

How to host more sustainable events

The movement toward more sustainable consumption practices and lifestyles has been gaining momentum in recent years. Widespread adoption of and education around the UN's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) has fuelled conversations about individual impact – how simple personal choices can help or hinder the achievement of sustainability targets.

As we become more attuned to the impact of our day-to-day activities, there is one area that can benefit from closer attention – how we coordinate and host events. Whether they are elaborate affairs such as conferences or

weddings, or simple house parties, dinners or community sports days, events can leave a significant footprint through their logistics, inputs and outputs. Research focusing on business events, in particular, suggests that the global events industry contributes as much as 10% of annual carbon emissions.¹

Even if we party or convene on a small scale, by deconstructing our events and making some simple and innovative decisions, we can deliver maximum impact for our guests, with minimal impact on our planet.

VENUE



Determine whether your event can be hosted virtually or facilitate hybrid attendance. Conferences, for example, can attract attendees from distant locations, including other countries. Offering virtual participation options will reduce the emissions associated with travel to the event.

When choosing a venue, consider the geographical spread of your guest/attendee list. Where possible, choose a central or easily accessible location that will minimise the average commute time for those attending.



Depending on the occasion and time of year, consider hosting your event in an outdoor space. This can reduce emissions associated with lighting and air conditioning, and can also reduce the need for artificial décor.



For indoor events, try to select venues outfitted with LED lighting. Adjust air conditioning if possible to optimise comfort rather than cooling.



GIFTS AND GIVEAWAYS

For branded swag, look for eco-friendly and sustainably sourced items.



Weigh the usefulness of the product against the cost – a cheap token that would get tossed within a day is essentially more costly than a more expensive item that people would use routinely.

For weddings and parties, consider seeds and plants as favours.

Purchasing local handcraft and goodies to give as tokens helps support cottage industries and small businesses. Work with suppliers, if possible, to use eco-friendly or minimal packaging.



COMMUNICATION

Where feasible, send digital invitations.



If printed invitations must be issued, print on recycled paper or consider seed paper which can be planted.

Keep prints to a minimum. For example, instead of multipage wedding invitations with event details, venue directions, registry information and RSVP cards, save some paper and set up a website with all the important details. Collecting digital RSVPs will also make it much easier to manage your guest list.



Instead of printed programmes and brochures, create digital ones and let guests use QR codes to access.

DÉCOR

Opt for potted plants or reusable décor items instead of fresh floral arrangements which must be discarded after use.



If fresh flowers are being used, try to integrate local varieties instead of imported blooms to reduce emissions associated with the supply chain.

Encourage recycling by installing appropriately labelled bins around the venue.



SUPPLIERS

Why not hire a DJ, musician or audiovisual supplier from within your community? Giving young talent an opportunity can help generate more potential job offers and support creative livelihoods.

Do some research into potential suppliers and try to choose businesses that operate by sustainability principles or offer sustainable products or services.

FOOD

Minimise food miles – use community food suppliers or prepare meals using locally sourced ingredients.

Offer plated food instead of buffets – this will help reduce food waste. Ask for RSVPs where possible to guide catering.

Have eco-friendly takeaway containers on hand to allow guests to carry home their unfinished meals or any extra available.



Reduce plastic waste by providing water coolers instead of bottled water. At parties or weddings, glass drinkware can be offered instead of disposable cups. At conferences, reusable water bottles can be given as swag.



Consider integrating more vegetarian dishes into the menu. A serving of meat compared to a serving of vegetables is linked to 20 times more greenhouse gas emissions.²

TALKING POINTS

Plant a tree or trees to commemorate your wedding or corporate event. If feasible, make it an activity in which all your guests can participate.



In lieu of door prizes or tokens, make donations to causes or organisations that support the SDGs. If making the donations on behalf of invitees, you can let them choose their preferred cause from a shortlist as they enter the event, then announce the totals that would be donated to each entity during the event.

Instead of traditional musical entertainment at your next conference lunch break, why not try a 'lunch and learn' session? Invite an expert to talk about a light topic – such as how to prepare more sustainable meals – or show a short 'green' film.



The next time you plan an event, give it some thought. There are many ways to deliver unique and memorable experiences for your guests while keeping sustainability at the centre.

¹ <https://www.nature.com/articles/s41467-021-27251-2>

² <https://www.economist.com/graphic-detail/2019/11/15/how-much-would-giving-up-meat-help-the-environment>