



Tips for Innovative Meetings and Events (T.I.M.E.)

Topic: Culture and Color

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## Welcome

With Halloween fast approaching, I am getting ready to celebrate the unusual -- found in the form of haunted houses, unexplained mysteries, and supernatural forces. So this October issue deals with the unusual venues and how to utilize local color and culture to improve your meeting. Smart Meetings in their August issue identified one meeting industry trend as an interest in heritage, history and local color. This is reinforced by a study from the Travel Industry Association of America, which indicated that 81% of US adults who traveled in the past year included historic or cultural activities on their trips.

In the corporate and association world, we can capitalize on the interest of 118 million travellers by incorporating culture and color into our meetings.

Unusual venues and the use of local color need not be spooky or scary. This issue of Tips for Innovative Meetings is intended to spur your thinking about culture, local color and customs.

On a personal note, after 3 years of appearing as a witch for Halloween, my daughter has opted to be an Oompah-Loompah from Willy Wonka and the Chocolate Factory. Talk about unusual/obscure -- I won't find that costume at any store. I am in the midst of designing the costume. Watch for it for sale on E-bay after Halloween!

Sue  
[Sue Tinnish](#)

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## Coordinating Color and Culture

By coordinating local color, an unusual venue or local culture into your meeting, you can create a memorable meeting experience. Here are four tips to assist in a successful design:

1. Integration and Immersion -- Integration will help you avoid the cliché. Start with the goals and objectives of the meeting and create links between your setting and the meeting. Themes are an easy tool for weaving the setting into the meeting. I also like to use metaphors and analogies. You may not have thought about these figures of speech since your days in high school English but they are very useful. Metaphors are a figure of speech by which a thing is spoken of as being that which it only resembles. For example, "My dentist is a butcher" creates a very sensory, fully-loaded image for you. Metaphors can do the same thing for a meeting. If you were to hear someone say "I'm helping the other person to reach a destination", you would know that they were talking about a symbolic destination. Generating effective metaphor can be as simple as falling off a log. Find ways to create unconscious associations with your meeting message.

An analogy is a comparison between two things. Analogies are helpful in pointing out relationships that may not be visible at first. You might remember analogies on standardized tests in the form: shoe is to foot as tire is to \_\_\_\_\_. (The answer is wheel.)

I like to use more open-ended, unfinished analogies to spur my own thinking. Some unfinished analogies are:

- o A good meeting is like a treat not a trick because...
- o Meeting design is like an uncarved pumpkin because...

Metaphors and analogies can work in conjunction with a theme or be completely independent. Just give some thought to "Why is fill in the blank like our meeting objective or specific message?". Or what type of unconscious positive associations can I create with my meeting?

With a smart "tie-in" you will be strategically focused and your extra effort will be memorable rather than sticking out like a sore thumb.

2. Advance Notice -- Incorporate your venue and local culture into all your marketing efforts. This will separate your message from the clutter and reinforce the message. Moreover, it will provide your participants with an idea of things to come. This can pique their interest and also prepare them for a "different" flavor of meeting.
3. Exercise Sensitivity -- Embracing local culture and rituals requires that you exhibit some sensitivity to how it will be perceived.
4. Understand Policies -- Unusual venues may have specific restrictions. Ask about the use of equipment, props, and decorations. Insure that your participants are also aware of any restrictions.

5. Create an Experience -- The beauty of local color and culture is the heightened creation of an experience. The business of meetings is not as simple as "throwing" the message at the participants. Multi-generational, frenetic participants with limited attention spans require crafting of the message in a way that reaches them. One solution is creating a meeting more akin to an experience than a lecture. I have recommended this book before and suggest you devour it and live it.



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### The "Treat" of an Unusual Venue

The real treat of using an unusual venue is the opportunity for great creativity. You can discover other treats in unusual venues too:

- **Save Money** Unusual venues offer the benefit of typically offering built in decor, entertainment or activity for your participants. Ideally, this can allow you to save money on these other areas. Kathy Horky, Director of Corporate Events at The Chicago Historical Society, says, "There is a misconception that off-premise meetings and events are more expensive. That is not necessarily true when you consider the entire package (parking, no minimums, no room set-up fees, etc.)."
- **Build your meeting** An exhibit or venue can serve as a theme or metaphor. For example, a museum's exhibition can serve as your theme. Or a racetrack offers great opportunities to build tie-ins to your meeting with the Winners Circle or Victory Lane.
- **Pre-existing Conditions** With an unusual venue you can take advantage of existing decor (lighting, exhibits), infrastructure (architecture), and the mood-setting aspects of the venue.
- **Customization** Unusual venues are usually well-equipped and eager to help you create a memorable meeting or event. They often have a wealth of resources to assist you. Kathy Horky from the Chicago Historical Society, provides a concrete example: "For one of clients, we pulled copies of photographs from our archives that helped support the objectives of the meeting."
- **Reinforce your message** on conscious and unconscious levels. We learn 99% of

what we know unconsciously. (Think of every jingle or slogan you know and will never forget despite the fact that you never set out to "learn" it at all.) Take advantage of all senses to build your message on all levels.

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## Options, Options, Options

You can find local color and local culture in many places. Here are some options for you to consider:

- Cities and Locations like New Orleans, Montreal or Hawaii
- Theme Parks
- Sports Venues Ballparks, stadiums, racetracks (horses and cars), or arenas. There is also Big League Dreams Sports Parks which has replicas of real baseball stadiums. The company offers replicas of Wrigley Field (we're still grieving in Chicago over the Cubs), Fenway Park, Yankee Stadium, and more that can be rented for special events and meetings. [Big League Dreams](http://www.bigleaguedreams.com) or [www.bigleaguedreams.com](http://www.bigleaguedreams.com)
- The Great Outdoors
- Museums It's easy to think of "traditional" museums, but you can also consider unusual museums. Meeting & Conventions in August of this year listed three -- The Recreational Vehicle and Manufactured Housing Hall of Fame (Elkhart, Indiana), The Dr. Pepper Museum (Waco, Texas), and Stark's Vacuum Cleaner Museum (Portland, Oregon).
- Universities
- Conference Centers Conference Centers are devoted to meetings. They can offer high-technology, state-of-the-art meeting spaces that will create a distraction free environment. You can find conference centers in historic mansions, university settings, urban environments and resorts. I have my personal biases on this subject; you can research conference centers at [International Association of Conference Centers](http://www.iacconline.org) or [www.iacconline.org](http://www.iacconline.org).
- Cultural Venues like performing arts centers (symphony), aquariums, zoos, planetariums, libraries, pavilions, and theaters. Also consider Presidential Libraries as a venue option.
- Traveling Options You can use a companies like Rail Cruise's train for meetings, incentives, road shows. [Rail Cruise America](http://www.railcruiseamerica.com) or [www.railcruiseamerica.com](http://www.railcruiseamerica.com). You can opt for a cruise.
- More Ideas Wineries (wine grapes are actually grown in all 50 states in the United States), Cooking Schools, Castles, Churches, Farms, and Country Inns

This list is not to suggest that you must avoid hotels. Many hotels and resorts have started adopting local heritage, culture and history. Hotels will often partner with local historical societies and museums. Local color and culture is being incorporated within their walls, too. Local artists' work adorn the walls. Local foods and dishes are beginning to appear on hotel restaurant menus. Hotels are also embracing their history and restoring not just renovating.

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## Think Locally

What can you do to create a regional flair in your meeting or event? Here are some suggestions:

1. Networking activity tasting a regional specialty (food, wine, beer, chocolate)
2. Take advantage of local culture by using a museum, cultural center or art gallery for an evening event
3. Consider local festivals as a source of entertainment, theme or as a source of color for your meeting. Again don't overlook the tricks of analogies and metaphors.
4. Dine-A-rounds as an option to allow your participants to experience the locality and sample local specialties.
5. Ethnic food or regional specialties to enrich the experience and reach a jaded audience who has eaten a lot of plated chicken dinners and lunches.

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## Freebies:

**FREEBIES:** For people involved as professional meeting or event planners, this Freebie comes from Barbara Panetta of Barbara Panetta and Company Special Events. If you are trying to build your business or find a job, she offers the suggestion of volunteering at a local museum or unusual venue. It will certainly educate you about the possibilities of using an unusual venue (Barbara works at the Chicago Children's Museum) and it may be the way for you to get your foot in the door for a paying gig.

**More FREEBIES** Build an experience with an unusual venue. This template will offer you a checklist of items to consider for creating a holistic experience that takes full advantage of local color and culture. Click here [Experiential Template](#) or send an email to stinnish@ameritech.net.

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## Future T.I.M.E.

Thank you to those who came to see Mike Hamilton and me at the ITME Motivation Show in Chicago. Mike and I presented [The Measurement Exchange: Real World Answers to your Questions](#) and [Can't We All Get Along: Increasing Program Value with Effective Supplier Teams](#).

Tips for Innovative Meetings and Events will be accepting limited advertising. If you are interested in using this e-newsletter as a way to reach a targeted audience, please e-mail Ron Hopkins at rchopkins@ameritech.net for more details. [Or Click Here](#)

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