



Welcome to the RSA Annual Conference: A Guide for First Time Attendees

The RSA Events Team is excited to welcome you to the RSA Annual Conference! We understand that attending a large conference for the first time can feel overwhelming. With over 200 sessions across three days and up to 30 running simultaneously, navigating such a dynamic event can be a challenge. That's why we've created this guide – to help you feel confident, prepared, and ready to make the most of your experience.

The RSA is mindful of the unique challenges first time attendees may face. From finding your way around, building connections and presenting for the first time, we know this can be both exciting and daunting. That's why we are determined to ensure that all attendees, especially those joining us for the first time, feel welcomed, supported, and equipped to thrive during the event.

The RSA Annual Conference is not just about sessions and presentations – it is a wonderful opportunity to learn, connect, and grow within a vibrant and diverse community. Whether it's through formal sessions, informal networking, or spontaneous conversations, this is your opportunity to embrace new ideas, make meaningful connections, and contribute to important discussions about regional issues.

If you have any questions or need assistance, please do not hesitate to visit the registration desk where our friendly RSA staff team will be happy to assist you.

We're thrilled to have you join us and look forward to an inspiring and productive conference!

We also encourage you to review these important resources:

- [Conference Code of Conduct](#)
- [Event Privacy Statement](#)
- [Tips and Techniques for Effective Presentations](#)
- [Making an Appeal with the Eyes – Simplicity from Complexity in Data Visualisation](#)

General Tips for the Conference

Manage Your Schedule

- Download the RSA mobile app to create a personalised daily agenda, explore the programme, and stay informed about networking events, session details, and other conference updates. Download the app [IOS](#) or [Android](#) from your phone's app store. See our ["How to" video guides](#) for information on downloading RSA Hub App and using it in preparation for the conference.
- Use the app to search for sessions and events that align with your interests.

Prioritise Your Activities

- Identify must-attend plenary talks, keynote addresses, and special sessions centred on the conference's featured themes.

- Balance these with opportunities to explore less familiar topics to broaden your perspective.

Be Flexible

- Allow room in your schedule for unexpected opportunities, like impromptu conversations or changes in session availability.
- Check the app regularly for updates on schedule changes, room assignments, or new announcements.

Pace Yourself

- Conference days can be long and busy, so plan time for breaks.
- Take advantage of opportunities to explore the city, meet new colleagues, and reconnect with old friends.

Finding Your Way Around

- Visit the registration desk upon arrival to collect your name badge and lanyard. Badges are printed on both sides and include your name, institution, and country for easy identification.
- Nearby, you'll find exhibitors and the refreshment area—both excellent spots to meet fellow attendees.
- Session room names are listed in the programme and marked with clear signage. Arrive early to familiarise yourself with your presentation room and upload your materials ahead of time.

Wi-Fi and Staying Connected

- Eduroam is available for attendees from participating universities.
- A dedicated conference Wi-Fi network will also be provided; login details will be shared during the event.

Dress Code

- The dress code is relaxed. Aim for **smart casual**, particularly if you're presenting.
- The average temperature in Porto for May is 20°C, but it's wise to pack layers in case of cooler or changeable conditions.
- Comfortable shoes are a must for long conference days.

Food and Drink

- Lunch and two refreshment breaks are provided on days one and two. Day three includes one refreshment break and a light lunch.
- **Welcome Reception:** Held the evening before sessions begin (6th May) at [Jardins do Palácio de Cristal](#). Attendance is free but requires pre-registration.
- **Conference Dinner:** 8th May 2025, [Palácio da Bolsa](#) – Pricing varies by career stage and country. Pre-registration and payment are required.

Networking Tips

- **Plan Ahead:** Identify key individuals you'd like to connect with and attend their sessions. Reach out via the RSA app to request a meeting.
- **Use Your Badge:** Conference badges display attendees' affiliations. Coloured stripes indicate roles within the conference and the Association.
- **Leverage the App:** Use the app's business card swap feature and direct messaging to connect.

- **Other ways to connect:** Consider joining a field trip for smaller, informal networking opportunities. Look in the app under social/networking sessions to discover first time attendee sessions and other targeted sessions.
- **We are here to Help:** RSA staff (look for pink stripes on badges) can also facilitate introductions.

Session Types and Tips

Session Formats

- **Parallel/Paper Sessions:** Each presenter has 15 minutes to speak, followed by 10 minutes for Q&A. Bring your presentation on a USB for upload.
- **Panel Sessions:** Panellists provide brief remarks, then engage in a moderated discussion with audience Q&A.
- **Plenary Sessions:** High-profile sessions featuring distinguished speakers and discussants.
- **Special Sessions:** Convenor-led discussions on specific topics, including journal lectures.
- **Professional Development Sessions:** Opportunities like "Meet the Editors" and sessions on publishing or career advice.

Tips for Presenters

- Familiarise yourself with your session room ahead of time.
- Introduce yourself to the session chair and fellow presenters.
- Prepare and rehearse thoroughly and keep track of time using the chair's signal cards (5 minutes, 2 minutes, STOP).
- Take notes during Q&A and ask for clarification if needed.
- After your session, engage with attendees for feedback and discussion.

General Session Tips

- Arrive early to sessions and stay for the full duration when possible. If you must leave, do so quietly.
- Ask thoughtful questions of presenters, modelling the kind of engagement you appreciate during your own session.

Supporting First Time Attendees

The RSA is committed to helping new attendees feel at ease and empowered. In addition to this guide, we have planned initiatives to help you prepare for and navigate the conference:

- **Online Pre-Conference Events:**
These include sessions such as *Tips for First-Time Presenters* and a virtual coffee chat with the RSA team to answer questions and share insights about the conference experience.
- **First-Time Attendee Networking Opportunities:**
Join targeted networking sessions, field trips, or informal social gatherings to meet other first-timers and experienced attendees in a smaller, more relaxed setting.
- **Personalised Support:**
Use the RSA app to connect with the community before and during the event. Reach out to the RSA team, who are dedicated to helping you overcome nerves and make valuable connections.

If you have ideas for further initiatives to support first-time attendees, we welcome your suggestions. Please email us at events@regionalstudies.org.

Final Thoughts

The RSA Annual Conference is a unique opportunity to immerse yourself in the regional studies community. Whether this is your first time or your tenth, the RSA is here to ensure your experience is rewarding and enjoyable.

We're excited to see you in Porto and look forward to making this conference a memorable experience together!