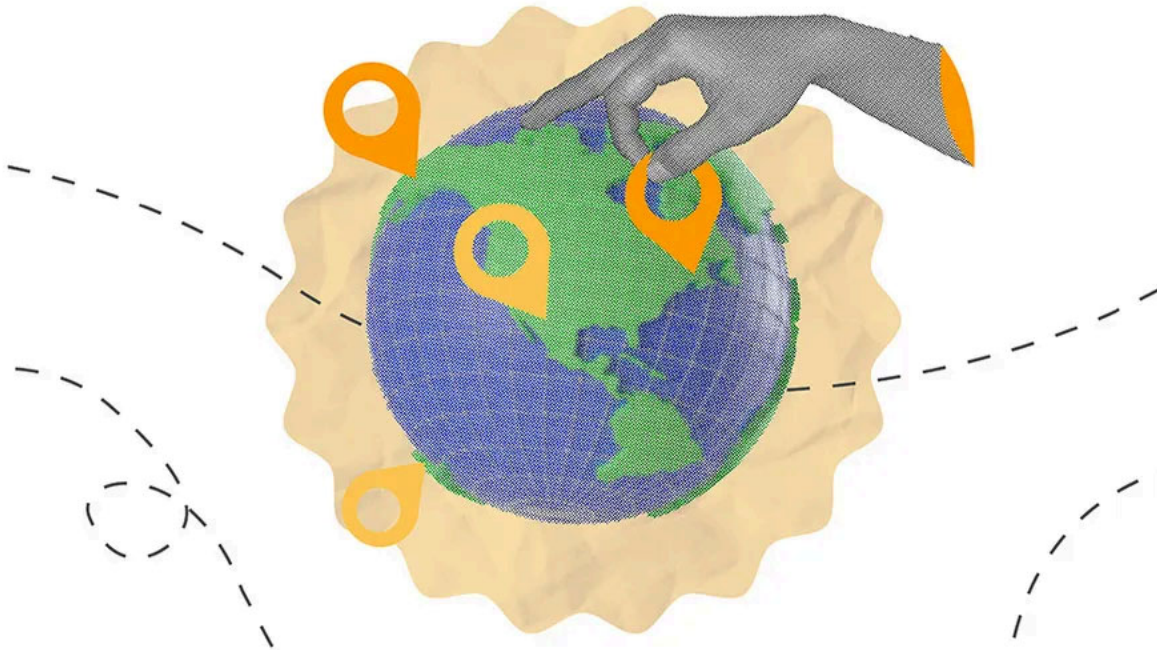


Why the US is now slipping off the events map

If planners are looking to alternatives to the US, which destinations are proving attractive?

by Kim Benjamin
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Political climate, visa challenges and economic caution are changing how and where planners book events. Photo Credit: Adobe Stock/Roby

Tariffs, an uncertain economic outlook and more recently an increasingly fragile geopolitical landscape, are forcing planners to rethink the timing and location of their events within the US – whether travelling there domestically or internationally.

Global DMC Partners president and CEO Catherine Chaulet says that destinations like Canada and select European countries are increasingly being seen as strong alternatives to the US.

“Canada, in particular, offers many of the logistical advantages of the US – short travel times, English-speaking environments, strong infrastructure as well as easier visa access – while presenting a different political and social climate that some clients find more comfortable right now,” she says. “Western Europe also continues to perform well, especially for incentive travel and high-level meetings. Asia is gaining interest too, but often for longer-lead programmes due to the travel distance and complexity.”

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Catherine Chaulet, president and CEO, Global DMC Partners

Chaulet adds that while the volume of international group leads into the US has remained steady, the agency is seeing a clear hesitation among US-based clients when it comes to planning and confirming events – both domestically and abroad. Year over year, she says, US-originating group interest is down about 10%.

“This measurable slowdown points to increased caution among US planners rather than a broader pullback from international clients toward the US market,” she says. “It is worth noting that while volume is slightly down, the last-minute nature of the bookings is at an all time high, making any future projections and negotiations that much more challenging to make.”

Bruce Morgan, global president at BCD Meetings & Events, says that while budget impacts and potential shifts are on everyone’s radar, the agency has not observed any significant changes within its business but it continues to monitor the situation closely and remain prepared.

“During these times, it’s essential to clarify the value proposition of events and how they contribute to business goals,” he says. “We also know it’s crucial to empower teams and keep them well-informed while continuing to advocate for the value of in-person meetings. Uncertainty can be challenging for clients, employees and supplier partners alike so open lines of communication are a must.”

At Elevated Meeting Solutions, chief elevation officer Timothy Glanzer says that other destinations that are in the frame and being considered, and which are on a par with the US, include Canada and Europe, in particular Germany. He has also noticed a change with regards to room blocks.

“Canadian-based groups are requesting to decrease their room blocks or cancel their events altogether,” he says. “European-based groups are also requesting to decrease their room block due to lower interest in travelling to the US.”

In uncertain times like these, exercising degrees of flexibility – from both planners and suppliers, could become increasingly important.

“Planners are more cautious, and many are seeking increased contract flexibility as a way to manage that uncertainty,” says Chaulet. “Force majeure clauses, attrition terms, and cancellation windows are all under closer scrutiny. There’s a clear desire for more collaboration between planners and suppliers, with the understanding that flexibility isn’t just a convenience – it’s a necessity in today’s environment.”