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Congresses return to Vienna: Austria Center Vienna expecting strong summer for events

Behind the scenes at the nation's largest vaccination and testing centre, the Austria Center Vienna is gearing up for a packed year for congresses ahead. After two years of postponements and a new focus on online formats, this year will finally see a return for numerous congresses with thousands of on-site participants. To ensure that these events play out as safely as possible, the majority of them will be held during the extended summer months. The Wiener Spielefest has also been brought forward to October. Meanwhile, the vaccination and testing facility at the venue will remain in operation until the spring at least.

"We are already busy this year preparing for the phased return of large-scale congresses. Our experiences of numerous national and international restrictions last winter led us to schedule as many events as possible between April and October," confirmed Susanne Baumann-Söllner, Managing Director of the Austria Center Vienna. In accordance with the new timeline, the General Assembly of the European Geosciences Union (EGU) will take place at the end of May, followed by the European Society of Human Genetics (ESHG) Conference and European Academy of Neurology (EAN) Congress in June, and the European Congress of Radiology (ECR) in July 2022. Additional highlights include the Baukongress at the end of April, the Annual Meeting of the International Continence Society (ICS) and the Society for Arthroscopy and Joint-Surgery (AGA) Congress in September, with the Annual Meeting of the German Society for Hematology and Medical Oncology (DGHO) and European College of Neuropsychopharmacology (ECNP) scheduled for October. Forced to skip two years due to Covid-19, this year the Wiener Spielefest will take place from 21-23 October before returning to its regular November slot.

Maximum flexibility the order of the day

As a result of the pandemic, numerous large-scale congresses had to be put back to 2022 and beyond. So this year will call for one thing above all else when it comes to planning: flexibility. "The industry continues to find itself in a general state of uncertainty and is waiting to see how the number of infections and the resulting measures develop. But by offering organisers the option of switching to a summertime slot and enabling them to stage their gatherings as hybrid events with full flexibility in terms of on-site participant numbers, we have been able to give our customers the highest possible degree of planning security," Baumann-Söllner explained. The actual number of participants will depend on developments over the next few weeks and months – and the Austria Center Vienna is prepared for various scenarios.

Industry in transition: sustainable congresses are the future

Only a few years ago, the congress industry was very much a seasonal business, with a clear focus on spring and autumn. The current trend towards staging events in the summer could

be here to stay, and not just due to the pandemic. But this is just one of countless changes right now: “The industry is undergoing a fundamental shift. Topics such as hybrid offerings, options for getting to and from the venue and flexibility when it comes to the amount of time participants actually take part are becoming more important all the time. Anyone who decides to travel to another country for a congress needs a compelling reason to do so. And it is our job to provide the perfect environment for knowledge transfer and networking. This now includes our leafy terraces and outdoor areas, which will experience another major growth spurt this year,” Baumann-Söllner elaborated. In line with its status as the first certified green conference centre in the country, the Austria Center Vienna published its first sustainability report in late 2021 which targets several measures, including the goal of significantly increasing the number of green meetings and green events at the centre over the next few years. The congress centre has provided free consulting and certification services for many years now, an approach that helped to cut the amount of general refuse by around 125 tonnes and paper consumption by 200 tonnes at the meetings held during Austria’s Presidency of the European Council in 2018 – in one of many such examples.

Around 2 million vaccinations and 1.6 million tests at the ACV and counting

The largest vaccination and testing facility in the country will continue to operate at the Austria Center Vienna until spring at the very least. So far, around 2 million doses of the vaccine and 1.6 million tests have been administered at this location alone. During the same period, the venue pressed ahead with the biggest renovation project in its history. With work inside the main building – including in the entrance hall, and in the halls and lounges – scheduled for completion in phases, it means that participants can look forward to using the newly modernised areas at events for the first time this year. “Due to cancellations and postponements of events over the past two years, we have been able to make much quicker progress on the modernisation project than originally planned, and we can’t wait to unveil the new areas to our international customers,” Baumann-Söllner concluded.

About IAKW-AG

Internationales Amtssitz- und Konferenzzentrum Wien, Aktiengesellschaft (IAKW-AG) is responsible for maintaining the Vienna International Centre (VIC) and operating the Austria Center Vienna (ACV). The Austria Center Vienna is Austria’s largest conference centre. With 19 halls, 180 meeting rooms and some 26,000 square metres of exhibition space, it is one of the top players on the international conference circuit. www.acv.at

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