

Vienna, June 2020

Austria Center Vienna reports strong year for events in 2019 – autumn season to determine whether 2020 is a total washout

Austria's largest congress centre posted another strong set of results in 2019, despite ongoing modernisation work. This year, the coronavirus pandemic has had a huge impact on the congress industry and Vienna as a destination for tourism, with the majority of large-scale international events either cancelled or postponed. Unlike trade shows and fairs that are open to the public, there is still a lack of certainty as far as planning for congresses this autumn is concerned. In response to the current situation, the Austria Center Vienna is offering special meeting packages with custom hygiene plans.

“2019 was a successful year in every respect. Despite launching our major modernisation project, we were still able to build on the results posted a year earlier. And this year, bookings pointed towards yet another set of record results. But the cancellations and postponements caused by the coronavirus pandemic instead make it painfully clear just how important the congress sector is for Vienna as a destination for tourism,” explained Austria Center Vienna Managing Director Susanne Baumann-Söllner.

International guests help secure more than 3,000 jobs in Austria in 2019

With 91,501 international visitors during the year, there was a 12% decline on the record total set in 2018 (115,938) due to modernisation work carried out at the centre. “We took a conscious decision to keep the centre open while construction work went on, splitting up the year into event phases and building phases in the process,” Baumann-Söllner explained. At EUR 540, the average daily spend for a congress attendee is around twice as much as that of the average visitor to Vienna. The number of participants in 2019 was comparable with the 2016 total despite the construction work, with the positive economic impact translating into induced GDP of more than EUR 450m and over 3,000 year-round jobs. An analysis of revenue from events and partners' commissions painted a similar picture: at EUR 13.2m, the total was down 10.5% on the record-breaking previous year (2018: EUR 14.8m).

Threat of complete washout for the congress industry in 2020

The coronavirus pandemic has hit the international congress industry very hard. “The postponements and cancellations over the past three months have also had a serious impact on the city's hotel industry, restaurants and a great many partner enterprises in Vienna,” Baumann-Söllner confirmed. For a number of weeks, there has been a clear positive trend – both in terms of measures set at a national level as well as vital border openings. However, this year the industry will have to brace itself for a complete absence of large-scale events until autumn at the earliest. “We will only be able to fully determine the scale of the losses for Vienna as a business and research location in up to two years' time,” Baumann-Söllner added.

Ability to plan for autumn essential for congress location

The situation for this autumn is still unclear for the congress industry. While it has been possible to host trade fairs and non-trade events in Austria without any limits on participant numbers since mid-June, providing they comply with specific hygiene regulations, the latest amendment does not apply to congresses – in contrast to numerous media reports. “As things currently stand, we still have two large-scale congresses planned for October and November. In light of the positive overall trend, I am confident that we will be hosting congresses with more than 1,000 participants once again from September. That said, the industry requires greater planning certainty right now,” Baumann-Söllner noted.

Special packages for meetings, seminars and small-scale gatherings

Seminars and meetings returned in mid-June. To make this possible, the venue drew up its own hygiene plan over the past few months: scalable classroom-style seating guarantees that a minimum distance of more than a metre is assured, whether it is for a room used by 50 participants or a hall for almost 1,000 people. The plan covers aspects such as ventilation, disinfection, signage, preventing large numbers of people from congregating, and clearly organised catering solutions. “The whole industry needs to come up with new concepts and develop attractive packages during this difficult time. Alongside hygiene measures, we have been focusing on expanding our digital offering, since hybrid congresses – a mix of on-site participation and attending remotely from home – are the future,” Baumann-Söllner concluded.

About IAKW-AG

Internationales Amtssitz- und Konferenzzentrum Wien, Aktiengesellschaft (IAKW-AG) is responsible for maintaining the Vienna International Centre (VIC) and operating the Austria Center Vienna. The Austria Center Vienna is Austria’s largest conference centre, with 24 halls, 180 meeting rooms, and some 26,000 m² of exhibition space, and is one of the top players on the international conference circuit.

Contact

IAKW-AG – Austria Center Vienna

David Scheurich, Press Officer

Tel: + 43-676-4392579

Mail: david.scheurich@acv.at

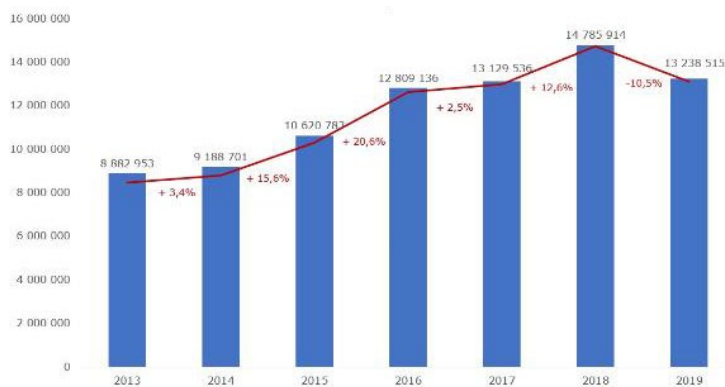
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The Austria Center Vienna hygiene plan includes a minimum distance of at least one metre for all participants and in all halls and meeting rooms throughout the venue.



Visitors statistics – international participants



Revenue from events incl. partners' commission

There was a slight year-on-year decline on the record totals for 2018 both in terms of revenue and event numbers, due to construction work carried out at the centre during 2019.