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Staying power

The French capital has shown its resilience in the past year, and with the C&I industry standing defiantly behind it, Paris' appeal is undiminished.
By Jack Carter

Talking points

With its iconic images and standards of service, Paris offers amazing experiences

It should have been a year of excitement, with several C&I developments coming to fruition, not to mention a major football tournament just around the corner. Instead, 2015 was defined by two tragic events that will live forever in the memory of Parisians around the world.

The reaction from the events industry after the attacks in January was defiant and spirit raising. "Tragic as the circumstances are, the industry should not be dictated to by acts of terrorism," said Conference Care director Andrew Deakin at the time.

UNWAVERING SUPPORT

These sentiments were echoed in November following the latest attacks, with event planners unwilling to let their support for a destination with a proud C&I heritage waver. "Paris is a beautiful city that offers an amazing experience," says Jane Jones, director of project management DRP. "There's no way we would ever rule it out."

Victoria Capper, head of events at European private equity firm Permira, says the company's

perception of Paris hasn't changed either: "The tragedy last year hasn't affected our usage or my willingness to use it again."

The Paris Convention & Visitors Bureau revealed that soon after the November attacks corporates were phoning up to cancel events, but it didn't take long for things to stabilise and for business leads to return.

Corine Bernadou, C&I marketing and communication manager, Paris Convention & Visitors Bureau, tells *C&IT* the UK market has maintained a steady level of visitors and leads are still being generated for 2016 and beyond.

"The Paris Convention Bureau has received many supportive and encouraging messages from our clients who are high on emotion for Parisian suppliers," she adds.

Quality of product in Paris hasn't diminished either, with the vast array of innovative meeting spaces, palace-status hotels and Michelin-star restaurants still reaching their usual heights of service. DRP recently placed a group of senior corporate delegates in the Four Seasons Hotel George V Paris, located just off the Champs-Élysées. Jones says that the venue was under pressure to wow and it "absolutely hit the mark".

The cloud Paris currently sits under is defined by a concern for security. However, director of Purple Dog Solutions Chris Clarke argues that travelling to the city isn't as risky as some clients may think. "I believe that Paris is probably safer for events than ever before, which is another reason to placate anyone with security concerns."





London itself has had to mend after the tragic events of 11 years ago, which brought the two cities closer together. “After what happened in 2005, the UK market feels Paris is a kindred spirit, which means these attacks won’t stop us from taking events there,” says Clarke.

SPOILT FOR CHOICE

Like London, Paris is constantly unveiling new hotels and venues while existing favourites are continuously being renovated to stay at the top of the game.

In the past year, AccorHotels opened the Sofitel Paris Le Faubourg in the elegant St Honore district while the five-star 37-room Roch Hotel readies for its spring unveiling. Viparis has also announced plans to introduce a 440-room hotel on the Porte de Versailles site as part of a modernisation project.

Located on the Paris Seine looking up to the Charles de Gaulle Bridge will be Paris’ first floating hotel. There will hardly be a better-placed bed in the city when the Off-Paris Seine opens in the spring, with 54 rooms, four suites and a 50ft outdoor swimming pool.

One of the openings of the year is set to be Hotel de Crillon, which, after being placed under new ownership with Rosewood Hotels & Resorts, was meant to open last year. Ongoing renovations will keep excited event planners waiting a bit longer.

In October, the Bercy Arena reopened to reveal Paris’ latest major event space, with a maximum capacity of 20,000 seats. About 4,000m² of VIP areas and 52 box seats are also available for corporate events, while its Galerie will have 14 dining options.

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PARIS

WHY I LOVE PARIS...

JANINA MONAGHAN

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“The great thing about Paris is that the majority of landmarks are all within walking distance of each other”

SALI SASAKI; JÉRÔME BLUM



HOTELS AND MEETING SPACE

The **Intercontinental Paris Le Grand** is stunning. If you are looking for a hotel with meeting space that has the extra ‘wow’ factor, this would be it. The Opera ballroom is a listed building and would be perfect for any event.

Hôtel Thérèse, located within walking distance of the Louvre, offers a smaller boutique feel with just 40 rooms. Its Parisian elegance is coupled with a modern industrial feel and it is perfectly placed for an incentive trip.

RESTAURANTS

A dinner boat cruise along the Seine is the perfect way



to experience the city after sunset. Cruises can pass by the major landmarks which make great talking points over a meal.

A must-visit in Paris is **Ferdi**. The menu is extensive and will suit all appetites but their burgers are the biggest talking point. The attention to detail is incredible, from the food to the atmosphere with model cars and old photographs placed around the eclectic interior.

Allard, located near Notre Dame, is a traditional and authentic French restaurant, both in atmosphere and menu. The eatery, set up as a sequence of little rooms, is the perfect setting for smaller groups.



INCENTIVES

The great thing about Paris is that the majority of landmarks are all within walking distance of each other. Walking is the best way to take in the culture but as walking isn’t for everyone, boat rides along the Seine allow you to hop on and hop off at various must-see attractions.

The island where Notre Dame sits is often one of the more peaceful places in Paris: the squares are the perfect place to learn pétanque, a game of boules, accompanied by French wine and nibbles for a relaxing but competitive afternoon.

Not everyone is lucky enough to visit the city in glorious weather so it is a good idea to have indoor activities available that are typically Parisian. A cooking class for groups reveals the secrets of authentic macarons (not to be confused with macaroons) and a chance to experiment with new flavours.



Unforgettable (above from left) Intercontinental Le Grand; Ferdi; Notre Dame; (inset) the Seine