

2020
WELLNESS STUDY



The IRF 2020 Wellness in Meetings and Incentive Travel Study

This and all other IRF reports are available at TheIRF.org

www.TheIRF.org

The IRF 2020 Wellness in Meetings and Incentive Travel Study

Introduction

Wellness continues to be a topic highlighted in both professional circles as well as in our personal lives. For this 2020 study, the Incentive Research Foundation explored how wellness is specifically represented in incentive travel programs as well as in general meeting types. Of the individuals surveyed for this report, 68% noted that wellness is a “critical focus” for the organizations for which they plan meetings. However that focus is not translating into their meetings and incentives in any consistent way. This report explores the gap between general wellness focus and incorporation into meetings and looks at effective ways to introduce healthy options into meetings and incentives.

Methodology and Respondent Profile

The IRF’s web-based survey on the topic of wellness in meetings and incentives was fielded in November and December of 2019. The survey was distributed to the IRF database, *Prevue Magazine* subscribers, and members of Meeting Professionals International (MPI) and the Events Industry Council (EIC). The IRF received 224 responses representing a highly experienced group of meeting planners.

- Of the respondents, 48% were internal meeting planners, while 52% represented third parties, planning for other organizations
- 58% of respondents plan corporate events, while 32% plan association events, and 10% indicated “other”
- The group was highly experienced, with 61% having 15+ years of experience
- 51% are planning 11 or more meetings in 2020, and 19% are planning more than 6 meetings in 2020
- 48% of the respondent base plans incentive trips

The Wellness Gap

The study reveals a clear ongoing gap between the personal and corporate focus on wellness and the incorporation of wellness practices into meetings and incentives. When asked whether wellness was a critical focus for their company or the company they plan for, 86% of internal planners strongly or somewhat agreed, and 68% of third-party planners strongly or somewhat agreed. The majority also indicated that these companies have wellness programs in place for their employees.

However, when respondents were asked whether these organizations will accept additional cost to incorporate wellness into their meetings, a decidedly lower percentage were represented with only 27% of internal planners strongly or somewhat agreeing, and 39% of third-party planners strongly or somewhat agreeing. The responses were even lower when asked whether the organizations have detailed wellness guidelines for meetings.

Compared to the 2019 study results, there appears to be a bit of progress in closing the gap. When asked to rate the how healthy a standard meeting is for their client or their own company with no additional budget for wellness, nearly 30% indicated their meetings are “mostly healthy,” up 6% over 2019. There was also a 3% increase in meetings categorized as “very healthy.” More than half of the external planners indicated that they advise clients on budgeting strategies to support healthy meetings, indicating that the conversation around wellness is becoming more prominent.

If extra budget is made available for wellness and healthy options, the percentage of meetings that are “mostly healthy” shifts to 39%, and 13% report meetings with additional funding are “very healthy.” It is important to note that this is only a 10% improvement over standard meetings where no budget is available.

Wellness in Incentives

Incentive events are designed to reward top performers for their hard work and achievements. It stands to reason that if wellness is an important focus area for organizations, wellness-focused incentive trips or destinations would be a natural extension. However, when asked whether their company or client plans, offers or considers incentive trips that are wellness-focused such as a spa retreat, yoga retreat or other wellness-focused destination, nearly 40% of respondents indicated they do not plan or offer them.

The study does show that there is some positive movement for wellness overall within the context of incentive programs. Nearly 85% of respondents indicated that wellness-centric activities are offered during their incentive travel programs. Another encouraging sign is that 41% indicated they spent more time on wellness activities during their incentive programs over prior year.

The most common wellness inclusions offered during incentive travel programs:

- Spa - 89%
- Locally sourced food – 86%
- Yoga – 73%

The least common wellness inclusions were:

- Personalized food plans – 34%
- Gamification of wellness - 13%
- Non-traditional (eg. acupuncture, aromatherapy) – 9%

The Wellness Gap

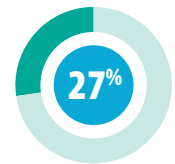
The study reveals a clear ongoing gap between the corporate focus on wellness and the incorporation of wellness practices into meetings and incentives.

Indicated *wellness* was a **critical focus** for their company.

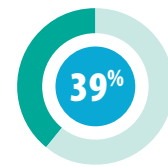
Indicated the company would **accept additional costs to incorporate wellness** into meetings.



Internal Meeting Planners



Third Party Meeting Planners

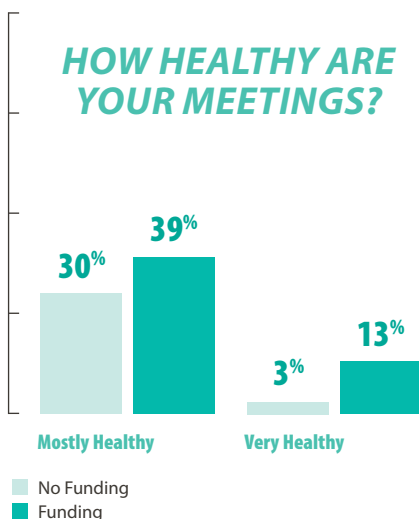


EXTRA BUDGET DRIVES INCREMENTAL IMPROVEMENTS



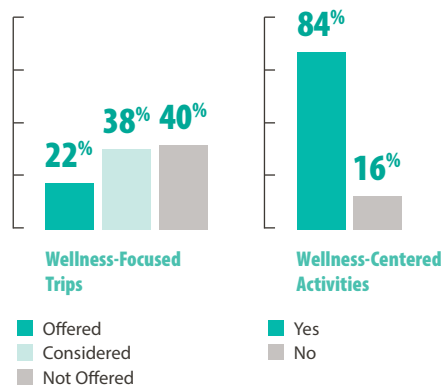
If extra budget is made available for wellness and healthy options, there is a **10%** improvement.

HOW HEALTHY ARE YOUR MEETINGS?



WELLNESS IN INCENTIVE PROGRAMS

While the majority of meeting planners do not plan wellness-focused incentive trips, they do offer wellness-centric activities at their incentive trips and meetings.



The most common wellness inclusions offered during incentive travel programs:



89%
Spa



73%
Yoga

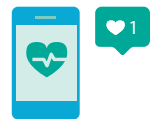


86%
Locally Sourced Food

OVERCOMING THE EXPENSE HURDLE

It is important to note that many wellness inclusions can be offered at no additional cost to the program.

The program *mobile app* can be used to offer step challenges or guided meditation.



Make the most of activities and locally sourced food offered by many *resorts*.

Use the talent within your group by crowd-sourcing *yoga, meditation, or running* enthusiasts to lead wellness activities.



Objections to Wellness-Centered Inclusions

The main objections to offering wellness-centered inclusions in meetings are concerns around cost, lack of cultural fit, and that “attendees are not interested” in wellness inclusions. These objections are worth exploring, particularly in organizations where wellness is a critical focus. Some options to overcome these objections include starting with low or no-cost inclusions such as group walks or stretch breaks, or surveying attendees to understand their perspective first-hand.

Overcome the Objection that Wellness is Cost-Prohibitive:

- Casual/comfortable dress
- Guides to nearby fitness centers
- Healthy snacks
- Group walks
- Stretch breaks

Overcome the Objection that Wellness is Not a Cultural Fit:

- Ask questions to understand barriers
- Offer options – one size does not fit all

Overcome the Objection that Attendees are Not Interested in Wellness:

- Review past feedback – solve for pain points
- Offer low-barrier options
- Survey before the event

Overcoming the Expense Hurdle

It is important to note that many of these potential inclusions can be offered at no additional cost to the program. The program mobile app can be used to offer step challenges or guided meditation. Maps of walking trails can be provided by the hotel or resort. In fact, many resorts offer wellness activities as part of their daily onsite program, and hotels and resorts are increasingly including locally sourced food as part of their menu.

Some organizations are crowd-sourcing wellness into their programs, identifying individuals within the participant base who have a passion for yoga, meditation, or running who then offer to lead interested groups in a morning workout or evening meditation session. This is a great no-cost way to include wellness offerings.

Recommendations

To determine whether wellness should play more of a role in your meetings and incentives there are a couple of key considerations:

Examine the role wellness plays in your company or your client's company.

Evaluate the importance of delivering wellness consistently in all company touchpoints including meetings and incentives. If you find it is important, look for low-cost or no-cost ways to add wellness components into events to help bridge the gap.

Talk to your attendees.

Whether the data is gathered via focus groups, one-on-one conversations or surveys, understanding your attendees' desires when it comes to wellness can help you find the right ways to implement wellness in your program. From casual crowd-sourced morning workouts to full-blown wellness-focused destinations, you will understand the drivers of attendee satisfaction and can plan accordingly, presenting options to your program owners backed by data.