

Title:

If it is the unusual you are after.

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Summary:

So you're after an usual venue, not the size of the Sydney Opera House, but something just as inspiring.

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So you're after an usual venue, not the size of the Sydney Opera House, but something just as inspiring.

Of course London boasts it all for event organisers from magnificent Tall Ships and historic Sailing Barges on the Thames to Museums and royal palaces for extravagant receptions.

Meetings and conferences make a £10 billion-a-year contribution to the national economy and is an industry that supports 1.8 million jobs. But what's on offer outside the Capital. Here are my top picks:

The Deep, Hull's £53 million Millennium Commission Lottery project is certainly a venue with a difference. Providing the most spectacular aquarium displays to be found anywhere in Europe, the world's only submarium is home to nearly 50 sharks and more then 3,500 fish, giving a spectacular backdrop for a variety of events. When you think about it, where else can you banquet with sharks.

A trip to an authentic Victorian fairground should certainly be on any events organiser's list. Blists Hill Fun fair is part of the Ironbridge Gorge World Heritage site in Telford and this venue, complete with sideshows and rides can be hired independently. Alternatively, the entire Victorian Town can be booked for the evening, allowing guests to wander leisurely around the shops and cottages giving them an unforgettable taste of Victorian Shropshire.

Even its name suggests a sense of mystery and Sutton Hoo certainly doesn't disappoint.

Described as one of Britain's most important archaeological sites, an Anglo-Saxon burial chamber and the remains of a 90 ft ship were discovered here at Woodbridge in

Suffolk in the Thirties, which lay untouched for more than one thousand three hundred years. A replica of the ship now forms a spectacular backdrop to a

corporate event or drinks reception in the main Exhibition Hall at this National Trust property.

Set in the heart of the city of Manchester, the award winning Royal Exchange Theatre is one of the most exciting architectural achievements in the country, built within one of Manchester's most prestigious historic buildings - the former Cotton Exchange, once the largest room in the world for commerce. Today it provides a WOW factor for conference delegates as the foyer integrates one of the more unusual Theatre spaces with seating on three levels and in-the-round facilities for up to 750 people.

Of all Henry VIII's wives, Anne Boleyn is arguably the most famous and her headless ghost is still said to wander the corridors of Blickling Hall. With its Dutch turrets, gables and intricate red brick and Ketton limestone, Blickling Hall is a superb conference venue, a National Trust Jacobean house in the rolling Norfolk countryside representing all that is great about the English stately home.

A former residence of queens and ambassadors for more than four centuries, the Hall's dramatic façade conceals an exclusive suite of rooms offering the perfect area for corporate hospitality and meetings.

Leicester's National Space Centre offers an out of this world venue where you can welcome your guests with a reception at the top of a rocket tower but if you're looking for something that's a little more down to earth, the National Coal Mining Museum near Wakefield fits the bill in more ways than one ...historic 19th Century colliery buildings, exhibitions that bring the story of coal to life and a unique underground tour make the Museum an exceptional location...while Rheged in Penrith, Cumbria, Europe's largest grass covered building boasts stunning architecture.

But wherever you choose, remember the golden rule... that the conference venue you select is appropriately sized for your requirements. A venue without that right amount of space will be uncomfortable, yet it is often the factor that is underestimated.