

LEEDS

Hats off to Leeds: the city still pulls in around four million delegates annually and was recently ranked fifth for conferencing in the UK by the British Meetings and Events Industry survey. 'That's a real achievement for us,' says Jennifer Young, head of visitor economy at Leeds City Council.

Young claims a £100m investment in the city's venues has helped it emerge as a player in the events sector. And there's more to come: ambitious plans are afoot to double the size of the city centre with a massive development in South Bank, which will include new venues.

MEET

That Leeds has emerged as an events destination without a major conference centre is a testament to its small and medium-sized venues, which are punching well above their weight. The 250-capacity Horizon Leeds is one such space, and was awarded multiple gongs at the Conference & Hospitality Show Awards in 2016.

New and refurbished venues are also coming online, including Cloth Hall Court, which reopened this year after a £4.5m renovation. Special mention should go to Shine too: housed in an old Victorian school, the 200-capacity facility operates as a social enterprise and helps women ex-offenders get their lives back on track.

EAT

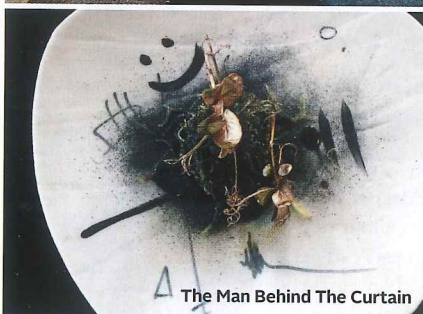
Thanks to the lauded cuisine of Michael O'Hare's The Man Behind the Curtain, Leeds lays claim to Michelin-starred status. Relocating to larger premises in the autumn, albeit in the basement of the same building, it's rumoured that the revamped



Crowne Plaza



Issho



The Man Behind The Curtain

restaurant will have a chef's table, which would be spot on for corporate groups.

Elsewhere, D&D London's new rooftop restaurant, Issho, has a range of hire options available, as does Shears Yard, which serves European food in an attractive timber-clad, oak-beamed room. The fun and informal atmosphere of the Roxy Ball Room comes with the added benefit of ping-pong tables. If it's timeworn charm and pub classics you're after, try the 75-capacity James Watt Room at The Cross Keys.

PLAY

If lowering your employees 140 metres into a coal mine doesn't make them feel more grateful for their jobs, then surely nothing will. That sooty experience can be had at

the National Coal Mining Museum, in nearby Wakefield, which gives visitors a flavour of what it was like to work in one of Britain's oldest working pits.

As well as outstanding conference facilities, Elland Road, home of Leeds United, also offers teambuilding activities including celebrity guest speakers, meet-and-greets with former Leeds United players and tours of the stadium. Feeling flush? Try a group helicopter tour of the surrounding Yorkshire countryside, available from Leeds Bradford airport.

STAY

The hotel scene continues to evolve with new openings and refurbishments to established properties such as the Crowne Plaza, which now has 135 rooms, a new restaurant and enhanced conference facilities (including a 200-capacity suite).

Did someone say 300-thread-count cotton sheets? Only Dakota Deluxe, which is the latest luxury hotel to open in the city. The property is big on comfort but specialises in small conferences: its bijou boardroom can accommodate up to 16 delegates, while its restaurant offers private dining for eight. For those on a budget, Ibis Style is a new purse-friendly opening. →