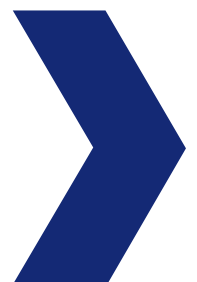




Latin America Destination Report: **Perceptions of Top 5 Cities**



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Approximately 1.3 billion people traveled internationally in 2017, marking the strongest growth in seven years (+7%).¹ This increase in travel worldwide has not only created a more sophisticated leisure traveler, but has also raised the bar for meeting planners to provide more local, authentic experiences for attendees. From bucket-list destinations like New Zealand to traditional favorites like Orlando and London, destination choice has a critical impact on the attendee experience. The challenge for meeting planners is to find a destination that offers the infrastructure and amenities needed for a meeting, but also excites and energizes well-traveled attendees.

Increasingly, Latin America is garnering attention as a compelling destination for meetings and events – even beyond the well-known resort towns. Anyone who has visited the sparkling blue waters of Cancun, explored the Costa Rican rainforests on zipline, or celebrated the annual Day of the Dead in Mexico understands the colorful heritage, natural beauty and warm hospitality of the region. With an increase in travel to Latin American countries expected in 2018 (between 2% and 6% growth),² many countries are embracing tourism as they rebound from years of declining economies. As individuals expand their familiarity and enthusiasm to travel to Latin America, and more multinational businesses expand into countries in Central and South America,

meeting planners are now increasingly looking at the region as a destination for meetings and events. Meeting planners are risk averse, and political unrest, concerns about safety, and border issues with the United States may have an impact on perceptions of the region. Conversely, the region boasts ease of air lift from the US and Canada, favorable exchange rates, and has so far been immune from major terrorist incidents experienced in other parts of the world. With so many factors potentially weighing on the minds of meeting planners, we conducted a survey of 232 US, Canadian*, and Latin American meeting professionals to understand how they currently perceive the region and its top destination cities.

TOP 5 Meeting Destinations



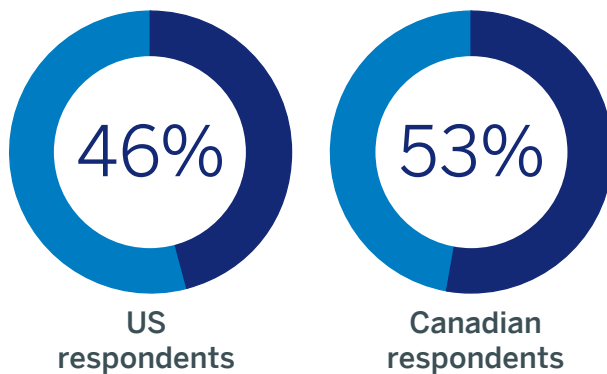
*To qualify, North American meeting planners had to operate international as well as domestic meetings and events.

The People and Culture Are Making a Big Impression

The overarching good news is that interest in holding meetings in the region is high – and increasing.

A survey conducted by American Express Meetings & Events and IBTM Americas found that there is growing awareness of Latin America among meeting planners. Additionally, 46% of US and 53% of Canadian respondents report that attendees are increasingly interested in the region as a destination.

Increasingly interested in Latin America as a destination



What is driving this increased interest over alternative destinations? While beaches and food are highly ranked characteristics that set the region apart, a whopping 79% of US respondents indicate that people are what makes Latin America special. Over 60% of Canadian and Latin American respondents feel the same. Latin America is also known for its unique blend of Indigenous, African, and Spanish traditions, so it is not surprising that culture is another characteristic planners find compelling. Constantly challenged to provide unique and authentic experiences, meeting planners view Latin America as a region that can deliver. According to the SKIFT report, Megatrends Defining Travel in 2018,³ interest in destinations in Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) will shift from well-known cultural experiences – like Machu Picchu and Day of the Dead, to more off-the-beaten path experiences in second-tier cities.

Direct Knowledge and Experience Make a Difference

The meeting planners included in this survey are experienced with planning international meetings, and there is a high degree of familiarity with the top destinations of Rio de Janeiro, Cancun, and Mexico City. Almost half of both US and Canadian planners surveyed have operated meetings in these cities in the past two years. Previous experience operating a meeting in a destination almost doubles the likelihood that a future meeting will be operated there. For example, only 33% of planners who had never operated a meeting in Rio de Janeiro would consider that city for future meetings, compared to 64% of planners who have operated meetings there previously. That correlation is even more pronounced in the less familiar destination of Cartagena, with planners who have held previous meetings there over 3 times more likely to consider Cartagena for future meetings than their counterparts.

While previous meeting experience in a destination is immensely helpful to future consideration, there are other opportunities for meeting planners to learn and experience an unfamiliar destination. Our research showed that among planners who have not operated meetings, but have personally traveled to a destination, the likelihood of future meetings sharply increases as well. Fostering professional connections and relationships with local businesses is another priority for meeting planners looking to expand their destination horizons. Building local relationships has a positive effect on planners' consideration of a destination for future meetings. In the top three destinations of Rio de Janeiro, Cancun, and Mexico City,

more planners report having local contacts in those destinations.

Familiarization trips are a standard industry practice and these results confirm the importance of this tool for destination marketers – planner familiarity and local contacts do have an impact on destination selection. These trips are a great learning tool for planners to see for themselves how a city can holistically cater to meetings, from hotels and ease of access to local cultural experiences and amenities. Attendance at industry shows is another way planners can make connections with local contacts, such as Convention and Visitor Bureaus (CVBs) and hoteliers. Fostering a next level understanding helps planners overcome uncertainty – a win-win for planners and for cities trying to capture more meeting spend.



Destination Perceptions of the Top 5 Cities

While the overall image of the region has an impact on perceptions, when it comes to choosing a destination, specific city-level characteristics highly factor into planner decisions. The following section provides snapshots of each of the top 5 cities in Latin America as reported in the American Express Meetings & Events 2019 Global Forecast. Based on survey responses, we have identified perceptions to capitalize on (✓) and concerns

to address (⚠). When evaluating each of these destinations for meetings and events, meeting professionals should not only consider their own planning needs, but also the perceptions of their attendees. Communication becomes even more important when attendees are traveling to an unfamiliar place to not only build excitement, but overcome any potential areas of concern.

Rio de Janeiro, Brazil

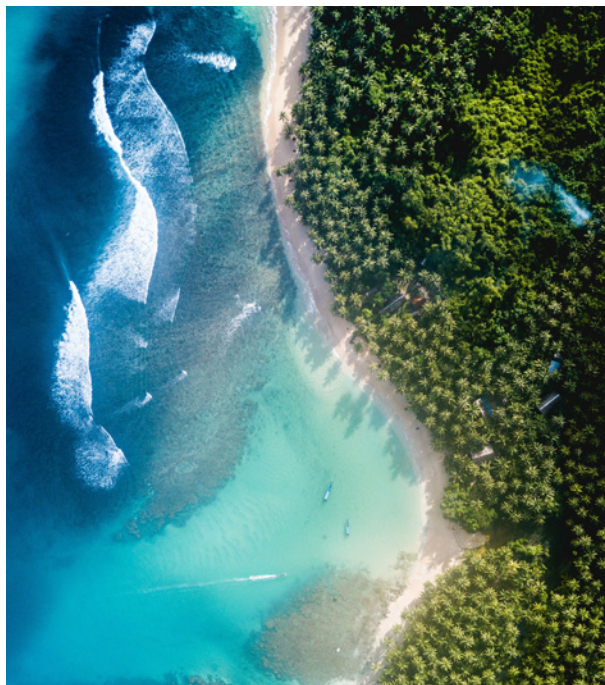
Host of the 2014 World Cup and 2016 Summer Olympics, Rio de Janeiro boasts new infrastructure, airport upgrades, and over 4,000 new hotel rooms ready to accommodate any group.* With the beaches of Ipanema and Copacabana and the iconic Christ statue, it's no wonder this breathtaking city tops the list of Latin America meeting destinations. Overall, US and LAC planners surveyed had a very positive impression of Rio, although safety concerns may factor into US planner decisions. In contrast, Canadian respondents perceived several areas of concern.



RIO DE JANEIRO, BRAZIL	US	CANADA	LAC
Has good air transportation options for attendees	✓		✓
Is a safe location	⚠	⚠	
Has modern amenities and conveniences	✓		✓
Has the necessary infrastructure to support meetings and events		⚠	✓
Has suppliers I know and trust	✓	⚠	
Is a destination attendees would be enthusiastic about	✓	⚠	✓
Is politically stable		⚠	⚠
Is an affordable destination			

Cancun/Riviera Maya, Mexico

The Caribbean beaches of Cancun and the surrounding area have long been a beloved vacation destination and, more recently, a top choice for incentive trips. Hotels have responded by purposefully designing meeting spaces for groups. These accommodating venues paired with the fresh seafood, fine dining, and the opportunity to explore Mayan history make Cancun a desirable destination.



Survey respondents perceived Cancun very favorably across the board, however, their concerns about safety are likely top of mind due to recent travel warnings advising of turf battles between criminal groups frequented by US citizens.⁴ This highly publicized increase in violence along with the uncertainty of a new Mexican president may be contributing to concerns from the US and Canada about political stability.

CANCUN/RIVIERA MAYA, MEXICO	US	CANADA	LAC
Has good air transportation options for attendees		✓	✓
Is a safe location		⚠	✓
Has modern amenities and conveniences	✓	⚠	✓
Has the necessary infrastructure to support meetings and events	✓	✓	✓
Has suppliers I know and trust		✓	✓
Is a destination attendees would be enthusiastic about			✓
Is politically stable	⚠	⚠	
Is an affordable destination		✓	

Mexico City, Mexico

Mexico City is the largest city in Latin America and offers groups the opportunity to experience modern amenities combined with the rich traditions and heritage of Mexico. Not only does it have the most museums of any city in the world, Mexico City ranks fourth on the list for number of theaters after New York, London, and Toronto. It is also home to four World Heritage Sites.* Safety is a concern among planners we surveyed. Unlike the US and LAC planners, Canadian planners are concerned about amenities, political stability, and trustworthy suppliers.



MEXICO CITY, MEXICO	US	CANADA	LAC
Has good air transportation options for attendees	✓		✓
Is a safe location	⚠	⚠	⚠
Has modern amenities and conveniences	✓	⚠	✓
Has the necessary infrastructure to support meetings and events			✓
Has suppliers I know and trust		⚠	✓
Is a destination attendees would be enthusiastic about	✓		✓
Is politically stable		⚠	
Is an affordable destination	✓		✓

São Paulo, Brazil

São Paulo is one of the largest cities in Latin America. The São Paulo Convention Center, also known as Anhembi Parque, is Latin America’s largest convention complex. It has 400,000 square feet of space, including the Celso Furtado Auditorium for 2,500 persons.* A city this size certainly has many renowned hotel, venue, and dining options, however, São Paulo may be overshadowed by the flair and modern updates that planners find in Rio de Janeiro. This lack of a “newness” may be contributing to the concerns planners have about the destination.



SÃO PAULO, BRAZIL	US	CANADA	LAC
Has good air transportation options for attendees		✓	
Is a safe location		⌊	⌊
Has modern amenities and conveniences		⌊	⌊
Has the necessary infrastructure to support meetings and events		⌊	⌊
Has suppliers I know and trust	✓		⌊
Is a destination attendees would be enthusiastic about	⌊	✓	⌊
Is politically stable			
Is an affordable destination		⌊	⌊

Cartagena, Colombia

Founded in 1533 as the first Spanish colony in the Americas, Cartagena is a UNESCO World Heritage site. Within the walls of the city, Colonial era forts and buildings provide unique venues for meeting planners. As noted by respondents, Cartagena has great air lift for US and Canada. Rafael Nunez International Airport (CTG) has direct flights to Fort Lauderdale, Miami, and New York City, and seasonally to Montreal and Toronto.* Familiarity with Cartagena was the lowest across respondents, but planners have an overall positive impression that will likely only improve with increased experience with the destination.



CARTAGENA, COLOMBIA	US	CANADA	LAC
Has good air transportation options for attendees	✓	✓	
Is a safe location		⚠	
Has modern amenities and conveniences		✓	
Has the necessary infrastructure to support meetings and events	✓		✓
Has suppliers I know and trust		✓	
Is a destination attendees would be enthusiastic about		✓	
Is politically stable		✓	
Is an affordable destination		✓	

Conclusion

Paulo Coelho, a well-known Brazilian novelist wrote, *“Be brave. Take risks. Nothing can substitute experience.”* This advice rings true for meeting planners considering a new destination. It is important to be aware of perceptions (your own and those of your attendees), but sometimes the only way to find hidden gems is to get out of your comfort zone and explore somewhere new. Trying a new city first-hand, either during a site visit or familiarization trip, can help to overcome uncertainties and open new possibilities. Increasing pressure on planners to provide unique, yet budget-friendly experiences, makes the culture, hospitality and natural beauty of Latin America an appealing destination.



1. World Tourism Organization - <http://media.unwto.org/press-release/2018-01-15/2017-international-tourism-results-highest-seven-years>
 2. World Tourism Organization - <http://media.unwto.org/press-release/2018-06-25/international-tourism-exceeds-expectations-first-months-2018>
 3. Skift Megatrends 2018 – <https://skift.com/wp-content/themes/skift/img/megatrends-2018//Skift-Megatrends-2018.pdf>
 4. US Department of State - <https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/international-travel/International-Travel-Country-Information-Pages/Mexico.html>
- * Cvent Meeting and Event Planning City Guides.



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The newly launched IBTM Americas is the international tradeshow connecting the meetings and events industry across North America, South America, and beyond with the aim of inspiring the meetings and events industry to deliver exceptional experiences. The IBTM Americas philosophy is based on three pillars:

- **Inspiring business success**
To strive to progress the industry and help you do business more effectively by making it simple for buyers and suppliers to connect.
- **Inspiring future thinking**
To provide insight into future trends and changing customer needs to help industry professionals make informed decisions about the future of their meetings and events.
- **Inspiring people**
To create a hub for the meetings and events community providing education, networking opportunities, and career development

IBTM Americas is the annual must-attend event for the industry that take place in Mexico City.

www.ibtmamericas.com

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