

The Meetings Maximizer: The Next Generation of Meetings & Events



The Meetings Maximizer: The Next Generation of Meetings & Events 2025 Hilton Trends Report Special Section

Introduction

Kelly Knowlen, Vice President, Sales Engagement and Special Events, Hilton

From the rise of virtual offices to the age of digital meetings, the last several years have transformed the future of work and how we conduct business. The world has a fresh new approach and perspective toward in-person gatherings, and young corporate employees are influencing the evolution of meetings, events and conferences. From attending their first work conference to experiencing an off-site with their team, this new generation entering the workforce is more digitally savvy than ever, while still valuing connections and redefining the purpose of face-to-face interactions. As travelers embrace more engaging, human experiences and connections, we at Hilton are always listening and evolving to the needs of our guests, meeting and event planners and attendees. Whether you're with us for a cup of coffee, a restful night's stay or a career-defining day, we believe in the power of human connection and creating more opportunities for shared moments and memories.

Today, the outlook of the meetings and events industry has never been brighter, and Hilton is setting out to revolutionize the way we think about attending and planning events. Hilton's Global [Trends Report](#) predicts this year to be the 'Year of the Travel Maximizer,' and as travelers seek out high-impact adventures and experiences to maximize their time and financial investment, this trend is showing no signs of slowing down, especially with the next generation of event goers embracing this trend in full force. Hilton is excited to celebrate planners and event goers alike with a special section spotlighting the future of meetings and events, ushering in what we've coined the 'Year of the Meetings Maximizer.'

The 2025 planner and their attendees are **maximizers**, seeking to make the most of in-person connection, their network and time together. As a global leader in hospitality, we at Hilton are proud to power authentic connections, fueled by our world-class culture as a Great Place to Work.

Our 2025 Hilton Trends Report Special Section explores a variety of insights and new solutions to make meetings and events more welcoming – from the Gen Z employee taking on their first post-grad full-time job to the Gen X senior leader who has attended meetings and events for their entire career. The positive power – personally and professionally – of meetings and events is endless, from unlocking solutions to strengthening workplace culture to building greater team trust. Understanding what attendees need to feel welcomed, comfortable and supported is the key to making one moment in time have a lasting impact.

Cheers to a purposeful and welcoming year ahead!

Jason Dorsey, President and Lead Researcher, The Center for Generational Kinetics

Human connection has never been more important – and creating community sparks important questions that meeting and event planners should anticipate. What makes an event welcoming, engaging, inspiring, and impactful? What do different groups of people want before and during a meeting or event? Where should meeting planners start in order to create meetings, events, and experiences that event goers love and organizations champion?

To uncover the most up-to-date, accurate, and hidden perceptions, beliefs, and expectations about in-person meetings and events, I was honored to partner with Hilton on a first-of-its-kind study to separate myth from truth,

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explore key trends, and highlight new solutions grounded in data and expertise. This special section of Hilton's 2025 Trends Report does all of this and more by diving into key aspects of transforming meetings and events into more welcoming experiences from a variety of perspectives.

Leading this research with Hilton is important because there is a strong demand for both corporate and social gatherings. Companies, associations, and organizations of all sizes recognize and value the excitement and connections that a great event can deliver to attendees and stakeholders. Collaborating on this study was personally meaningful to me because I participate in more than 60 in-person meetings and events at hotels and convention centers around the world *annually*, so I'm living the experiences that meeting and event planners create!

The custom study explored many variables of in-person meetings, leading to a trove of data and discovery – and in many ways validating the industry evolution that myself and the teams at Hilton see every day. The insights were then analyzed through a variety of demographics to uncover additional perspectives and behaviors shaping meeting and event experiences.

The study confirms that in-person meetings and events build trust, connection, friendships and more in effective ways that attendees value. It is an exciting time to be a meeting and event planner because the impact on attendees and organizations delivers results far beyond the walls of the venue.

I hope you enjoy *The Meetings Maximizer: The Next Generation of Meetings & Events* as much as I enjoyed collaborating with Hilton on such an important and actionable initiative.

Event Prep 2.0: The Surge of Extreme Meeting Preparedness

In 2025, Gen Z will [outgrow](#) Baby Boomers in the professional workforce and, soon, Millennials and Gen Z combined will make up 75% of working professionals. As this rising generation is defining the evolution of in-person meetings, conferences and events, for many Gen Zers, their next work or work-related gathering will be a new experience, and first-time attendees, regardless of generation, may share some of the same anxieties.

- **Traveling for Work:** Nearly 9 in 10 (87%) are likely to travel for an external work or work-related event in the next 12 months.
- **In-Person Attendance:** Only 44% of those with five or less years of work experience are very comfortable attending in-person events.

To make Gen Z, first-timers and even seasoned event goers feel more comfortable at in-person events, pre-event communication is key, with top actions including:

- **Share Agenda Previews:** Receiving an agenda well in advance (71%)
- **Employ Event Hosts:** Being welcomed by someone as you enter the event (61%) who shows you around and makes sure your questions are answered
- **Define Logistical Contacts or Groups:**
 - Having a number you can text to get your questions answered (59%)
 - Offering messaging or social media groups where you can meet people ahead of time (55%)

Bringing The Stay to Life: To meet attendees where they are, Hilton relies on one of the most basic tenets of hospitality – to feel truly cared for—to make attendees of all ages, and especially Gen Z, feel comfortable attending events. Planners can bring Hilton's signature hospitality to life with all the pre-event tools needed to make attendees feel their most confident, including:

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- **Share Know Before You Go Briefing:** Whether virtual or in-person, pre-con meetings for attendees contribute to the success of the event. Providing a briefing to address last-minute pre-event questions would make 58% feel more comfortable at in-person events.
- **Host ‘Welcome’ Hour:** Nearly 60% of those attending an event for the first time say they would feel more comfortable at in-person events if they could attend a meet and greet.
- **Promote the Power of Personal Branding:** Gen Z needs to feel more empowered to work the room and expand their network as many strive to build their personal brand as a budding professional. This speaks to the 54% who feel more comfortable having icebreaker questions to help start a conversation, the 47% who feel anxious joining a group of people already in conversation or the 45% who fear ending up in a controversial conversation.

“While the world has changed, the power of in-person gatherings and face-to-face interactions has never been more important than today, serving as a powerful platform for connection, collaboration and innovation,” said Frank Passanante, senior vice president, global head of sales and HRCC, Hilton. “Event planners and attendees alike want to maximize their time and impact while on the road and attending events and conferences, and Hilton is reimagining how meetings and events energize individuals and organizations to create seamless, purpose-driven experiences that ease anxieties and fuel authentic, meaningful connections.”

Hilton Case Study: First-Timers Meet-Up

At the 2024 Americas Leadership & Commercial Conference (ALCC), an innovative Hilton event bringing together nearly 3,700 attendees, including hundreds of General Managers, Directors of Sales, and corporate team members from across the Americas, there was a meet-up opportunity that attracted more than 50 Hilton first-timer attendees. In the pre-event “Know Before You Go” communication, Hilton advised first-time event goers to meet at a designated location to connect with other ALCC first-timers. The welcome meet-up allowed attendees to meet and create connections ahead of the official conference programming, receiving positive feedback from all attendees.

Attendees Seek Steps for a Stress-Free Start

For attendees, every meeting and event takes some level of preparation, and today’s event goers seek to be more prepared than ever before. The top actions to prepare for a work or work-related event at a hotel, convention center or meeting center include:

- **Schedule:** Study the event schedule (40%)
- **Online Search:** Visit the event website, such as a site set up by the organization or sponsor of the event (36%)
- **Wardrobe:** Buy new clothes or shoes (32%)
- **Navigation:** Review maps of the hotel (31%)
- **Local Dining:** Look up dining options at or near the hotel (30%)
- **Self-Care:** Get a haircut or get your hair done (30%)
- **Event Dining:** Figure out what food will be served at the event (26%)

Meeting the Occasion: Two in five (42%) agree that they are unsure of the proper dress attire. Gen Zers are more likely to be anxious about this, as 79% report feeling at least a little anxious about not having the right attire when attending a work event – whether it is centered around a theme or the classic “business casual” dress code. Alternatively, event goers also cite food and beverage as another top anxiety inducing factor, with 28% noting they worry about food and beverages spilling on their clothes (38%) – with other reasons including not liking the food being served (30%) and getting food stuck in their teeth (28%).

By sharing attire guidelines and menu previews in advance, meeting goers can feel welcomed and empowered to meet the occasion:

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- **Personal Packing Guidance:** Sharing suggested attire guidelines for attendees to reference, with supporting visuals, as they get ready or pack allows meeting goers (67%) to feel more comfortable at in-person events.
- **Will Travel for Food:** Having food menus sent in advance (60%), non-alcoholic drink options (52%) and food options for people with allergies (52%) make event goers feel more comfortable and reduces meal-time anxieties.

“At Hilton, we know that today’s attendees and planners seek environments that foster collaboration, innovation, and meaningful connections,” said Bill Duncan, senior vice president and global category head, All Suites and Focused Service Brands, Hilton. “The future of meetings and events is about ensuring attendees feel welcomed, comfortable and prepared to maximize impact and inspire productivity. Across our Focused Service and All-Suites brands, we deliver intuitively designed spaces, spacious and stylish guest rooms, and value-added amenities, like complimentary breakfast to meet these evolving needs. By focusing on what matters most to attendees, we help planners create seamless, impactful events that bring people together and leave a lasting impression.”

Hilton Solutions: Main Character Menus

Hilton is working to create catering menu items that avoid traditionally messy foods (think soups, poppy seeds, crumbs, etc.) that may spill on your clothes, require cutting or get stuck in your teeth or hair. Hilton is also reimagining food and beverage offerings and industry-leading innovations to make eating, drinking and networking easier, such as sustainable plates that have a cut-out for wine glasses.

Sound Shhhift: The Rise of Silent Meeting Time

When walking into an event, one of the first things attendees notice is how the room is set up. The design of an event can make or break the attendee experience even before the agenda kicks off. Looking around the room attendees may wonder... *“Is there a spot to answer my emails in between sessions, or do I need to go back to my room?”* ... *“Are there areas for small group conversations or will I be called on to talk in a large group setting?”*

While attendees look forward to making the most of their time, research shows that they also value downtime:

- **Duration:** Nearly 7 in 10 (68%) professionals agree that work events are often too long.
- **No Breaks:** More than half (51%) of attendees report having to be ‘on’ for long periods of time as a top reason to feel at least moderately anxious.
- **Break Time:** 78% of respondents agree that sometimes when they are at a work event, they need a break or time to themselves.

The Power of Saying More with Less: Whether it’s an hour-long meeting or a multi-day conference, planners can help event goers feel more at ease by reimagining the event space to include moments of pause to break up your event programming. Building in breaks so the schedule is not completely full (71%), having dedicated quiet areas to work or check work emails (65%) and creating smaller meetings instead of large ones to feel more at ease speaking (62%) allow attendees to feel more comfortable at in-person events.

Hilton Case Study: Silent Spaces

At the Americas Leadership & Commercial Conference (ALCC) and HiltonLIVE events, geared toward Hilton B2B customers and team members across all levels of the organization, Hilton has offered dedicated quiet zones for attendees to work, eat or relax when they just need a minute. Across these events, Hilton also provides eco-friendly to-go containers for attendees to take their food to these quiet zones to further disconnect, which Hilton has seen grow in popularity across events with this offering.

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Hilton is leading the industry with innovative meetings and event spaces available across the brand portfolio:

- At [Signia by Hilton](#) guests can choose to elevate their stay by upgrading to Club Signia, an exclusive experience with attentive service that's a step ahead, with access to private conference rooms for work or collaboration, premium Wi-Fi, and a stylish lounge with all-day food and beverage offerings.
- [Hilton Tulum Riviera Maya, All-Inclusive Resort](#) is home to Tulum's only and largest purpose-built event center, featuring over 55,000 square feet of exquisitely designed indoor and outdoor event space. Shared with Conrad Tulum Riviera Maya allowing for dual-resort events, the convention center's modern and sleek décor boasts large windows for sun-soaked rooms and breathtaking views. The 9,000 square foot outdoor terrace is perfect for al fresco dining or events, and additional spaces include a Main Ballroom, Junior Ballroom and three meeting rooms that can accommodate up to 1,800 people.
- [Embassy Suites by Hilton Nashville Downtown](#) is the brand's largest hotel in the U.S., and is influenced strongly by the city's deep musical heritage. From ballrooms, meeting rooms, to pre-function areas and rooftop settings, this property offers plenty of possibilities with 35,000 square feet of total event space.

"Hilton delivers world-class meeting and event spaces thoughtfully designed to meet the unique needs of today's planners and attendees, while providing exceptional service and an elevated, seamless guest experience," said Gary Steffen, global category head, full-service brands, Hilton. "From upscale amenities such as state-of-the-art technology and sophisticated dining to thoughtfully curated wellness experiences such as morning group runs or yoga sessions, we continue to innovate, ensuring every detail reflects our commitment to creating truly unforgettable events for every guest, every hotel, every time."

Meet with Purpose: In addition to making events engaging and impactful for its attendees, many planners and event goers alike are considering the environmental or social impact of their meeting, event and travel decisions. In fact, according to Hilton's [2025 Trends Report](#), 73% agree it's important to minimize their environmental impact while traveling. Backed by its [Travel with Purpose](#), Hilton's [Meet with Purpose](#) program was launched in 2015 to help customers create meaningful events and impact within the communities they visit.

Through this program, meeting planners and attendees can gather responsibly, nourish sustainably and leave a positive impact on the communities where Hilton operates, all while having the tools to measure and manage the environmental footprint of meetings and events using actionable data from Hilton's LightStay platform. Hilton's LightStay Meeting Impact Calculator provides an estimate of the carbon emissions, water and waste generation associated with a specific meeting or event using each hotel's specific utility and emissions data. This data is used to inform customers of the environmental impact of their event and how their efforts contribute to their own sustainability goals.

The Emergence of Pod Squad Travel

According to Hilton's [2025 Trends Report](#), nearly 30% of global travelers (29%) often travel with "Frolleagues" – friends who are also colleagues – on leisure trips. For the 25% of global respondents who plan to travel more in 2025 for "bleisure," combining business and leisure trips, extending their days on the road with Frolleagues can be both convenient and fun. With the surge in group bookings worldwide, signaling an increase in the number of smaller meetings, off-site team gatherings and incentive travel in 2024, Hilton is meeting the rising demand for team building by bringing "pod squad" teams together in-person to reconnect and strengthen team culture.

The smaller, more intimate "pod squad" setting puts younger generations at ease, with 83% of both Gen Z and Millennials citing increased anxiety around being asked to speak or called on during an event. Improved team bonding and professional networking opportunities also fuel event attendance, with four in five noting an improved team culture due to in-person work meetings and events, and increased trust in their team. Other benefits include:

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- **Building Connections:** 82% agree that they have built a better connection with their team members because of work meetings and events, 78% with their boss and 76% with executives and senior leaders.
- **Career Advancement:** 71% agree that they have met someone at a work event who has helped them further their career.
- **Frolleagues:** Attendees also prefer to go to meetings or events if they are with somebody they know (82%). However, there are also advantages to going alone, as 83% agree that they have made new friends at work meetings or events.

Will Travel for Frolleagues: For Frolleagues, work meetings and events offer a new opportunity for continued connection and team building.

- **Plus One, Please:** Being able to bring at least one Frolleague or team member to the event empowers 59% of attendees to feel more comfortable at in-person events.
- **Igniting Conversations:** Both 54% of Gen Zers and Millennials (48%) are more likely than their older counterparts to report struggling to make new connections at work events. To alleviate barriers of striking up a new conversation and inspire authentic connections based on mutual interests, consider offering conversation starter stickers to decorate badges upon check-in.

Hilton Case Study: Career Curious

At HiltonLIVE at Waldorf Astoria Washington DC and several HiltonLIVE events in 2024, event planners invited the attendees to bring a mentee, partner, friend or colleague to gain a first-hand understanding of the hospitality industry. The initiative, coined as “Career Curious,” attracted dozens of attendees, while also extending the value of the event beyond the customer connections, into the broader hospitality community.

When traveling with Frolleagues, team members or your pod squad, it matters where you stay. Across its global portfolio, Hilton offers event space and accommodations to meet the needs of attendees traveling together for work. At [Embassy Suites by Hilton](#), for example, guests are offered breakfast, drinks and snacks every day at no additional charge, serving as the perfect pre- and post-event spot for the squad to start and unwind from the day.

Curated Experiences: In response to the global interest in incentive business, Hilton also launched the [Hilton Incentive Collaborative](#), which directly addresses curated offers with purpose and experiences that bring the local culture into events. This program offers uniquely built, preset incentive event experiences that planners can select to meet the needs of their group and elevate their program.

Beyond traditional business travel perks, Hilton also redefines how groups connect and engage by offering immersive experiences that inspire collaboration and create lasting memories for groups, meetings and events of all sizes.

“At Hilton’s All-Inclusive Resorts, we are reimagining meetings and events by creating opportunities for groups to bond and enjoy time together beyond the meeting or conference agenda,” said Nicole Tilzer, vice president, Hilton’s All-Inclusive & Resort Strategy. “From cultural experiences like salsa and merengue lessons, local tequila tastings and a Mayan jewelry-making class to surprise and delight moments, All-Inclusive resorts encourage guests to re-energize and embrace the destination. With plenty to do right on property, the convenience of an all-inclusive stay eliminates concerns about additional expenses or planning during downtime, offering unmatched value and making meetings and events as memorable as they are seamless.”

The 'Year of the Meetings Maximizer'

The ‘Year of the Meetings Maximizer’ is just getting started, and as meeting and event planners seek to drive impact and create meaningful connection, embracing the evolving needs of attendees across generations will play a pivotal

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role in the next generation of meetings and events. Meeting planners can create impactful experiences by designing spaces and moments that make attendees feel seen, heard and valued. Through driving engagement, trust and collaboration, Hilton is redefining the meetings and events landscape for a modern workforce, propelling each attendee's personal and professional growth.

As we usher in the 'Year of the Meetings Maximizer' and seek to make meetings and events more welcoming for all, planners can explore a variety of insights and new solutions available now in the [World's Most Welcoming Events Playbook](#). Visit <https://www.hilton.com/en/events/> to learn more.

Methodology

These are the findings of an Ipsos poll conducted between September 30 – October 16, 2024. For this survey, a sample of 1,050 U.S. adults ages 18-65 were interviewed online in English. To qualify for the survey, respondents have to be planning to attend an in-person work event in the next 24 months. The poll has a credibility interval of plus or minus 3.7 percentage points for all respondents. The sample contains a higher concentration of male, younger, and college educated adults.

Statistical margins of error are not applicable to online non-probability polls. All sample surveys and polls may be subject to other sources of error, including, but not limited to coverage error and measurement error. Where figures do not sum to 100, this is due to the effects of rounding. The precision of Ipsos online polls is measured using a credibility interval. In this case, the poll has a credibility interval of plus or minus 3.7 percentage points for all respondents. Ipsos calculates a design effect (DEFF) for each study based on the variation of the weights, following the formula of Kish (1965). This study had a credibility interval adjusted for design effect of the following (n=1,050, DEFF=1.5, adjusted Confidence Interval=+/-5.2 percentage points).