

Essential

Lisbon on top

Portugal's capital is fast gaining recognition as one the world's top destinations for the staging of major conferences and other events

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Lisbon is a saucy flirt that you fall in love with at first sight, so go the lyrics of traditional Portugues Fado songs. But the -statistics seem to back this idea up since the Portuguese capital is one of Europe's favourite destinations when it comes to Business Tourism. This city on the banks of the River Tagus is becoming increasingly famous the world over and comes Number 6 in the International Congress and Convention Association ranking with 90 associated events last year, putting it in front of cities like Madrid, Amsterdam, Brussels, and even London. Its geographical location, history, modernity, wide choice of hotels and cuisine are just some of the factors that go to make Lisbon one of Europe's most competitive and popular cities to visit.

Lisbon's hosting of the World Expo 98 created a new area of business and placed the city firmly on the Congress and Events map. And the city has already been showered with awards such as the Fifth Best City for World Congresses.

Then came the UEFA 2004 Euro Football Championships and the Portuguese Presidency of the European Union, both events which proved equally important for the country in terms of visibility and financial return. "The country needs projects that can create a dynamic energy which continues on well after the event itself and has a knock on effect on other cities and towns other than the one that hosted the event," stresses Paula Oliveira, Director of Lisbon Tourism Association.

The Lisbon Convention Bureau is the tourist department that acts as a bridge with the world and promotes the Portugal brand. It works in close partnership with hotels, congress centres and destination management companies such as TLC - Events in Portugal, the company responsible for bringing over 10,000 business tourists to Portugal in 2007. The organization was set up in 2003 and focuses on planning and organizing events, congresses, promotional initiatives and product presentations. Its clients are all foreigners looking for excellent services. The company has particularly close ties with the English market, as can be guessed from its actual name - an anagram of Tender Loving Care - which in itself says a lot about its approach to business. Its aim is to be different from its competitors when it comes to organizing events by going that extra mile. TLC operates all over the country with special emphasis on Lisbon, Estoril, Sintra, and Cascais, while the north region, namely Porto, is a new business area for the company.

With Sales & Marketing offices in the United Kingdom and Germany as well as the United States, the company aims to open Portugal's doors to the wider World:

"We're competing with Barcelona, Dublin, Prague, Budapest, amongst others and when closing the deal has its budget as the bottom line and when it comes to price and quality Portugal is unbeatable," affirms Diogo Assis, TLC Managing Director.

In the last four year TLC has been behind some of the most important events staged in Lisbon. In 2005, for example, was responsible for the logistics of the MTV Europe Music

Awards, an operation which involved around 2,000 people and which was staged at the city's Atlantic Pavilion. Then in 2006 it organized the Microsoft Government Leaders Forum Europe which was attended by 500 European Leaders and High Level Microsoft Delegates. And this year, during the entire month of June, it was its responsibility to organize the launch of a family saloon car on behalf of an important German manufacturer. This event took place in various venues including the city's 'Coliseu' (a concert and show hall), the Cordoaria Nacional (a former rope factory) and at Praça das Flores Square, which gave the participants a chance to really feel Lisbon as a city. "Lots of clients that visit Lisbon for the very first time end up by having an immense desire to come back with their family or friends, and this is what we call the 'indirect impact' of the events that we develop and organize and this impact is incalculable. Projecting Portugal's image abroad has to be seen as an investment rather than a cost." Promoting Portugal worldwide is, as Diogo Assis underscores, a duty for both public and private entities. The first steps have been taken but there's still a long way to go before Portugal, and more particularly Lisbon, become well-known, internationally recognized destinations because of the quality of their services and the cultural and historical heritage that oozes from every Lusitanian stone.

Lisbon is the passport to a country that is presently in the vanguard of the business tourism sector, even overtaking its larger neighbour Spain. The secret lies in making the difference, putting tradition at the service of sophistication is just part of the trick, but keeping Lisbon in fashion, now that's the real challenge!

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