

## SECTION 3. PROFESSIONAL CONFERENCE ORGANISER SURVEY

### 3.1 BACKGROUND

We surveyed professional conference organisers (“PCO’s”) nationally and in the Eastern Cape to determine the criteria used for selecting locations for conferences and functions, particularly if they use the Eastern Cape, and under what circumstances they would make use of locations in the Buffalo City region.

It is important to note that there are a limited number of conference organisers based in Buffalo City and that most conference venues organise their own events for clients.

### 3.2 SURVEY RESULTS

#### 3.2.1 Survey Sample

We surveyed the following professional conference organisers:

- Eastern Sun Promotions – Port Elizabeth based;
- Creative Public Relations – East London based;
- Global Conferences – Cape Town based;
- Event Dynamics – Johannesburg based;
- Reservations Hotline – Johannesburg based;
- Venue Finders – Johannesburg based.

#### 3.2.2 Criteria Used

There are two interlinked criteria used to determine where an event is held i.e. the criteria used to select the city/ town and the criteria used to select the venue.

The PCO’s interviewed stated that the most important criteria for selecting a city/ town is logistics. The criteria relating to logistics include:

- Whether the venue is of the right size, has enough break away rooms and exhibition space, (see **Table 3.1**);

- Whether the local airport can accommodate enough flights from all important connecting destinations at peak times;
- Whether enough accommodation is available within the required star grading;
- Whether sufficient local transport is available for delegates.

Following the logistics criteria, the attractiveness of the city/ town are considered including:

- The availability of alternative venues to the main conference venue for banquets, cocktail parties, etc;
- The availability and range of tourism attractions and activities for both delegate and accompanying person programmes

**Table 3.1** gives the selection criteria used by PCO's and end-users to choose conference venues, assuming that the venue is of adequate size and is available for hire on the date that it is required.

The five most important selection criteria are numbered from one to five with remaining criteria, of roughly equal importance, listed as bullets. In the case of venue selection criteria identified by PCO's, the first three criteria are felt to be of equal importance and are, therefore, given the same rating.

While user requirements will naturally differ according to the nature, size and format of a particular conference, it seems clear that issues relating to the functionality (such as accessibility, technical equipment, parking, security and service) of a conference facility are those, which are regarded as most important.

**Table 3.1: Selection Criteria of PCO's and End-Users for Conference Venues**

PCO's	End-Users
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The location of the venue must meet with the clients' needs and be easily accessible for all the delegates.</li> <li>1. The technical equipment offered by the venue must be up-to-date and in good working order. Of great importance are white boards, data projectors and internet access in the meeting rooms.</li> <li>1. Security and secure parking.</li> <li>2. The prices charged for the venue must fall within the clients' budget.</li> <li>3. The availability of numerous break-away rooms at the venue.</li> <li>▪ The absence of pillars and obstructions in the meeting rooms.</li> <li>▪ A dedicated staff member employed by the venue to be on hand during the meeting.</li> <li>▪ The policies that the venue has, for example, with regard to who carries the liability for cancellations, what is the policy for payment dates, etc.</li> <li>▪ Private dining and bar venues for the delegates.</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Service, especially in terms of the availability of a dedicated staff member who is available during the planning of the meeting and on hand while the meeting is taking place.</li> <li>2. Location of the venue in relation to where the delegates will be coming from, it's accessibility and how the location can add to the experience, e.g. the beautiful views from the Westcliff, the Michelangelo's proximity to the Sandton Square, etc.</li> <li>3. The quality of the food.</li> <li>4. Visible security and secure parking.</li> <li>5. Value for money; the prices charged must be competitive and reasonable considering what is offered.</li> <li>▪ The ambience, atmosphere and reputation of the venue; it must complement the image and/ or culture of the company and/ or it's delegates.</li> <li>▪ The venue should offer the latest equipment and it must be in good working order.</li> <li>▪ The availability of break-away rooms.</li> <li>▪ The privacy afforded to the delegates.</li> </ol>

*Source: Grant Thornton Kessel Feinstein*

### 3.2.3 View of Buffalo City

Of the PCO's interviewed only the two based in the Eastern Cape utilised Buffalo City as a conference destination. The reasons listed for not utilising the study area are summarised as:

- Lack of demand from clients for Buffalo City;
- Lack of conference facilities that are considered of an upmarket standard;

- Lack of accommodation facilities that are considered of an upmarket standard;
- Lack of flights in to and out of East London Airport;

The PCO's surveyed felt that they and their Clients were unaware of what Buffalo City could offer as a conference destination and accordingly there was no demand from Clients. The PCO's that do not use the study area as a conference destination were mostly unable to list the conference facilities available and had no idea as to the tourism attractions and activities that the study area offers.

PCO's that were aware of the conference facilities available in Buffalo City felt that most facilities were not of a 4-star or higher standard which limited the type of conferences that could be hosted in the study area. The PCO's felt that the private sector in particular required conference venues that are of a 4-star quality or higher.

Similarly, the PCO's felt that there is a lack of accommodation facilities on a 4-star level or higher. As with the conference venue, the PCO's felt that the private sector requires more upmarket accommodation and the lack of these facilities limited the type of conferences that could be hosted in the study area.

Finally, the PCO's felt that the number of seats available on flights to and from the East London Airport was limited which limits the hosting of large conferences where delegates wish to arrive and depart at similar times.

### 3.3 CONCLUSION

The PCO's surveyed felt that they would be willing to utilise Buffalo City as a conference destination if the following issues are addressed:

- The availability of suitable venues;
- The availability of suitable accommodation;
- The availability of flights at the right times.

The overarching point that was highlighted from our research is that PCO's outside the Eastern Cape are unaware of what Buffalo City had to offer as a conference destination.