



The Recce

How to plan, manage and gain maximum value



Introduction

A site inspection, site visit, reconnaissance trip or “recce” is key to the smooth logistics of an event. However, its necessity is often questioned when management are seeking budget cuts or savings because they do not fully appreciate the objectives and value of a recce.

In this whitepaper we look at the importance of the logistics recce, the need for careful planning, how to maximise the time available and some key points to consider.

Why do you need a recce?

- All too often websites, brochures and information supplied by a foreign venue or supplier can be misleading or difficult to understand, usually due to cultural or linguistic differences. On paper, the venue or service can look better than it actually is, or sometimes it does not do it justice – causing it to be unfairly discounted.
- Even if you have already used a venue or supplier before things can and do change - personnel, services, terms and conditions, prices, facilities.
- A great deal of ground can be covered during face-to-face meetings with potential suppliers and it is vital for building strong working relationships. These will stand you in good stead during the actual event.
- Prices can more easily be queried and services compared to local alternatives.
- It is the only way to get a true impression of what your delegates will actually experience.

For these reasons a thorough recce is vital to accurately evaluate the local elements, look for opportunities and avoid any unwanted surprises further down the line. This holds true whether the event is abroad or at a local venue in the UK.

Getting the most from the recce

A recce should not simply be organised and run by a local destination management company (DMC) or hotel representative. Nor should it be seen as just a chance to 'take in the destination.' Naturally you should be guided by local expertise, but you should also have a comprehensive idea of what you want to achieve.

Due to budget constraints recces are often squeezed into short periods of time, allowing just one or two days at the destination to research and check options for an event that may last a lot longer. A well-planned inspection will prove invaluable, making the best and most sensible use of your limited time on the ground:

- Book the first and last flights of the day. It is worth a painfully early morning flight and late return if they allow you a whole day on the ground.
- Create an itinerary for your trip allowing adequate time to meet with all suppliers. Arrange meetings that are convenient and time efficient, for example if you have an early morning viewing with a hotel ask another supplier to come to the hotel for a meeting after this, rather than wasting time travelling.
- Plan your meals at potential venues. Schedule these for the time of day when you would be coming with your group so you can check the ambience and standard of both the food and service.
- Have a back-up plan. Far too often a venue or supplier turn out to be unsuitable and once on site it is sometimes too late to then find, contact and visit alternative options. You are then faced with either spending money on a second recce or 'winging it' for the event.
- Seek complimentary services or discounted rates from prospective suppliers. A recce is a chance for your suppliers to sell their services to you; they should be keen to impress in order to secure the business.
- Confirm all recce costs with local suppliers, and in particular the DMC, before arriving on site and check that no hidden extras creep in.
- Prepare a detailed checklist of points to cover each element of the event before departing. Once on site it is all too easy to miss the small yet crucial information that you may need during the run up to your event and you can find yourself back in the UK wondering whether there was an adequate cloakroom at the Gala Dinner venue, details of the power supply, room layout etc.

Points to consider

From the moment you set off for your chosen destination, it is important to pay attention to all your surroundings, make detailed notes, and take photos. What seems straightforward and memorable at the time may well blur when trying to recall specific details at a later date. A few key points to check and consider during your recce are as follows:

- **Climate.** Find out what the weather will be like at the time of your event, and bear this in mind throughout your inspection. It is easy to imagine a beautiful coastal BBQ in June but if your event is in November then the environment may be considerably different. Also if the recce takes place during cool weather, but your event is in summer, consider the comfort of your delegates – will they need air-conditioning, what clothes will be comfortable, should events be indoors or outside? Always enquire what the average rainfall is for when you're proposing to be there as this will affect your decision or at the very least ensure robust back up plans!
- **Include your WHOLE trip.** From the moment you step off the plane, boat, train or coach take note of the arrival procedures, signage and location of important elements, i.e. where is the lost baggage help desk at the airport or the taxi rank at the station. This thorough detailing must continue throughout the recce, including all elements from breakfast at the hotel through to the bars and nightlife available to your delegates after hours.
- **If delegates are driving to the event where will they park? Are there enough spaces? Do they have to pay and how? Is it easy to find?**
- **Nothing is too small when it comes to making notes and completing your recce checklist.** Don't forget the many crucial elements such as disabled facilities, bathrooms, access points, signage, internet connectivity, cloakrooms, hostess/ground agents' uniforms, parking, opening times etc.
- **Never assume anything.** Just because there is a toilet on your coach it doesn't necessarily mean the one you book will have one. Or just because another group has a designated reception desk in the hotel lobby doesn't mean it belongs to the hotel and will automatically be available for you. Always confirm that what you see is what you will get - no matter how obvious it seems at the time.
- **Contingency and crisis plans are essential.** What will you do if things change or fail? For example if you need extra accommodation where can rooms be found? If there is a transport problem what other options exist? If there is a security or communication problem how will you deal with it?

- Check your environment. If there is work or development, whether it be at the airport, on the roads or at the venue itself, make sure you confirm exactly when the work is due to be finished. Once back in the UK insist that your local contacts keep you updated on its progress and right up until the last day check that there will be no problems for your group. Also remember to check for scheduled work due to happen at the time of your event and keep an eye out for local holidays, festivals or even demonstrations and strikes.
- Health and Safety. In today's compensation culture it is imperative that you complete rigorous Health and Safety checks and risk assessments on all your suppliers. It is not enough to rely on recommendations from your DMC, you must actively seek risk assessments and crisis strategy's from all your suppliers, whether booked through a local agent or direct. One of the simplest ways to obtain these guarantees is to check whether companies are part of any recognised and regulated authority specific to their field.
- Emergencies. Check for fire exits, fire extinguishers and safety equipment such as seat belts and handrails. Obtain contact details for the local emergency services, private hospitals, doctors and pharmacies. Ensure any eventuality can be covered and use this information to prepare a detailed plan for your team.

Summary

Planning and managing a logistics recce is very time consuming and needs to be handled carefully. If you do not have the resources or experience to get the most from a site visit you should invest in the services of an event production company. Reconnaissance trips for the production of the event could dovetail with the logistics side and usually are completed concurrently.

An event production company will also have a thorough understanding of the production elements and will ensure that the logistical and production requirements are both met, without detriment to each other. They will consider how to balance creativity with practical issues and how to weave event theming and corporate brand values through all the delegates' experiences. This holistic approach will ensure you do not make logistical choices that could later compromise the overall event objectives and production values.

In addition a production company will have the right contacts and experience to manage the planning and logistics, handle the minute detail and wring the maximum value from the visit. Vitally they will ensure information is captured, confirmed and actioned leading to significant savings in time, planning and budget and, most importantly, ensuring the eventual success of the event.

About Mirage

Mirage is a full-service live event management and production company.

We continue to delight clients, and exceed expectations, for the simple reason that Mirage does not produce events to a formula. We tailor our creativity to meet your brief and create a memorable, vibrant event, which is professional without being predictable. We help define your objectives, refine your messages and then we inject fun, velocity and life into your content, ensuring your key messages are understood, reinforced and embraced.

Mirage has an impressive portfolio of blue-chip clients whose events range from product launches, conferences, roadshows, business forums, AGMs through to themed parties and fun days, award ceremonies, team-building and motivational activities. Our complete range of services includes venue selection, programme content, logistics, staging, print and electronic media, delegate management, guest speakers and celebrities, video conferencing, speaker support and AV.

To learn more about how your events could have greater impact, relevance and creativity call us on +44 (0) 1883 740400, email diane@mirageemail.com or visit our website at www.miragewebsite.com or visit our party planners site: www.mirageparties.co.uk.



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