

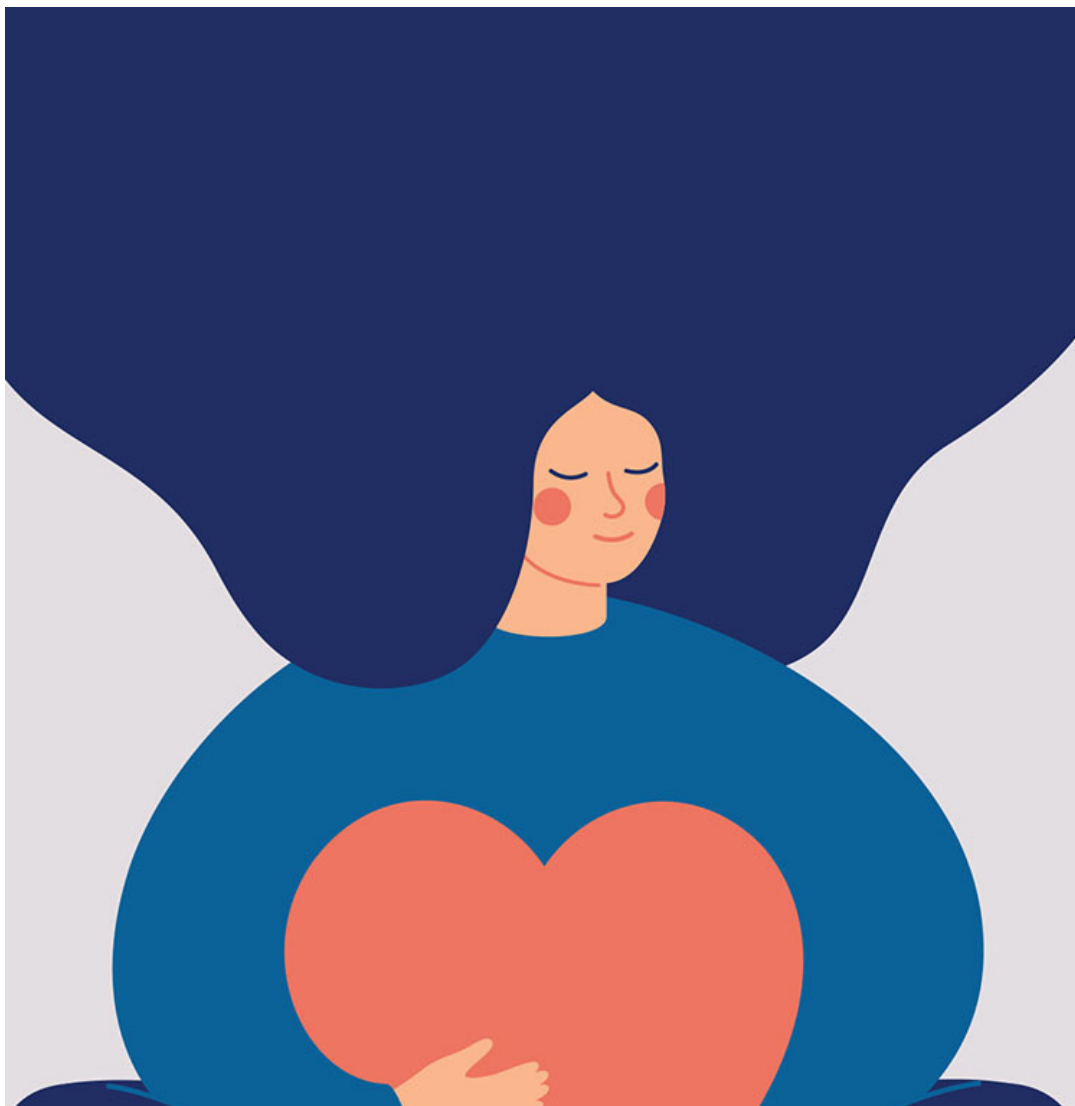
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# Evolution and Innovation of Wellness at Events

A cross-section of respected meeting professionals discuss the growing desire for wellness factors within the design of events and share some eyeopening examples.

BY MICHAEL PINCHERA

Featured Wellness





**A** re you seeing an increase in the consideration and/or incorporation of

**↳ wellness into the design of meetings and events? Can you share an example of an innovative wellness component you've seen recently?**

Yes, wellness seems to be a large consideration for meetings and events today. It is not only trendy, but meeting and event organizers seem to be taking a thoughtful approach to incorporating wellness into event design.

The incorporation of the outdoors is an innovative way to connect attendees with the environment of the destination around them. Caesars Entertainment did this beautifully with guided hiking in the mountains prior to the start of IMEX America in Las Vegas. There is a term labeled "grounding" when placing your feet on the Earth enhances one's greater well-being by lessening stress and improving blood flow. Being outdoors has a positive effect on our bodies by potentially reducing stress, so taking that approach with attendees could result in more relaxed conference-goers.



**KARINA ANTHONY, CDME, Senior Director of Marketing, Visit Atlantic City**

We have noticed an increase in wellness focus over the past few years. Meditation

rooms and yoga are often incorporated into conferences. Quiet spaces are also becoming more common. And there is also a tendency to include more healthy food options as well as plant-based foods.

One of the most memorable activations was when a planner created a secret garden environment on our 100,000-squarefoot Outdoor Forum Plaza complete with large trees which were brought in, aura readings, henna and matcha tea stations complete with lemon grass essential oil diffusers and a sound bath. Yoga mats were provided as well as personalized water bottles.



**DERROD MCKINNEY, Director of Catering and Convention Services, CAESARS FORUM**

Wellness has been a part of event design for some time but grew in importance post pandemic as attendees who started working from home made it an integral part of their workday expected to see it when they traveled.

Las Vegas has so many beautiful outdoor and unique options in the destination

where organizers can have fun with their wellness elements within meetings. We've seen group yoga on our pool decks, pop-up fitness classes on our rooftops and organized hikes in Red Rock Canyon.



**LISA MESSINA, Chief Sales Officer, Las Vegas Convention and Visitors Authority**

Our event strategists are asking customers about wellness goals during the event design process. Mental wellness is a big focus for many organizations, and meeting experiences should be inclusive of these initiatives. The challenge is getting stakeholders on the same page in the planning process. We design for impact and look to maximize event ROI by connecting company initiatives, values and culture in the meeting experience. If wellness is important to the company, reflecting it in the agenda, on the tradeshow floor and in educational programming is the inclusive approach that delivers results.

Many event professionals are incorporating quiet rooms into their floor plans to allow attendees to unplug, recharge or process information. We are also seeing more physical exercise built into agendas like morning walks, yoga sessions or light stretching during educational sessions.

What's new? Incorporating "mindful moments" at the beginning of educational sessions. Some speakers conduct their typical introductions, then ask attendees to take the next 30-60 seconds for a few deep breaths, clear some head space for the content, set an intention and connect with each other.



**AMANDA ARMSTRONG, SVP, Communications and Industry Relations,  
Encore**

An increase in the wellness components at meetings and events is definitely manifesting. I'm noticing many conferences are offering yoga classes, mindfulness and exercise classes early in the mornings, before diving into the business and data components of the event.

During the pandemic, there was a boom in the incorporation of wellness programming, which was all taking place virtually. Companies from practically every industry (banking, finance, pharmaceutical, food, clothing, IT, etc.) started placing great emphasis on the well-being of their employees as they were seeing a spike in mental health challenges being experienced by their workforce.

Post-COVID, the trend has continued. Decision makers are seeing the value of inserting one or more wellness components into a packed conference schedule allowing their participants an opportunity to take a breath, press pause and recharge. Ultimately, what's the point of spending a ton of money putting together an event, with tons of information and workshops, if attendees aren't able to absorb the content? There is a popular saying in the wellness community, "If you don't make time for your wellness, you will have to make time for your illness."





**PANDIT DASA, Speaker and author, Work Mindful Corp.**

I've seen more options at conferences than at standalone meetings. I specialize in clinical research medical programs, so we are not allowed to go too outside of the box. However, at conferences (even medical conferences) there are some areas that take wellness into consideration, especially on the exhibit floor.

- Some exhibitors are providing wellness giveaways instead of the latest must-have gadget or phone accessory. These are also going over well with attendee gifts at standalone meetings. Neck pillows, roller foot massagers, aromatherapy oils (even make-your-own options for an engagement activity), even shoe inserts to help absorb impact from all of the walking done at conferences, to name a few.
- Relaxation/quiet areas/rooms are no longer just for nursing moms. These are used for anyone who may just need a few minutes of downtime. Not everyone can handle the constant buzz of an exhibition hall, so these quiet rooms/areas are great to just relax, breathe, meditate and get refocused.







**MOZELLE GOODWIN, CMP, HMCC, MMP, Principal, Goodwin Consulting**

Thankfully, I've noticed a wellness element to most conferences and meetings I've attended this past year. The positive trend is that wellness is moving from a bolted-on element to more integrated design elements throughout the event: fitness options, healthier food, agendas built with more down time and even quiet areas for people to decompress. The pandemic helped us reset expectations, and participants want a better onsite experience, or they will just bow out of some of the program. We have a long way to go since the business event industry is reaching all-time-high stress levels again, but these are promising signs.

IMEX always does a good job, especially their Zen room, which is a quiet space far from the crowds for people to escape and reset. I've also seen an increase in non-alcoholic options, with signature mocktails and mixing contests. At the Google booth at IMEX America, there was a great drumming dance party activation, bringing music and movement to help people destress and also connect in a new way.





**ANNETTE GREGG, CMM, MBA, CEO, SITE**

Event professionals are increasingly seeking to incorporate wellness into all aspects of their event design and strategy. As opposed to bolt-on programming, this new, holistic approach focuses on more than healthy meals and menus and physical activations (which remain important) and instead considers participants as individuals with unique mental, intellectual, spiritual and social needs.

I love the idea of a wellness concierge. A few ideas from MPI's 2023 World Education Congress (WEC): later start times; meditation, mindful breaks; longer lunches and downtime; unique venues that prioritize nature and natural light.

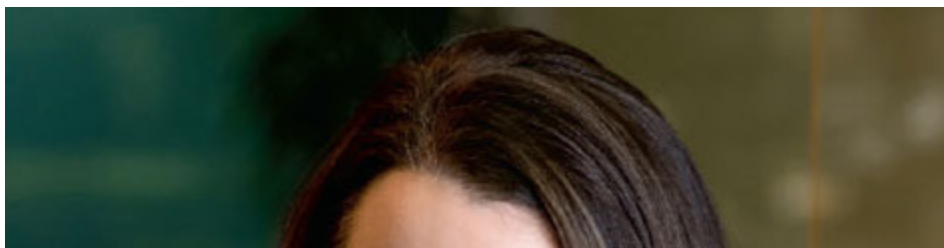




**JESSIE STATES, CMP, CMM, Vice President, MPI Academy**

Wellness is now table stakes as opposed to a consideration to be incorporated, and we have seen a steady increase in intentional wellness at events over the last few years, along with a diversification in wellness offerings. While the morning "fun run" and spa day is still offered widely, our desire for more holistic wellness culturally has translated into a more holistic approach to wellness activations at events. From how an event schedule is designed with enough time to get other work done to F&B that provides variety, health benefits and accommodates many dietary needs to quiet spaces and relaxation experiences, wellness is not an activity to schedule, it's a holistic approach to an attendee-centric event experience. We have seen a few innovative wellness-related initiatives at events over the past year, all unique in their approach to wellness and leaning into cultural shifts of belonging, inclusion and holistic wellness, including:

- Pickleball @ re:Invent! - Part of a rec center that allowed attendees to connect more organically and engage in joyful movement through new, exciting sports.
- Poppi's Gut-Happy Holiday Party - The event featured Poppi-based gut-friendly cocktails and mocktails and a number of wellness-centric services, including "acupuncture to go," which used an adhesive to attach small pellets to the ear to simulate acupressure points. Leaning into more natural wellness remedies and trends toward holistic wellness.





**KIM KOPETZ, CEO, Opus Group**

It is not a nice to have any more—attendees are expecting to have time to take good care of themselves from a personal well-being perspective. If not, and if they have a choice, they might not attend your event.

There are so many examples. The Neu Project, the work that Google is doing around neurodiversity, is spectacular. The mental health of people needs to be top priority in all industries. In today's world with talent shortages, companies are only going to win when they take good care of their people. Well-being is not just activities that you incorporate for physical activity. Well-being is bigger than that. At an event, we can plan activities that center around overall well-being that meet the objectives of a meeting. We just must think differently; look at the bigger picture.

I think the No. 1 thing an event designer can do is to give people time to take care of their well-being while attending an event. Don't get them up at the crack of dawn to do a run or even an early breakfast/meeting. What is wrong with starting the event at 9 a.m.? Be mindful that we are not machines. Especially when a time change happens, we need to give our bodies time to adjust. I think so many event

...things happen, we need to give our attendees time to digest all the many event professionals don't think about the person when designing an event. They just want to get their agenda accomplished. Studies show that people can only take so much information in and we tend to overload them when we are at events.



**RACHAEL RIGGS, GM, Environmental Strategy, Maritz**

Meetings and events are definitely in their wellness era—it's not just about sessions and networking anymore. Organizations are thinking about how to amp up the overall event vibe by incorporating elements to care for the physical, mental and emotional wellness of everyone in attendance. In 2023, I rarely planned a conference that didn't incorporate some sort of health and wellness element, and I don't see that changing in the foreseeable future.

In the past year, I've come across a few really innovative wellness components at events, but one notable example combines nature and leadership. While offering

attendees breaks in green spaces is always great, what really caught my attention was the addition of executive-led mindful walks/activities. This unique feature allowed for a direct connection with nature while introducing the added special touch of leadership engagement, creating a truly holistic experience for participants.



**JESSICA CAMPOS, CMP, Chief Experience Officer, Wicked Experience Design**

Burnout and exhaustion are not new to our industry—in 2019, the World Health Organization declared burnout an official diagnosis—but they have reached new levels post pandemic.

Before we're event planners, we're human—and we're not much use as event professionals unless we safeguard our mental health and well-being as humans first.

In order to do this, people want—and rightly expect—a curated, personalized, elevated experience with time baked in for wellness and to bring "the whole of themselves" to an event. This could be meeting up with others for a run (for our head of programming, Tahira Endean, it's her favorite way to explore a new

location), a trip to the hotel gym or simply giving people the gift of free time in their schedules for their own meditation, yoga, stretching or mindful breathing.

Where wellness used to live on the fringes, it now sits front and center ... and goes beyond citrus water and vegetarian food.

One of the highlights from our team this year was dancing with fellow delegates at the opening of Bestival in Berlin! Dancing is a fun yet powerful way to create a shared experience and sense of joy, as our brand ambassador in Germany, Tanja Knecht, found out when she attended Bestival. It was used as a fun ice breaker and to set the tone for the event ahead.



**CARINA BAUER, CEO, IMEX Group**



## WELLNESS CHALLENGE

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Click the **Scan-In** button in your Challenge App and scan the QR code to get your bonus points



Manual code: **ignite24#2**

**Scan-In:** On the Challenge app's main dashboard, press the Bonus Activities selector and tap the 'Scan-In' button. Align the app viewer with the QR Code. The code will automatically be detected and provide you with a confirmation notice. Alternatively, enter the manual code in at the bottom of the scan-in screen

**Bonus Points:** Scan-in during the Challenge and add 1,000 bonus points to your challenge total (limit of one bonus).

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To find out more information on the Ignite Wellness Challenge, go to [hekahealth.com/ignite24](https://hekahealth.com/ignite24)