Total	204	222.176			
Reputation	Between Groups	2	1.095	.547	.524	.593
	Within Groups	203	211.934	1.044		
	Total	205	213.029			
+Safety and security	Between Groups	2	6.248	3.124	3.225	.042*
	Within Groups	202	195.655	.969		
	Total	204	201.902			
+Support services	Between Groups	2	5.466	2.733	3.117	.046*
	Within Groups	203	177.995	.877		
	Total	205	183.461			
Overall cost	Between Groups	2	.818	.409	.471	.625
	Within Groups	203	176.056	.867		
	Total	205	176.874			
Value for money	Between Groups	2	.654	.327	.439	.645
	Within Groups	200	148.981	.745		
	Total	202	149.635			

\* Significant at the .05 level

\*\* Significant at the .01 level

+ Levene's test is significant (variances are significantly different)

## **Hypotheses**

### **Hypothesis 1:**

**Members of IAEM rate destination selection variables differently than the members of MPI.**

The results of the one-way, between groups ANOVA indicated that a significant difference was found in how members of IAEM and MPI rate one of the thirteen destination selection variables. The post-hoc comparison using the Tukey HSD test indicated that there were significant differences found in how IAEM and MPI rated the importance of the amount of dedicated exhibit space at the time when the destination selection decision was made.

### **Hypothesis 2:**

**Members of MPI rate destination selection variables differently than the members of PCMA.**

The results of the one-way, between groups ANOVA indicated that a significant difference was found in how members of MPI and PCMA rate 5 of the thirteen destination selection variables. The post-hoc comparisons using the Tukey HSD test indicated that there were significant differences found in how MPI and PCMA rated the importance of: choice of restaurant, number of first class hotel rooms, amount of dedicated exhibit space, safety and security, and support services for events variable at the time when the destination selection decision was made.

### **Hypothesis 3:**

**Members of PCMA rate destination selection variables differently than the members of IAEM.**

The results of the one-way, between groups ANOVA indicated that no significant difference was found in how members of IAEM and PCMA rate the thirteen destination selection variables.

### **Summary**

Descriptive statistics and a one-way, between groups ANOVA with post-hoc test were used to examine whether differences existed between how three groups of event planners' rate the importance of thirteen destination selection variables at the time destination selection decision is made.

The results of the study indicated that a significant difference exists in how members of IAEM and MPI rate the importance of the amount of dedicated exhibit space variable. A significant difference was also found in how members of MPI and PCMA rate five destination selection variables: choice of restaurant, number of first class hotel rooms, amount of dedicated exhibit space, safety and security, and support services for events. No significant difference was found in how members of PCMA and IAEM rate destination selection variables.

## **CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS**

### **Summary of the Study**

#### **Statement of the Problem**

This research investigated differences in how members of professional event planners associations' rate destination selection variables. Included in this study were the three associations of the IAEM, MPI, and PCMA. The members of those associations gave ratings to thirteen destination selection variables which included: ease of accessibility by air, ease of accessibility by road, choice of restaurants, variety of nightlife, number of first class hotel rooms, brand name hotels, amount of dedicated exhibit space, image as a desirable place to visit, reputation for hosting successful events, safety and security, support services for events, overall cost, and perceived value for money.

There is little research known of where researchers have compared event planners that belong to different professional associations, and how those planners rate destination selection variables. With this research, the differences that exist between those members were examined in order to provide more understanding of the planners, and how the type of event they plan for may influence the mix of destination variables that the planners look for in choosing a destination for their event. By providing the information on the similarities as well as differences that exist in how the groups rate destination selection variables, others with a vested interest in the event industry may benefit. This information may be valuable to destinations so that they can successfully market themselves, similarly other suppliers to the industry can

position their services in the market and tailor their products in a way that would benefit their client.

### **Statement of the Procedures**

The data for this study were generated from a random selection of approximately 4,000 event planners' in the U.S. that belonged to any of the three event planners associations. A survey instrument addressing destination selection questions about the two events planned in the calendar year 2004 by each respondent was sent via e-mail. The database for this study was made available by the professors from the Rosen College of Hospitality Management for research purpose. Hypotheses were derived from the previous studies on the topic of destination selection and were tested using the one-way, between groups ANOVA with a post-hoc test.

### **The Specific Research Hypotheses**

The three specific research hypotheses guiding the current study were:

1. Members of IAEM rate destination selection variables differently than the members of MPI.
2. Members of MPI rate destination selection variables differently than the members of PCMA.
3. Members of PCMA rate destination selection variables differently than the members of IAEM.

### **Conclusions**

The main objective of this research was to determine if there is a significant difference in how members of three associations for event professionals rate destination selection variables. The conclusion to this general question is that significant differences in how the three association members' rate destination selection variables exist.



The specific research hypotheses associated with the main objective of this study were tested. It was determined that members of IAEM and MPI differ significantly when it comes to the importance of the amount of dedicated exhibit space at the time the destination selection is made for their next event. This variable was found to be of no importance at all to over 30% of the MPI respondents whereas only about 3% of the IAEM respondents responded this way (Table 9). The respondents were asked to indicate what type of event was the largest one they have held and the answers that were provided by the members of IAEM and MPI may help in understanding why a significant difference was found in how the two associations rate the “amount of dedicated exhibit space” variable. About 47% of the IAEM respondents indicated that exhibition was the largest event they have planned, whereas only close to 4% of MPI responded that it was an exhibition (Table 2). This means that MPI respondents planned fewer exhibitions and therefore they may not feel that this variable is of as much importance as it would be to the IAEM respondents.

The study revealed that significant differences were found in how MPI and PCMA respondents rated five out of thirteen destination selection variables. Choice of restaurant, number of first class hotel rooms, amount of dedicated exhibit space, safety and security, and support services for events were found to be of significant difference to the members of the two associations at the time when the destination selection is made. About 94% of PCMA respondents indicated that the largest event they have planned was an annual conference or convention, and about 6% planned exhibitions, whereas the MPI respondents indicated that they have held all types of events with about 73% of annual conference or convention, 8% sales meetings, 8% training meetings, 4.5% incentive meetings, the rest was exhibitions and board

meetings (Table 2). The division between types of events that were planned by the members of the two different association groups may be one of the explanations for the different ratings of certain variables.

There were no significant differences found in how the members of PCMA and IAEM rate destination selection variables. This may be an indication of similarities between the types of events that the planners' in the two groups have primarily dealt with. Annual conference or conventions were the largest event type planned in the year 2004 for both groups of planners.

Most of the differences found, existed between MPI and PCMA planners and it could be explained by the difference in the type of events that the members of the two associations deal with. PCMA respondents rated the choice of restaurant as more important than did the MPI group. Close to 95 % of PCMA respondents stated that they have held an annual conference or convention, usually conferences and conventions are attended by large groups, the convention activities are concentrated during the day, and the attendees tend to have free time during the evenings. Such groups may require that there are many restaurant establishments near the place where the convention/conference takes place.

The number of first class hotel rooms was also more important to PCMA than MPI; planners in charge of conventions tend to have multiple contracts and need to use multiple hotels in order to accommodate larger numbers of attendees. This in part may also explain why safety and security was also rated as more important by PCMA. Similar findings were reported by Oppermann (1996) and Upchurch et al (1999) in their studies. They found with conference planners that safety and security and hotel availability were among the most important factors. Security was also ranked as most important in a study by Hinkin and Tracey (2003). Hotel room

availability was also found to be of importance in the study conducted by Crouch and Louviere (2004). Since there are large groups residing in multiple hotels it may be more difficult to move people from one venue to the next, the transportation of people from one activity to another brings with it hard to control situations, therefore it is deemed as more important to the PCMA respondents. Annual conferences and conventions tend to be more complex, there are many additional services that need to be provided such as audio visual, technology, entertainment, registration, and guest services. This may explain why PCMA respondents rated the variable of support services for events as more important than did the MPI respondents.

### **Implications**

The results of this study have determined that significant differences exist in how association members of three professional event associations rate destination selection variables. The variables where differences were found have been listed as well as the specific areas in which the associations have shown to differ from one another.

The benefits of knowing what the differences are can be numerous. This information can be an important tool for sales and marketing professionals in hotels, convention centers, conference centers, destination marketing organizations as well as many other suppliers who deal with the event planners on a daily basis. By understanding the specific needs of the event planners and distinguishing between the types of events that they plan for, suppliers can improve the services they provide and offer the specific mix of services desired by the event planners. The needs of the customer can be more easily anticipated, thus providing both the customer and supplier the chance of forming an improved, lasting relationship. As determined by previous

research, strong relationships between the planners and sales personnel at hotels is an important part of business for both (Lee & Hiemstra, 2001; Lee, Su & Dubinsky, 2005).

By being able to understand the variables which are important to the members of professional event associations, marketing professionals can target the intended audience. For example if a destination marketing association wanted to place an advertisement in the *Convene*, which is the trade publication of the Professional Convention Management Association, it should put emphasis on advertising the variables that may be of importance to the PCMA members, who may be predominantly in the business of planning annual conferences or conventions. This research has indicated that PCMA members, among other variables, deem the choice of restaurant and availability of first class hotel rooms as more important than the members of MPI. Therefore the advertisement of a given destination in a magazine which is targeted at the PCMA members could emphasize those two variables if they were actually available in that destination. Similarly advertisement in *The Meeting Professional*, which happens to be targeted to the MPI audience, should attract advertisement from suppliers that are able to provide the specific services deemed as important by MPI members. MPI members may be in the business of planning for more distinct types of events than the PCMA or the IAEM members, therefore the advertisement may include the specific areas of interest to planners of diversified types of events such as sales meetings, training meetings, and incentive meetings.

Event planners, regardless of even type, want to attract attendees' because without those attendees, event planners will not be able to do their job. In order to attract attendees to the event a good choice of a destination is crucial to the success of the planner. In a study conducted by Breiter and Milman (2005), attendees of tradeshow and exhibitions at a large convention center

indicated that “the destination in which the event is held is important in their decision to attend (pg. 1370).”

### **Suggested Further Research**

According to previous research, little emphasis was made in order to empirically test and better understand the relationship between the site-selection factors and the structure of influence for associations having different organizational characteristics (Lee & Back, 2005; Crouch & Ritchie, 1998). This research tried to identify important factors that were unique to the members of three different associations for professional event planners.

This understanding of site selection differences among planners who belong to different associations and who are in the business of providing services to different types of audiences should point into further understanding of why such differences exist. Therefore further research should be conducted to investigate the areas where the association planners show most dissimilarity in how they rate destination selection criteria.

Further research should also be conducted to see if the decision making process of the event planners and the variables that they deem as important in their site selection are also important to their customers, the attendees. Such research may further explain why the differences exist.

This study concentrated on the event planners in the U.S. and those planners belong to associations that include international members of the event planning industry. Further studies could include the international members.

Since the competition among destinations to host events increases with the expansions and additions of new facilities, it is important to conduct further research which could help those

venues in maximizing their potential to host events that best suit their service providing abilities. Such research would aid the facilities in providing the event planners with the best service mix that the planners may be looking for, which further may be what the attendees are hoping to find, and this way all of the parties with a vested interest can be satisfied for a win-win-win situation.

### **Limitations**

The main limitation of this study had to do with the small representation of certain groups. The IAEM group was represented by 37 members; PCMA had 55 participants whereas MPI had 117, a considerably larger number of participants. Some of the reasons that may have influenced this include the time of the year when the data were collected, summer time when many planners were out of the office on vacation. The other reason may have been the fact that a major hurricane hit New Orleans, which could have taken the attention of the potential participants away from completing the survey.

### **Summary**

Chapter 5 began with a summary of the purpose and restatement of the problem. It was found that there were significant differences found in how event planners' who belong to three different professional associations rate destination selection criteria. However there were more differences found among some groups in how they rate the destination factors than among other groups of planners.

The summary of the most important findings is that out of thirteen destination variables tested there were significant differences found in five of them. Most differences exist in the way

PCMA and MPI respondents rate the destination selection variables. The IAEM members rate one factor significantly different than do MPI respondents. There were no significant differences whatsoever in how IAEM and PCMA respondents rated the thirteen destination selection variables and their importance at the time the destination selection took place.

This information is important to both practitioners and the academics because it helps to identify sets of destination variables that event planners view as important in selecting destinations for their events. This research helps in understanding where the differences and similarities between groups exist in destination selection variables, and it sheds more light into why the differences and similarities may exist between the planners who belong to the three associations. The results of this study can help sales and marketing professionals in hotels, convention centers, conference centers, and other suppliers to better serve their customers since this research provides information which allows for more understanding of the planners and the different criteria used by them in the destination selection process. The results also provide more ground for future research which should investigate further and in detail the areas where the differences between groups exist.

## **APPENDIX: DESTINATION SELECTION SURVEY**



I. Event 1: The largest event held in calendar year 2004 was:

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Annual conference or convention | <input type="checkbox"/> Incentive meeting |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Sales meeting                   | <input type="checkbox"/> Exhibition        |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Board meeting                   | <input type="checkbox"/> Training meeting  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Other (please indicate type)    |  |

How many people attended this event?

---

How many guest rooms were used on peak night?

---

If you organized an exhibition, what was the net square footage utilized?

---

At what city/state destination was the event held?

---

What was the host hotel?

---

A. *At the time when the destination decision was made*, how important were the following in selecting the *destination* for this type of event? Please circle the corresponding number where:

1 = Not at all Important

5 = Extremely Important

Ease of accessibility by air	1	2	3	4	5
Ease of accessibility by roads	1	2	3	4	5
Choice of restaurants	1	2	3	4	5
Variety of nightlife	1	2	3	4	5
Number of first class hotel rooms	1	2	3	4	5
Brand name hotels	1	2	3	4	5
Amount of dedicated exhibit space	1	2	3	4	5
Image as a desirable place to visit	1	2	3	4	5
Reputation for hosting successful events	1	2	3	4	5
Safety and security	1	2	3	4	5
Support services for events	1	2	3	4	5
Overall cost	1	2	3	4	5
Perceived value for money	1	2	3	4	5

B.1 Would you return to this destination for the same type of event? Yes No

B.2 If you answered 'No' in 'B.1', would you return to this destination for a different type of event? Yes No

B.3 If you answered 'Yes' in 'B.2' please circle the type of event (s).

Conference   Sales Mtg   Board Mtg   Incentive Mtg   Training Mtg   Exhibition  
 Other (Please indicate type):

II. Event 2: Another event held outside of the office in calendar year 2004 was:

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Annual conference or convention | <input type="checkbox"/> Incentive meeting |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Sales meeting                   | <input type="checkbox"/> Exhibition        |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Board meeting                   | <input type="checkbox"/> Training meeting  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Other (please indicate type)    |  |

How many people attended this event?

---

How many guest rooms were used on peak night?

---

If you organized an exhibition, what was the net square footage utilized?

---

At what city/state destination was the event held?

---

What was the host hotel?

---

A. *At the time when the destination decision was made*, how important were the following in selecting the *destination* for this type of event? Please circle the corresponding number where:

	1 = Not at all Important	5 = Extremely Important
Ease of accessibility by air	1	2 3 4 5
Ease of accessibility by roads	1	2 3 4 5
Choice of restaurants	1	2 3 4 5
Variety of nightlife	1	2 3 4 5
Number of first class hotel rooms	1	2 3 4 5
Brand name hotels	1	2 3 4 5
Amount of dedicated exhibit space	1	2 3 4 5
Image as a desirable place to visit	1	2 3 4 5
Reputation for hosting successful events	1	2 3 4 5
Safety and security	1	2 3 4 5
Support services for events	1	2 3 4 5
Overall cost	1	2 3 4 5
Perceived value for money	1	2 3 4 5

B.1 Would you return to this destination for the same type of event?      Yes    No

B.2 If you answered 'No' in 'B.1', would you return to this destination for a different type of event? Yes No

B.3 If you answered 'Yes' in 'B.2' please circle the type of event (s).  
Conference Sales Mtg Board Mtg Incentive Mtg Training Mtg Exhibition  
Other (Please indicate type):

### III. Cancellations due to an Act of God or Force Majeure

A. Between January 1<sup>st</sup>, 2000 and December 31<sup>st</sup>, 2004, did your organization invoke a force majeure (Act of God) clause to terminate an event contract without damages for an incident outside of your control? Yes No

B. If you answered 'Yes', what was the nature of the incident (s) or event?

C. Has an increased concern for incidents typically covered by force majeure clauses caused your organization to reconsider your destination selection criteria for future events? Yes No

D. If you answered 'Yes' in 'C', please explain the changes your organization has made or is considering making when selecting a destination.

**IV. May we have some additional information regarding your responsibilities and meeting planning experience?**

What is your job title?

---

What percentage of your time is allocated to meeting and event planning? %

---

How many years of experience do you have in meeting and event planning? Years

---

Please check those associations that you belong to at the present time

- MPI
- PCMA
- IAEM
- (Other please list)

---

Please tell us which event industry certification (s) you hold

---

How many off-site events have you planned for your organization within the past 12 months? # of Events

---

How many off-site events have been planned by your organization within the past 12 months? # of Events

---

*Thank you for your assistance!*

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