

## Unique Venue in Europe: A Real-Life Experience with the Unexpected

Planning an international meeting is always an adventure. Though I have organized events across Europe and Asia, a 2008 convention in Florence, Italy tops the list of unique venues. The 2,400-person meeting took place in a Renaissance period fort!



The Fortezza da Basso was constructed in 1535 and was the property of the Italian military for four centuries. (To put that in perspective, this was 50 years before the first English settlement at Roanoke, NC.) The grounds consist of nearly a dozen buildings set inside a half-mile wide courtyard. Delegates enter the facility through a 30-foot-high wooden door and six-foot thick walls that are straight out of a storybook.

Most of our sessions took place in the “Modern Building,” a three-story facility that was an empty shell inside. Walking through the door of the space was like walking into an abandoned warehouse – there were four walls, but nothing else. To transform the facility into a working meeting space, the center brought in a construction crew and built temporary rooms to our specifications.

Though it sounds like a dream to be able to build your perfect convention center, having no constraints was an unexpected burden on our group because the volunteers had to spend time developing blueprints when they would normally be focusing on program development. Floor plans must be painstakingly reviewed for the tiniest detail, from the direction of door openings to the placement of electrical sockets.

Though the construction planning was an unexpected learning experience, the Italian staff and hosts were extremely gracious and concerned with our satisfaction. The meeting was extremely successful, and it was a treat to be in such a beautiful location. And next time I’ll know to ask, “Will walls be included when our convention arrives?” •

*by Janeé Pelletier, M.B.A., CMP, Vice President, Conference & Logistics Consultants, Inc.*

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The Colorado Convention Center’s 40-foot-tall Blue Bear, *I See What You Mean*, designed by Denver artist Lawrence Argent, has become a Mile High City icon.