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AIPC Sees Mannheim as “The Right Place at the Right Time”

The 2003 AIPC Annual Conference in Mannheim is happening at exactly the right time and in exactly the right place, says AIPC President Barbara Maple.

“We in the congress centre business have some very critical issues to deal with right now, and our Annual Conference is one of the few opportunities we have to address them face to face”, says Maple. “At the same time, it’s very appropriate that this important gathering should be taking place in a location that reminds us of so much of what our industry’s all about”.

Maple says that there are a number of reasons why Congress Centre Rosengarten in Mannheim is the perfect location for this event. “First, it is very centrally located, and at the heart of a country with strong AIPC membership, and this will ensure we have good representation to help us explore the key issues of today. Secondly, the Centre itself epitomizes the cultural and historic dimensions that are becoming an increasingly important part of the congress centre experience today. Congresses represent an important opportunity for delegates from all over the world to enjoy new cultural experiences, and a facility like the Rosengarten brings that kind of experience right into the meeting!”.

“In addition, we know that their technological capabilities are such that we can take advantage of many different forms of communication to carry out our program. And finally, we have the privilege to be holding our event on the occasion of the 100th Birthday of the “Grand Lady of Mannheim”, which gives us the opportunity to join in a celebration at a time when I think we can all use such a happy occasion!”

Maple says that after almost two years of challenges in the meetings industry, there is a real need to exchange views and develop strategies for business recovery, and that will be a major theme in the conference. “In the wake of 9/11, most in the meetings and congress industry hoped that the impacts would be short-lived and that things would be largely back to normal within the year”, she says. “However, things didn’t work out that way. The initial effects of event postponements and cancellations, delayed decisions and heightened security were quickly replaced by other, longer term effects: economic downturn, airline failures and lingering concerns about long distance air travel”.

“Now, as the world faces the prospect of even longer-term political instability, many destinations are recognizing that turbulent times may be an ongoing fact of life and re-evaluating their plans and projections accordingly. In particular, they are questioning the kinds of changes that have taken place in the market and how their particular product is affected by the new conditions and attitudes which have developed during this very demanding period”.

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Delegates will be both exchanging information and experiences and looking for ways to strengthen the industry in this period of recovery. While congresses and exhibitions have proven in many cases to be much more resilient than leisure travel, there have still been impacts that most facilities have had to deal with, and continuing questions relating to ongoing issues such as the strength of the economy and the airlines sector.

“We’re also having to re-visit many of our policies and practices, such as in the areas of security and remote meetings technology. Even the ways we do business have been impacted as economic factors and corporate cutbacks have resulted in more meetings now being organized by contracted meeting planners instead of in-house staff and many clients avoiding contracting until the last possible moment. These kinds of issues have major effects on our businesses, and that in turn needs consultation of the sort we have at our conference.”

Another aspect of the congress industry that delegates to the conference will be addressing is the role that congress centres themselves play in the overall meeting experience. “For many years, we in the congress centre business have been content to simply act as hosts, providing space, services and technology to event organizers but pretty much leaving the programming and other aspects of the meeting experience to them.

“Now, as meetings and congresses find themselves competing with many other forms of business interaction, we need to re-think the role we all can play to make the event even more satisfying and successful. Our host, Michel Maugé – General Manager of the Congress Center Rosengarten, has put together a great set of keynote speakers to help us consider our options in this regard, and we have a number of additional sessions scheduled to review the directions we may wish to take in becoming more involved in meeting our clients’ overall objectives”.

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