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Fashion Weeks Gone Wild, From Aruba to Karachi

If it's Thursday, it's fashion week somewhere.

This month alone includes fashion weeks in Moscow, Karachi, Houston, Tokyo and Portland, Oregon. Dubai fashion week begins today.



OSI Photography

There have long been just four fashion weeks that matter in the industry: New York, Milan, Paris and London. At these events, designers parade their collections for retailers and try to make a splash in the fashion press.

But in the past five to 10 years, the numbers of cities and nations holding fashion weeks has burgeoned. There are more than 100 fashion weeks around the

globe, from Islamabad to Rochester, N.Y. Event producer IMG is known for running New York fashion week, but it also produces fashion weeks in Aruba, Berlin, Zurich, Moscow, Toronto, Sydney and Miami, among others. Other locations have launched their own shows, hoping to boost their garment and retail trades.

Alas, there are only 52 weeks in the year. And plenty of people question the purpose of so many shows. Last week, as the Portland, Ore., and Houston fashion weeks were winding down and a Los Angeles "fashion weekend" was gearing up, Steven Kolb, chief executive of the Council of Fashion Designers of America, said, "Every other city is doing a fashion week. I think there can be only one market in the U.S., and that's New York."

There is also a timing problem among the bigger fashion weeks. The organizers of Milan, London and New York fashion weeks are locked in a dispute over the third week of September 2012. Industry representatives from major cities agreed on a schedule three years ago, but they now disagree over whether the schedule was meant to be set permanently or renegotiated.

Condé Nast, publisher of Vogue and other fashion publications, has pledged that its editors will attend New York and London but bypass Milan. Milan has dug in its high heels, with the head of its fashion chamber, Mario Boselli, insisting in an Oct. 14th letter that the shows must go on—on Italy's timetable.

Shoppers will find stores shelves stocked next year whether or not Vogue Editor-in-Chief [Anna Wintour](#) attends the Prada show in Milan. But the vehemence of the dispute is a reminder of fashion shows' value for designers and fashion brands, not to mention the ancillary businesses that build, promote and cater the events.

Of course, the big four aren't facing real competition from the globe's smaller fashion weeks. Fashion editors and store buyers say their busy schedule prevents them from paying much attention to lesser shows. In addition to the major fashion weeks, held twice a year, big retailers have menswear and collections such as resort to follow.

While smaller fashion shows feature original collections from local designers, the A-list designers who attend usually show clothes they have introduced elsewhere.

But small shows can whip up plenty of enthusiasm locally. Often they are open to consumers, who pay anywhere from \$30 to several hundred dollars for a seat. (The primary fashion weeks are invitation-only.)

Designer Barbara Tfank presented her spring 2012 collection in New York last month, but when she was invited to take it to Houston last week, she packed her suitcases. "There are 1,200 people in the audience," she says. "That's a lot of people from one city." For Ms. Tfank, it was an opportunity to put her collection—an ode to the style of Elizabeth Taylor—in front of consumers rather than the grouchy press and store buyers who go to shows in New York.

"They are really fun—they aren't all jaded," she says of Houston audiences. "I'm sure some designers would pooh-pooh and say, 'how provincial,' but I loved it."

The founder of Houston's fashion week, Jared Lang, says tickets to his city's events cost as much as \$375 for a front-row seat and a chance to meet a designer backstage. "All the top socialites in town will be there at least one night," he says, noting that the front rows sold out before the week opened. He hopes the event will encourage more fashion production in Houston.

Designer Prabal Gurung has been the toast of New York fashion week for several seasons. He's exploring opportunities to show his collections at fashion weeks in London, Turkey, Moscow and Singapore. "There are so many emerging markets that we want to in some way be a part of, and I would love to showcase my collection in a more global way," he says.

Portland's fashion week, which ended Oct. 9, was attended by an estimated 5,000 people and featured 30 brands, including Adidas. Its executive producer, Tito Chowdhury, has a day job: He works at Intel designing microprocessor chips. But his aim is to carve out a niche for the week in sustainable and eco-conscious design. "We are not showing things that have been launched somewhere else," says Mr. Chowdhury.

Overseas, fashion weeks often highlight regional talent and build the local economy. In Karachi this month, organizers tried to focus on business-building rather than thrilling local socialites. "Fashion in Pakistan for a long time has been an entertainment sport; at [Karachi Fashion Week], we are trying to really make it about the business of fashion," says spokesman Zurain Imam. Invitees were largely press and stores, with some Pakistani celebrities in the front rows.

Mr. Kolb of the CFDA notes that outlying fashion weeks can act like minor-league baseball teams in developing talent. Several fashion weeks boasted shows by "Project Runway" alumni. But he says organizers who expect the attention of major press or buyers are mistaken. Referring to the top editor of Harper's Bazaar, he says, "Glenda Bailey's not going to go to Richmond, Va., fashion week."

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A look from Adidas at Portland Fashion Week



A look from Avni for Portland Fashion Week.



A look from Lenzanita for Portland Fashion Week.



A look from Amai Unmei for Portland Fashion Week.