

2020 Tourism Vancouver Meetings and Conventions Year End Review

It goes without saying 2020 was a year unlike any other. Adjectives and superlatives used to describe what went on continue to increase.

Vancouver's meeting and convention sales and marketing community went through a major contraction as Tourism Vancouver along with our hotel partners, destination management companies, professional congress organizers and numerous other organizations all made significant reductions to their teams as a direct result of COVID. It is widely understood that it will take years to rebuild Vancouver's overall M&C sales and marketing capacity and productivity. Tourism Vancouver's leadership role and business focus has never been more important.

2020 Recap

As of mid-March, all group business began to cancel. Typically, Tourism Vancouver's Meeting and Convention sales team experiences two or three cancellations each year. We are very disciplined in what is considered definite, thus historically very few canceled bookings. For 2020, the total was 199. This represents \$220 million in direct business sales and \$350 million including indirect and induced spending. This only represents business captured directly through the Tourism Vancouver M&C CRM. It does not include all group business that books direct with our hotel partners, the VCC and other facilities and venues.

1. **Re-booking of core citywide convention groups.** Remains one of our team's highest priorities. Of the 26 citywide convention groups canceled in 2020, we have re-booked, or are in the process of re-booking 19: a 73% re-book rate. The Vancouver Convention Centre sales team has been a tremendous partner in achieving this result as have so many of our hotel members. It took a team effort to win these citywides, it has taken a team effort to re-book them. Tourism Vancouver is focused on re-booking non-citywide business considered high value, in partnership with the host hotels.
2. **BC Meetings & Events Industry Working Group.** The BCMEIWG is a group of extremely dedicated industry volunteers led by Joanne Burns Millar, owner and operator of Pacific Destination Services, with ongoing support and guidance from Walt Judas, CEO of the Tourism Industry Association of BC. Tourism Vancouver helped initiate this group and provides ongoing support. The BCMEIWG developed the *BC Meetings and Events COVID-19 Safe Restart Guidelines*. These guidelines were first shared with WorkSafe BC and the BC Centre for Disease Control, and then with the provincial government. After receiving very positive feedback, the guidelines were distributed to the meetings and events industry across the province for adoption and commitment to health and safety protocols in the planning and execution of any meetings or events. To date over 100 companies and organizations across the province have formally endorsed.
3. **Vancouver Virtually.** Virtual industry conferences started in May. Tourism Vancouver has actively and successfully participated in numerous online events including virtual tradeshow. The goal here not only sales but also to build awareness and attendance for future events coming to Vancouver. Many proved quite productive and created positive client interactions.
4. **Site Inspections.** As the year progressed it became clear the most important virtual opportunity was site inspections. The idea would be to balance the use of easily accessible high quality digital content and technology with virtual live person to person platforms to create a seamless experience for clients. Several practice sites were done before hosting real, live client site visits. Thus far quite successful. We are also now looking at a sales enablement platform that could support a more robust and consistent destination virtual experience improving our competitiveness. This key initiative remains in progress through Q1 2021.
5. **TAP Report and FuturePace.** The TAP Report will no longer be operating as of January 2021. As 2020 came to an end we began a transition from TAP, one of our most important data sets, to a new and exciting platform. Tourism Vancouver is moving to a relatively new, highly evolved and respected meeting and convention booking pace product - *FuturePace* will be Vancouver's new M&C pace tool. Fortunately, it has been fully adopted by close to 40 tier one and tier two city DMOs across the US. Toronto is also committed. Once up and running it will be available to all Tourism Vancouver members via the member extranet. Updates forthcoming.

Market Reviews

Canadian Market

- Our team continued to position Vancouver as a viable M&C destination, especially in the Toronto and Ottawa markets, for association, corporate and incentive business. We want Vancouver to be seen as a leader in supporting industry virtual education and positive virtual interaction and engagement.

- Newly created 2020 virtual sponsorship activities included: Professional Convention Management Association (PCMA) Canada East Chapter, Society for Incentive Travel Excellence (SITE) Canada, Meeting Professionals International (MPI) Toronto and Ottawa Chapters and with the Canadian Society of Associations Executives (CSAE). Showing our support in 2020 will put us in a strong position to gain more than our market share of Canadian meetings in 2021 and beyond.
- Tourism Vancouver was invited to join the Canada Life advisory board. Tourism Vancouver was able to contribute to their plan to help guide them in how they will safely return to meetings, corporate travel and the related role of DMO's to the safe return of their live events.
- Continued our support of Canadian third-party partners: primaries are Meeting Encore, Strategic Site Selection and Hotel Management International (HMI).
- Vancouver has earned a very positive reputation for hosting successful Canadian association and corporate meetings. We plan to capitalize on this as the business events sector returns, as many Canadian companies may choose to stay in Canada for the next couple of years.

International Markets

- Vancouver was recognized, in 2020, as the #2 city in North America for international meetings, resulting from the 2019 International Congress and Convention Association (ICCA) rankings.
- The newly designed Vancouver Bid Book and related new M&C brand positioning has given us valuable new tools going forward to support strategic sales efforts. Re-booking continues to be a priority for most international groups. Concurrently, several new bids are being developed and moved forward in the pipeline bringing new citywide conferences in the future.
- In January 2020, more than 600 incentive travel professionals from around the world convened in Vancouver for the Society for Incentive Travel Excellence (SITE) Global Conference at the JW Marriott - record attendance. A momentous occasion thanks to tremendous support from our SITE members in Canada, over 100 attended. The conference also received record high levels positive feedback. Despite the impact of COVID, hosting this event should prove to be a long-term gain for Vancouver for many years to come.
- Tourism Vancouver is also very fortunate to have three International Association of Professional Congress Organizers (IAPCO) certified members as very active and engaged Tourism Vancouver members and partners. Thanks to their hard work and collaboration with Tourism Vancouver and the VCC, we were fortunate to host the prestigious IAPCO Annual General Assembly in February of 2020. At 146 delegates it was the highest attended ever outside of Europe and the highest rated meeting in IAPCO's 51-year history. This event brought the senior leadership and owners of almost every global PCO to Vancouver. Many of whom are now very much brand ambassadors out in the market. There were 32 countries represented with the top five being Canada, Italy, Germany, Switzerland and the United Kingdom.
- The Meeting and Innovation Network of Distinction (MIND Partnership) continued as a top priority. Although with reduced team capacity, Tourism Vancouver continued to connect with our local and national M&C ambassadors. We also continued the strong relationships with our regional economic development partnerships such as the Greater Vancouver Board of Trade and Vancouver Economic Commission. We are actively working on bids in technology, medicine and science which require MIND members from UBC, SFU, Lifesciences BC and IEEE.
- Tourism Vancouver has been able to rely on our BestCities Global Alliance membership. BestCities has stayed very active with international congress sales and marketing efforts including social media, virtual client events and sharing of global knowledge to help track COVID trends around the world.

US Market

- The primary 2020 focus was to find customers with the right high-value business mix for Vancouver. At the same time, support a balanced portfolio year-round. This would be accomplished through in-market activities, industry partnership activations, site inspections and FAMs.
- Tourism Vancouver entered 2020 with US meeting and convention booking pace experiencing a few headwinds. Vancouver's history of consistent US M&C business levels was being eroded. Decreased hotel supply combined with significant reductions in hotel room block commitments for citywides as well as unsustainable hotel room rate increases were negatively impacting M&C future booking potential. A very successful VCC was also limiting availability space. 2020 was also a US election year which has historically delayed US client decisions for future years events. All in all, we were facing challenges.
- The first part of the year the US market was on pace. In March COVID became reality and severely impacted bookings. Cancellations and re-booking of citywides became the number one priority.

- Interaction with clients was done through proactive one on one communications. Our virtual presence in-market was amplified through our partnerships with industry organizations. All of our 2020 strategic agreements, partnerships and sponsorships had to be renegotiated and re-imagined. Virtual sales engagements were created through: Corporate Event Marketing Association (CEMA), Council of Engineering and Scientific Society Executives (CESSE), International Association of Exhibitions and Events (IAEE), Professional Convention Management Association (PCMA) National and our agreements with local in-market chapters (Philadelphia, Chicago Midwest and Washington, DC), Association Forum of Chicagoland, and many more.
- In the later part of the year negotiations were started with all industry organizations and companies for the 2021 partnership agreements, all of which will look very different from past years.

Convention Services

- Proactive outreach to clients to ensure they were kept up to date on COVID status in Vancouver, in BC and in Canada. A client facing live document was created to provide this information and be constantly updated.
- Attendance building and future host city promotion meant creating virtual destination exhibit booths to capitalize on this captive audience. Additional support was provided via social media and other electronic tools aimed to drive interest and excitement for meeting in Vancouver. Client site inspection visits also became virtual.

Sport Hosting Vancouver

- Thanks to our partnership with the City of Vancouver, Michelle Collens, SHV Manager, has been able to provide guidance to sport associations and organizations and continue to partner with Sport BC. Michelle continues to be an active member of the Sport Tourism Canada board of directors, giving Vancouver a national voice. All of this helps keep Vancouver top of mind for National Sport Organizations and provide us with the most up to date COVID information as it relates to sport event health guidelines. Although not the chosen bubble city, SHV also helped put forward a strong NHL bid. SHV also worked closely with Rugby Canada, GrandFondo and the BMO Marathon.

Events and Festivals

- Tourism Vancouver helped create and lead a new network of annual Vancouver event and festival producers. This network of 72 producers covers arts, culture, music, sport, esports, F&B and lifestyle events. Our goal is to try and find ways we can help keep them and their members sustainable through these very challenging times. The group has for the first time ever come together to collaborate, innovate, and advocate for their industry.

As 2020 came to a close, many in our industry were quite relieved to see it end. At the same time, we know 2021 will present many of the same challenges as our industry struggles to restart and rebuild. Hope is alive that 2021 will progress with widespread vaccine distribution, medical advances in rapid testing, reduced and then eliminated quarantines, meeting and event 50 person limit significantly increased, travel within Canada to return first followed by US and International once borders re-open, traveler confidence will return as will visitor volumes.

The travel and tourism industry is one of the most resilient on our planet. Meeting and convention business is an important part of that and will return in new, different, exciting and prosperous ways.