



## KEY FINDINGS

# DESTINATION REPUTATION:

## RESPONDING TO SOCIETAL ISSUES

# FOREWARD

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In an increasingly complex global environment, destinations face a range of challenges that shape their reputation and influence visitor and event demand. From geopolitical shifts and social issues to natural disasters and public safety concerns, various factors play a critical role in how destinations are perceived. More importantly, they impact how meeting and event planners make decisions, ultimately affecting economic opportunities for destinations worldwide. To better understand these dynamics, Destinations International partnered with Future Partners to conduct a comprehensive research study exploring the influence of reputation, public sentiment and societal issues on destination selection. The study, funded by the Destinations International Foundation, offers important insight into the impact of societal issues on destination reputation and equips destination leaders with actionable insights to proactively manage perceptions, address emerging challenges and enhance their positioning in a rapidly evolving marketplace.

A multi-method approach was employed to provide a comprehensive and holistic perspective on these issues. The study includes:

- **An online survey of 400 meeting planners** conducted between September 18 and October 1, 2024, through a partner panel provider, Sago.
- **In-depth interviews with 12 meeting planners** conducted between September 23 and October 7, 2024, to provide qualitative insights and deeper context into the factors shaping their decisions.
- **An analysis of American meeting traveler sentiment** drawn from a nationally representative survey of 967 adult American travelers conducted between August 16 and 25, 2024. This data provides a broader view of how those who attend meetings perceive destinations.

These findings present a roadmap for destination organizations, offering data-driven strategies to anticipate reputational risks, build resilience and enhance destination appeal. By leveraging these insights, destinations can take a proactive role in shaping perception, supporting event selection and ensuring continued success in the competitive global tourism and meetings industry.

As you engage with the insights summarized in this report, we encourage you to reflect on how they apply to your destination and how they can inform your strategy moving forward.

The full report and other resources are available online here or by clicking below:  
**<https://destinationsinternational.org/destination-reputation>**



**ACCESS FULL REPORT**





This research was made possible through the support of the Destinations International Foundation, whose mission is to drive innovation and provide critical resources that strengthen the future of destination organizations. The foundation champions forward-thinking initiatives that enable destination leaders to navigate change with insight, strategy and resilience. We acknowledge their commitment to industry research and extend sincere thanks to all foundation supporters who make initiatives like this possible.









# KEY FINDINGS

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## **Safety and Politics are Non-Negotiable**

Safety is a top priority for meeting planners, influencing their decisions in ways that go beyond crime rates. Perception, political climate and policies that affect rights, values or accessibility all play a role in whether a destination is chosen or avoided. In today's landscape, ensuring a destination feels welcoming and aligned with attendee expectations is just as important as physical safety itself.

## **Trust Is Built Through Transparency and Engagement**

Meeting planners expect honesty. Destinations that acknowledge their challenges and demonstrate real efforts to address concerns and improve perceptions earn their trust. Transparency about safety, reputation and policy concerns is essential, but actions speak louder than words. Planners value proactive site visits to see destinations firsthand, marketing that reflects genuine progress and data-driven narratives that highlight improvements while keeping challenges in focus.

## **Incentives and Advertising Work, But Not Alone**

Planners recognize that incentives like cash offers or concessions can influence decisions, but they are not a universal solution. Consistent advertising plays a far greater role in reshaping perceptions, especially for destinations working to overcome past reputation challenges. Strategic storytelling and sustained visibility can be game-changers for destinations looking to shift perception.

## **Collaboration and Persistence Pay Off**

Destinations that prioritize long-term relationships with planners and stakeholders often see the greatest returns. Success stories within the study show that persistence, paired with exceptional site visits, can turn initial hesitation into lasting partnerships. Planners also highlight the power of cross-sector collaboration, where destination organizations, local businesses and venues work together to create seamless, welcoming experiences. When destinations foster a united front and demonstrate a strong community commitment, planners are far more likely to advocate for them.

## **Empower Planners to Sell Your Destination**

Planners often face the challenge of trying to persuade boards or decision-makers to overcome preconceived notions about a destination. To advocate effectively, they need the right tools to counter objections. The most effective strategies include data-driven insights to address concerns, peer connections with those who have successfully hosted events and emotional narratives that highlight social impact and community benefits. However, planners can only do so much. When destination organizations take the lead in providing actionable resources, they make the decision process easier and significantly increase their chances of being chosen.

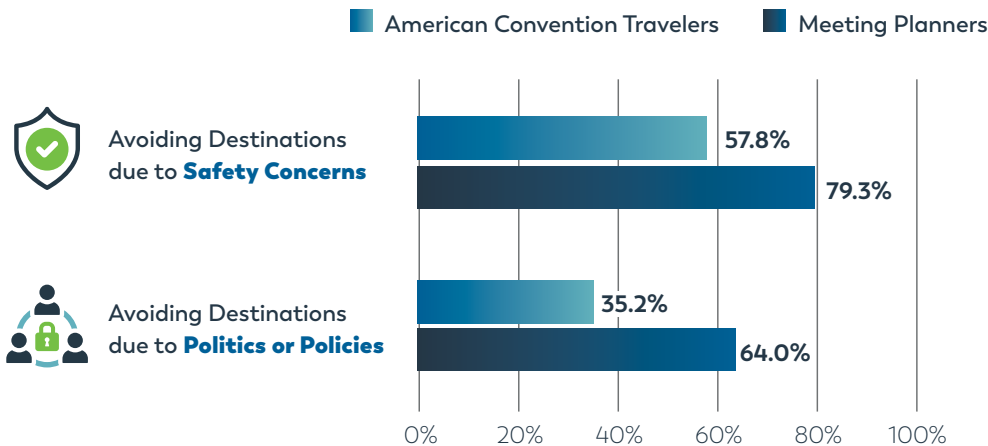
# KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

## Safety and Politics are Non-Negotiable

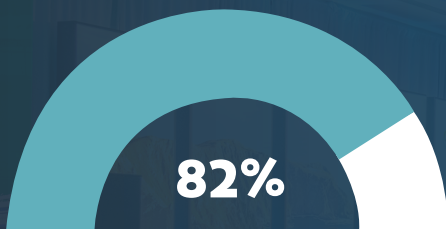
Planners are often tasked with persuading boards or decision-makers who hold preconceived notions about a destination. They need the right tools to counter objections and advocate effectively. The most successful strategies include:

- **Data and counter-evidence:** Provide credible information that addresses negative perceptions head-on.
- **Peer connections:** Enable planners to speak with others who have successfully hosted events in your destination.
- **Emotional narratives:** Showcase how choosing your destination supports social impact, community development and/or positive change.

Planners are clear that they can only do so much. When destination organizations take the lead in providing actionable resources, the process becomes easier and the destination becomes more likely to succeed.



While safety concerns is paramount (57.8%), still about one-in-three (31.6%) American travelers actively avoid traveling to destinations where local policies do not align with their values—a behavior that is more pronounced among group meetings travelers (35.2%). Comparing back to meeting planner sentiment, **avoidance of destinations due to safety concerns (79.3%) and politics (64.0%)** are much more prevalent among the business segment.



**Four-in-five planners have reconsidered a meeting destination due to issues impacting reputation, with the most common reasons:**

**54.9%**

Personal Safety Concerns

**35.1%**

Social Unrest (e.g. protest, strikes)

**33.8%**

Drug Activity



# GUIDANCE FOR ACTION

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1

Create toolkits for planners, including talking points, data sheets and case studies.

2

Facilitate peer-to-peer Q&A sessions for planners to hear success stories firsthand.

3

Frame your destination's story as part of a broader narrative about progress, safety and opportunity.

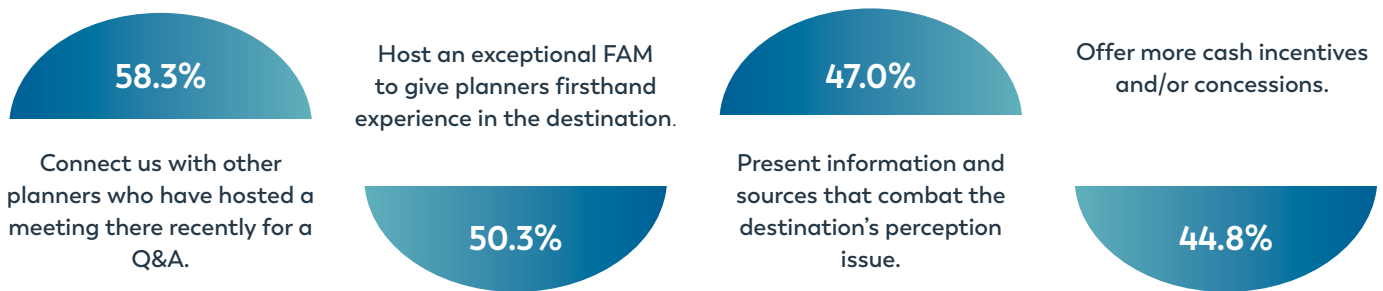
## Trust Is Built Through Transparency and Engagement

Meeting planners demand honesty. Destinations that openly address their challenges and show actionable steps toward resolving perception issues win planners' trust. Transparency about what's being done to address safety, reputation or policy concerns is crucial.

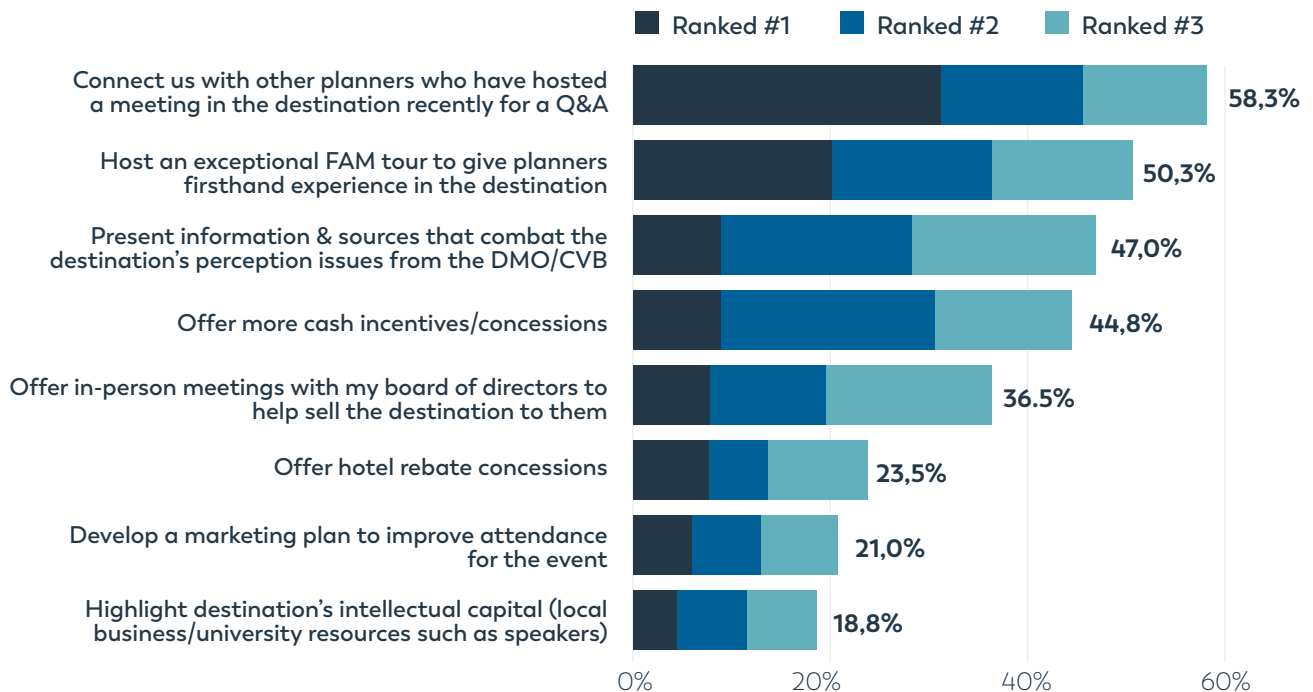
### Planners value:

- Proactive site visits to assess destinations firsthand.
- Advertising campaigns that reflect a genuine commitment to improvement.
- Evidence-based narratives that highlight progress while acknowledging challenges.

## Top Ranked Factors for Overcoming Reputational Issues (% Ranking Each as Top 3 Out of 8 Options)



## Key Factors Impacting Meeting Planners Destination Selection Amid Issues







# GUIDANCE FOR ACTION

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1

Promote open and honest communication about challenges and how you're addressing them.

2

Organize familiarization (FAM) trips to provide planners with firsthand insights into your destination's offerings.

3

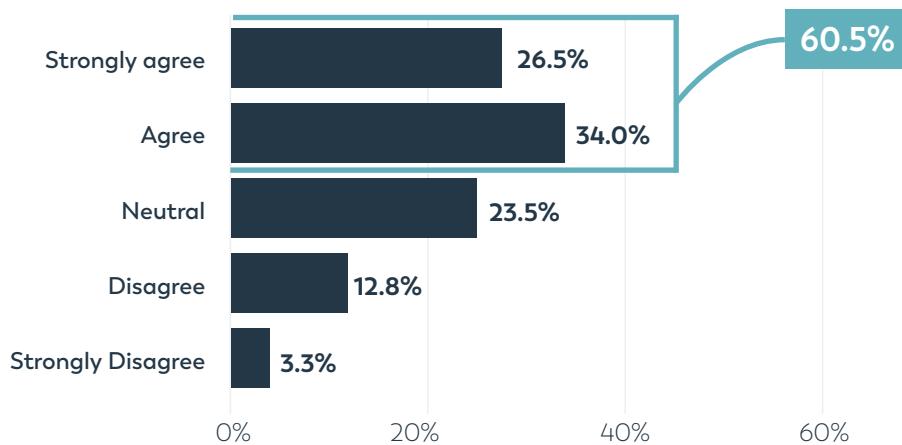
Align your marketing efforts to emphasize transformation efforts and ongoing community investment.

## Incentives and Advertising Work, But Not Alone

Planners acknowledge that incentives such as cash offers or concessions can “move the needle,” but they’re not a one-size-fits-all solution. Meanwhile, consistent advertising campaigns significantly reshape perceptions of destinations, particularly those with prior reputation challenges. Planners who recall seeing ads for a destination are much more likely to perceive it positively.

- Planners have successfully convinced decision-makers to select a previously rejected destination by offering a strong business case, evidence or emotional appeal.
- Ad recall has proven especially effective for destinations that have faced perception issues previously and rebuilt their reputation through targeted marketing.

## Cash Incentives and Concessions Improve Consideration of Destinations with Reputational Issues



**If you were advising a meetings destination that is dealing with challenging perception issues on how to rehabilitate their brand, what would you recommend they do?**





# GUIDANCE FOR ACTION

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1

Pair incentives with robust narratives about why the destination is a great choice, blending emotional and data-driven appeals.

2

Use consistent, memorable advertising to stay top-of-mind and reinforce positive perceptions.

3

Leverage testimonials and success stories in your ad campaigns to showcase your commitment to improvement.

## Collaboration and Persistence Pay Off

Destinations that invest in long-term relationships with planners and stakeholders often see significant returns. Destination organizations that demonstrate persistence, coupled with a commitment to creating exceptional site visits, can overcome initial resistance.

**Planners also emphasize the importance of cross-sector collaboration within the destination:**

- Unified efforts from CVBs, local businesses and venues create seamless experiences that build trust.
- Planners are more likely to advocate for destinations where they see a strong, welcoming community effort.



**What fuels a destination's reputation for excellence?**



**Think about a destination's reputation as a place for group meetings and events. What elements impact their reputation among meeting planners?**





# GUIDANCE FOR ACTION

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1

Collaborate with hotels, venues and local businesses to deliver a unified and welcoming experience.

2

Maintain consistent outreach to planners, even during periods of hesitation or resistance.

3

Showcase your destination's community strengths through storytelling campaigns.

## Empower Planners to Sell Your Destination

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Planners clear that they can only do so much. When destination organizations take the lead in providing actionable resources, the process becomes easier and the destination becomes more likely to succeed.



**Think about a destination's reputation as a place for group meetings and events. What elements impact their reputation among meeting planners? (continued)**





# GUIDANCE FOR ACTION

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Facilitate peer-to-peer Q&A sessions for planners to hear success stories firsthand.

3

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# ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

**This study was initiated and launched by Destinations International in collaboration with Future Partners. We are especially grateful to the Destinations International Foundation, whose support made this research possible.**



## About Destinations International

Destinations International is the world's largest and most respected resource for destination organizations, convention and visitors bureaus (CVBs) and tourism boards. With more than 8,000 members and partners from over 750 destinations, the association represents a powerful forward-thinking and collaborative community around the world. For more information, visit [destinationsinternational.org](https://destinationsinternational.org).

## Future Partners

### About Future Partners

Future Partners was founded by Dave Bratton and Erin Francis-Cummings in San Francisco, California, in 2003. It is a team of market researchers that work with over 250 organizations and travel brands around the U.S. and the world to provide insights and strategies that capture hearts, minds and market share. Future Partners connects human behavior and understanding to bring the future of travel within reach. For more information visit [futurepartners.com](https://futurepartners.com).



### About the Destinations International Foundation

The Destinations International Foundation is a nonprofit organization dedicated to empowering destination organizations globally by providing education, research, advocacy and leadership development. The Foundation is classified as a charitable organization under Section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Service Code and all donations are tax-deductible. For more information visit [destinationsinternational.org/about-foundation](https://destinationsinternational.org/about-foundation).



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