

# Event entertainment: how to keep your delegates happy

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Events and conferences aren't only about content. Delegates expect a 360° experience. No matter how great your speakers are, if that in-between time around sessions and in the evening falls flat, engagement levels drop too.

When you respect the breaks as much as the panels and posters, you give your event the space to breathe and bloom. Keep your attendees inspired and involved with this simple guide to managing event entertainment.



## **Authentic experiences**

Destination is the #2 decision-driver when delegates choose a conference. Help them make the most of it, with downtime activities that connect them to genuine local experiences.

When you're supporting teambuilding, climbing and raft-building are great – if you're somewhere rural and rugged. In urban spaces, try a city scavenger hunt that takes them to key sights. International visitors especially appreciate historic locations, so choose places to visit that connect with the conference topic. Food and drink bring people together with ease: in the Midlands, why not try a visit to a local craft brewery, or a chocolate workshop?

**Takeaway:** throw out the standard list of ice-breakers and teambuilding activities, and think about place. Give delegates genuine local experiences that connect them personally to the history and atmosphere of the destination.



## Eat well

Conference food can be hit or miss, especially at longer events; no one enjoys three days of buffet sandwiches.

However, food also really matters. Be creative with your menu planning. Follow the high street and take a more relaxed approach: international street food and plant-based main courses are current big hitters, and they support a wide range of dietary needs. Demonstrate a commitment to health and wellbeing with fruit available at all times, and evening events that don't rely on alcohol. And don't forget location: if your event's in Birmingham, why wouldn't you serve curry?

**Takeaway:** people care about food, so show them you care too. Steer away from repetition and exploit foodie trends to keep it feeling fresh.



## Include everyone

Accessibility is a key expectation for attendees. But too often, ‘accessible’ is taken to mean ‘wheelchair-accessible’. Genuine accessibility needs to meet the needs of all users, in a much more far-reaching way.

That means not only finding venues and using resources that can be accessed by those with disabilities, including a wide range of physical and mental impairments. It also means understanding the variety of barriers your delegates may face in terms of interaction. How many languages are spoken among your attendees? How far have they travelled to be here? What will their experience be like?

**Takeaway:** pre-empt the varied, often invisible needs of your delegates. Be mindful of jetlag. Use icons in signage wherever possible, and minimise travel between venues. Offer private spaces for prayer, or quiet rest.



## Low-key networking

Some of your delegates will thrive on meeting new people, making connections and working a room. Others will feel like they ought to – while hating every second.

For those who find it all a little too competitive, building in activities that feel unstructured can provide invaluable support. As well as planned task-based group activities like building a load-bearing structure or the tallest tower, scatter open-ended tasks around your open spaces. Building blocks and art materials – with prompts like ‘how do you feel?’ or ‘decorate your conference badge’ or left completely open to interpretation - promote free creativity better than single-goal-oriented tasks. They give your less socially confident attendees a focus during downtime. They’re also great conversation starters.

**Takeaway:** informal activities promote participation from everyone, by taking the pressure of performance away. Provide simple open-ended hands-on activities in your open spaces.



### **Many times, but not every time**

A selection of varied, involving, fun activities is important. But leaving space for informal chat and casual downtime is also important.

Don't be tempted to fill every moment. You're here to facilitate networking opportunities, not stymie them. A long conference over three or four days will quickly become overwhelming and exhausting if there isn't space to breathe and absorb the new information.

Takeaway: for longer conferences, frontload your event entertainment plans. Keep the first few days busy, then leave space for reflection (and catching up on sleep!).