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Becton, Dickinson & Company team members participated in the Wild Africa Trek at Disney World's Animal Kingdom.

Credit: © Disney

Off the Beaten Path

Theme Parks Offer a Walk on the Wild Side, and Much More

PAGE 18

The Final Bill PAGE 24

Tech Update PAGE 28

Caribbean/Bahamas PAGE 32

Las Vegas PAGE 38

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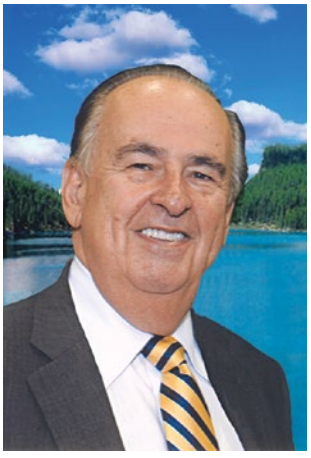
Publisher's Message

It's All About the Experience

Clearly one of the most impactful trends in the meetings industry nowadays is staging meetings and events that deliver a *complete experience* — a memorable, one-of-a-kind experience such as a thrilling sports feat, a luxurious fine dining escapade, or an off-the-wall, exciting adventure, to name a few. Here are a few ideas culled from this month's issue shared by meeting planners and other professionals that you will find enlightening and refreshing.



In our cover story in this issue, "Off the Beaten Path: From a Walk on the Wild Side to Wizards, Potter and Penguins, Theme Park Meetings Are All About the Experience," Gregory J. Butler, director, global supply chain stewardship at New Jersey-based Becton, Dickinson & Company, likes to surprise and reward his 12-person team with an experience "that they might not be able to experience as individuals." Thus, he selects a Disney venue often because he says, "A theme park allows attendees to experience something...that gives people an experience they couldn't have on their own."

Experient's Jeff Sacks, CMP, advises planners to tailor the experience to their group. "Make sure the facility will deliver the kind of experience that really fits your group. Not all groups are made to go offsite and do an event at a theme park. Quite honestly, there are groups that just need to be indoors at a hotel. But there are also a lot of groups that are a good fit for a theme park. For example, something that a lot of meeting planners are talking about today is that meetings need to be experiences. And a theme park allows you to make a meeting an experience."

In "What Planners Want" on page 12, MGM Resorts International's Michael Dominguez, says, "Over the last few years, we've seen an increase in the sophistication of travelers — including meeting attendees — when it comes to food and beverage. Food is something we are all fascinated with now. I joke that we all fantasize about becoming a renowned rock star chef. And you see that influence in the way hotels are presenting food today. One of the reasons that is happening is because more meeting planners and attendees are looking for real culinary expertise and excellence as part of their meetings. And part of that is because of the power of attendees today. They want a bigger and better meeting experience, and that now includes food."

Harvey Grotsky
Publisher

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50 People on the Move

50 ReaderServices

Credit: EIBTM

Pacific World hosted a technology-themed networking event at EIBTM that included playing with Oculus virtual reality. **PAGE 28**

Credit: Sandals Resorts

Sandals Emerald Bay in Great Exuma, Bahamas, is an all-inclusive resort with seven restaurants, three pools and more. **PAGE 32**

Credit: Erik Kabik/Kabik Photo Group

New Year's Eve fireworks, as viewed from the High Roller observation wheel, light up the Las Vegas Strip. **PAGE 38**

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News & Notes

Baha Mar Opens Its Doors March 27

Credit: Baha Mar

Aerial view rendering of Baha Mar.

NASSAU, THE BAHAMAS — Baha Mar, the Caribbean's newest destination resort, is preparing to welcome guests to its "New Riviera" in Nassau beginning March 27, with online reservations available now at *www.bahamar.com* for Baha Mar Casino & Hotel, Rosewood at Baha Mar and SLS Lux at Baha Mar. The Grand Hyatt at Baha Mar will open shortly after.

Among the features of Baha Mar, set on 3,000 feet of white sand beach and surrounded by 220 acres of tropical gardens on the 1,000-acre resort, are:

- Baha Mar Casino, the Caribbean's largest casino floor with state-of-the-art gaming and panoramic ocean views through 30-foot, floor-to-ceiling windows.
- 284 private residences, with one, two, three or four bedrooms and 24/7 concierge services, with optional hotel rental program for owners.
- A collection of 40 restaurants, bars and nightclubs.
- More than 30 retail boutiques featuring local artisans and couture brands.
- The world's largest collection of Bahamian art, including creative displays of 2,500+ contemporary works throughout the resort's public spaces.
- Championship golf at TPC at Baha Mar, the 18-hole, par-72 Jack Nicklaus Signature golf course that offers a dramatic front nine holes with ocean frontage and a back nine nestled into native habitat.
- 200,000 sf of breathtaking indoor and outdoor meeting space.

Baha Mar's ribbon-cutting is scheduled for April and the grand opening is in May. *www.bahamar.com*

Marriott International Says It Will Not Block Wi-Fi Devices

BETHESDA, MD — Marriott International announced January 14 that as it listens to its customers, it will not block guests from using their personal Wi-Fi devices at any of their managed hotels. According to a statement, Marriott remains "committed to protecting the security of Wi-Fi access in meeting and conference areas at their hotels, and they will continue to look to the FCC to clarify appropriate security measures network operators can take to protect customer data and will continue to work with the industry and others to find appropriate market solutions that do not involve the blocking of Wi-Fi devices. *www.marriott.com*

IACC Report Says Conference Centers Showing Restraint in Hiking Prices

NEW YORK, NY — The International Association of Conference Centers (IACC) has released the 2014 edition of "Trends in the Conference Center Industry." According to IACC CEO Mark Cooper, "The comprehensive trends report indicates that IACC Conference Centers once again see continued recovery in their rates, which are higher than 2013. This, coupled with marginal improvements in operating profits, demonstrates that IACC member properties continue to control costs and manage another year of improving occupancies. Conference centers — when benchmarked against hotels — are showing restraint in hiking prices to their customers, which shows a long-term approach and commitment to their customers."

Cooper also notes that IACC members predicted a bumpy ride for 2014 operating budgets, and they might well prove to be accurate in their predictions given the last few months of mixed economic forecasts for North America. "With the economy experiencing some setbacks, said Cooper, "a large part of conference centers' business is realized from training." According to the report, the greatest percentage of meetings (57.8 percent) held at residential conference centers were training/continuing education sessions followed by management planning conferences. "It is encouraging to see the significant growth in this type of events as organizations invest now to put in place a skilled work force to cope with further recovery," said Cooper.

IACC's Trends in the Conference Center Industry is available to purchase on the IACC website store. *www.iacconline.org*

Meetings Mean Business Coalition Names New Co-chair

WASHINGTON, DC — Meetings Mean Business Coalition (MMBC), a cross-industry communications and advocacy initiative, appointed Michael Dominguez, senior vice president of corporate sales at MGM Resorts International, as the coalition co-chair. Dominguez will work with fellow co-chair David Peckinpaugh, president of Maritz Travel, to lead the organization as it showcases the substantial value of meetings, conferences, conventions, incentive travel, trade shows and exhibitions.

DOMINGUEZ

"I'm thrilled to welcome Michael and look forward to working together to demonstrate how our industry creates personal connections, drives business results and builds strong communities," said Peckinpaugh. "Last year, we established MMBC as the central platform for industry leaders and the grassroots community to work together to ensure our industry's value is well understood."

Under Dominguez and Peckinpaugh's leadership, MMBC will expand its advocacy efforts through an industry-wide advocacy platform, work with partners in Canada and Mexico to host the first annual North American Meetings Industry Day and continue engaging with the media and business leaders.

With more than 25 years of experience and as senior vice president of corporate sales at MGM Resorts International, Dominguez provides oversight for the company's sales strategies in the convention, leisure and transient segments, including industry relations, diversity sales and MGM Resorts events. Prior to his position at MGM Resorts International, he served as vice president of global sales for Loews Hotels & Resorts, where he oversaw sales efforts for 18 luxury hotels in the U.S. and Canada.

The Meetings Mean Business Coalition was created in 2009 to showcase the incredible value that business meetings, travel and events bring to the U.S. economy. Its members span all facets of the face-to-face meeting and events industry, which have come together behind a common goal: providing the resources, tools and information to show the real impact the industry has on businesses, economies and communities. For more information, visit *www.meetingsmeanbusiness.com* and download the app on iTunes and Google Play.

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www.TheMeetingMagazines.com

News & Notes

Meet AC Announces Atlantic City Sports Commission

ATLANTIC CITY, NJ — Meet AC, the tourism development agency designed to attract meetings and conventions to Atlantic City, held a press conference recently at the Atlantic City Boardwalk Hall at which Atlantic City Mayor Don Guardian officially announced the formation of the Atlantic City Sports Commission.

The Atlantic City Sports Commission has been a vision of Meet AC President/CEO Jim Wood since he came on board in June 2014. Powered by Meet AC, the Atlantic City Sports Commission will continue to attract sporting events of all sizes as well as sports meetings and conventions.

"Sports is big business and through the formation of the Atlantic City Sports Commission we are positioning Atlantic City to attract additional sporting events to our city year-round," said Wood. In the most recent economic impact study conducted by the National Association of Sports Commissions, amateur sport events generate nearly $8 billion annually and are growing. Additionally, there are more than 1,000 sport event rights-holders who each plan multiple events each year.

Credit: Meet AC

(L to r) Meet AC Board Chairman and General Manager of the Sheraton, Jeff Albrecht; Meet AC Secretary and owner of Dock's Oyster House, Frank Dougherty; Mayor Guardian's Chief of Staff, Chris Filiciello; Meet AC President/CEO, Jim Wood; Atlantic City Mayor Don Guardian; Meet AC Treasurer and V.P. of Hotel Operations at Resorts Casino, Mark Sachais; Meet AC legal counsel and attorney at law, Jack Plackter at the formation of the Atlantic City Sports Commission.

Mayor Guardian stated, "The formation of the AC Sports Commission is one more fantastic non-gaming attraction that Atlantic City will build its future upon. No matter what your age is, you can always have fun watching a sporting event with your friends and family."

www.meetinac.com

Starwood Boasts Strong Growth With 74 New Hotels in 2014

STAMFORD, CT — Starwood Hotels & Resorts Worldwide Inc. announced that it opened 74 new hotels in 2014, representing approximately 15,000 rooms in 26 countries. The company also signed 175 new hotel management and franchise agreements in 2014, a 15 percent increase over the prior year, marking the fifth consecutive year of increased signings and the most new deals in one year since 2007. Starwood anticipates another year of solid growth in both mature and emerging markets in 2015, fueled by hotel openings and high-quality deal signings.

"With more than 1,200 hotels in 100 countries, we're on the frontlines of global change and continue to see increasing demand for innovative, design-led brands, playing to Starwood's strength," said Frits van Paasschen, president and CEO of Starwood Hotels & Resorts Worldwide Inc. "Our nine lifestyle brands continue to attract owners as does our loyalty program, Starwood Preferred Guest (SPG), which brings high-value guests to our hotels from around the world, driving more than half of our occupancy on any given night."

Building on its strong signing year, Starwood continues to grow in all corners of the world across all of the segments where it operates with plans to reach the following milestones in 2015:

- 300th hotel in Asia Pacific and China
- 150th hotel in China (with all nine brands represented) — 90th hotel in Africa and the Middle East
- 175th luxury hotel
- 750th upper upscale hotel
- 300th mid-market hotel

"Our balanced growth approach continued in 2014 with consistent, organic signings across all nine of our brands," said Simon Turner, president of Global Development for Starwood Hotels & Resorts Worldwide Inc. "Looking ahead, emerging markets remain a focus for us, but recovering economic conditions and increased availability of financing have also led to strong growth in North America and Europe."

www.starwoodhotels.com

Snapshots

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Credits: 1–5 EIBTM; 6,7 Oscar & Associates

1–5 The final edition of EIBTM (now ibtm world) was held November 18–20 in Barcelona, Spain, with more than 15,500 industry professionals onsite, an 8 percent increase in attendance compared to 2013. With more than 80 percent of attendees (excluding exhibitors) coming from Europe, the trend underlines the American Express Meetings & Events 2015 Global Forecast presented to more than 200 global industry thought leaders on the eve of the event. The report indicated that the number of meetings in Europe is predicted to increase. Some 78,436 prescheduled appointments and, for the first time, self select were made between hosted buyers and exhibitors, a 20 percent increase over last year. The 2015 ibtm world will be held November 17–19 in Barcelona. **6,7** The International Association of Exhibitions and Events (IAEE) celebrated a highly successful Expo! Expo! IAEE's Annual Meeting & Exhibition, held December 9–11, 2014 in Los Angeles. This year's event attracted 2,263 attendees (pending independent audit) to the Los Angeles Convention Center. The 2015 Expo! Expo! will be held December 1–3 in Baltimore.

By Rhonda Brewer

6 Incentive Travel Trends for 2015

Good news! The incentive travel industry is growing and is predicted to continue to grow at a steady pace through 2016. Results of the recently released SITE Index Annual Analysis and Forecast for the Motivational Events Industry reveal continued optimism about the industry's future with 80 percent of survey respondents reporting the use of incentive travel will increase. An ever-improving global economy appears to be the major reason for this confidence as well as bookings for future business.

> "Event guests are looking more and more for a completely **integrated and seamless approach to technology** from the second they register for an event to the time they depart for home."

So how can you capitalize on new business opportunities? What potential concerns should you keep in mind? And most important, how can you keep your existing customers happy?

Focus on these six key trends and what they mean for your business as they impact incentive travel in 2015 and beyond:

1. Seller's Market. In recent years, the industry has seen a shift from a buyer's market to a seller's market, with supply down and demand up. While clients still expect hotels and venues to hold space for a long time without a firm commitment and are still adjusting to the reduction in negotiation power with the shift, the reality is they are facing a lack of availability and price pressures. Make sure that you're keeping an open dialogue with your clients through the entire lifecycle of a program to hold firm deadlines and maintain clear expectations.

The new seller's market dynamic means an increase in room rates as well as food and beverage minimums. Some things you can consider to deal with these increases are making sure your space-to-room ratio is appropriate, shift offsite events to on-property to meet minimums, and always look to provide alternate dates when possible.

2. Measurable Value. In the digital age where consumers are more connected to each other and experiences than ever before, the need to be "customer-centric" is imperative. When it comes to our customer, there is often a disconnect between the definition of "value" among executives (cost savings and return on investment) and meeting owners (engaging content and positive experience). Understanding guests and gathering consensus among event stakeholders on the core objectives is essential to successfully bridging the value gap. By placing the attendee and defined business objectives in the center of the planning process ensures that companies are creating more effective, valuable experiences. The emergence of metrics around measuring value and customer experience has placed a premium on the ability for businesses to provide data around the impact of a given incentive trip or event. Between mobile and onsite technology data, trackable email campaigns, social media metrics and the ability to measure Web registration information, there are more ways than ever to gauge success beyond simply looking at post-event guest satisfaction surveys.

3. Full-service Technology. Technology is on the move. Using technology at meetings and events isn't new; however, how it's being used is. While many attendees already rely on specialized event apps to access vital event information, organizers have an opportunity to personalize an attendee's experience through the use of indoor geo-locating technology. The technology can help virtually guide the attendee through the event: highlighting booths and information the attendee might find interesting based on previous activity, locating nearby attendees for networking opportunities and wayfinding throughout the venue. For organizers, the data generated by this level of technology will allow them to become more

attendee-centric and data-savvy — gaining useful insight to attendees' behaviors and using that to improve future meetings and events.

Mobile event apps are becoming "table stakes" rather than a "nice to have" as event attendees are starting to expect the entire event experience on-demand and at their fingertips. Eighty-six percent of respondents to the SITE Index survey confirmed the importance of mobile technology for program communications and operations. Event guests are looking more and more for a completely integrated and seamless approach to technology from the second they register for an event to the time they depart for home.

4. Baseline Strategy. With many companies experiencing organizational leadership and structural changes every 12 to 18 months, it is essential for companies to develop an overall meetings and incentives strategy that can be executed by anyone, anywhere. Companies implementing an overall strategy can benefit from consistent program messaging to internal and external audiences, stronger negotiation power with suppliers, and achievement of organizational goals and objectives.

By creating a baseline strategy that is rooted in your company's core values, you'll have a constant framework to work off of that will keep you from having to start from scratch every few years. You'll also be able to focus on more strategic enhancements to a given program or set of programs on a year-to-year basis rather than getting bogged down with the basics.

5. Global Expertise. As the market continues to improve and global economies expand, the need for more global meetings is on the rise. The biggest trend from a global standpoint is being able to operate at a global level but understand cultures at a regional one. As global meetings continue to grow in size and scope, deeper in-region knowledge is a necessity to make sure that incentive trips go off without a hitch. This knowledge is also essential when it comes to both risk mitigation and the need to provide more unique, memorable experiences year in and year out.

6. Budgets vs. Fees. In this seller's market, we're seeing ancillary airline fees on the rise, which is taking money out of budgets that could have been spent in other areas. Budgets also are remaining flat for the most part while hotel room night and airline costs are rising quickly. Additionally, hotel contract negotiation is becoming harder and harder because the power lies with the seller. Smaller budgets and more fees are hardly new trends, but they do show an increased need for demonstrating value through analytics and an increased focus on designing a better guest experience.

While many of these trends mentioned have been a factor in one way or another in past years in the incentive travel industry, the takeaway and focus for 2015 should ultimately be on technology and its ever-evolving importance and influence on the customer and guest experience. Customers and guests have more power than ever, and our industry's ability to recognize this and evolve accordingly will ultimately determine our future success. ***C&IT***

Rhonda Brewer

is 2015 president of SITE, Society for Incentive Travel Excellence, and vice president group business travel-sales, Maritz Travel Company. *www.siteglobal.com*

What Planners Want

Hot New Hotel Restaurants and Amenities Fill the Bill

By John Buchanan

Credits: Eau Palm Beach Resort & Spa

Eau Palm Beach Resort & Spa, the former Ritz-Carlton in Palm Beach, Florida, accommodates groups from 10 to 1,000 people with more than 30,000 sf of indoor and outdoor event space, such as The Terrace, which affords breathtaking views of the Atlantic Ocean.

Now that the U.S. meeting market is healthy again — and more competitive than ever before for hotels — forward-thinking properties have begun to focus on new amenities to keep planners and attendees coming back year after year. And the best way to accomplish that say the experts is to offer attendees a complete meeting experience, an experience that very often catapults the hotel's restaurants in the starring role. Especially restaurants that excel in such areas as farm-to-table menus and small plates/tapas-style presentations. It seems that corporate meeting attendees just can't get their fill of foodie experiences as the restaurant craze continues to sweep the country.

Michael Dominguez, senior vice president of corporate hotel sales at Las Vegas-based MGM Resorts International, which operates hotels such as MGM Grand, Aria and Bellagio, which feature some of the most acclaimed restaurants in the world, says with a laugh that he credits the current restaurant craze to shows on The Food Network and other cooking channels.

"Over the last few years, we've seen an increase in the sophistication of travelers — including meeting attendees — when it comes to food and beverage," Dominguez says. "Food is something we are all fascinated with now. I joke that we all fantasize about becoming a renowned rock star chef. And you see that influence in the way hotels are presenting food today. One of the reasons that is happening is because more meeting planners and attendees are looking for real culinary expertise and excellence as part of their meetings. And part of that is because of the power of attendees today. They want a bigger and better meeting experience, and that now includes food."

Over the past few years, there has been a major shift in the way travelers perceive hotel restaurants. "Not that long ago, almost no one thought of a hotel as a place you'd go to eat a great meal," Dominguez says. "Now hotels are home to some of the best restaurants in the country. And that is especially true in Las Vegas."

Lou Trope, senior vice president of food and beverage experiences at Denver-based Destination Hotels, whose flagship meeting properties include the Eden Roc in Miami Beach, Royal Palms in Scottsdale, and Paradise Point in San Diego, agrees that top-quality and unique restaurants are more important than ever before as a meeting amenity. "One reason is that you're giving attendees a great, independent, restaurant-quality

dining option," he says. "But another is that you can use that restaurant to bring the experience directly into the meeting space. For example, as a banquet function you can have the chef prepare his signature dishes as a small plates experience. And that can become something really amazing in a group setting."

Even in a destination as dominated by offsite restaurants operated by many of the world's top chefs as New York City, new hotel restaurants that offer something unique and memorable have become a definite trend, says Sarah Gippin, director of sales at New York City destination management company Briggs Inc. And two of the key elements of that trend are farm-to-table menus based on fresh, locally sourced seasonal ingredients, and health-and-wellness regimens. "We're definitely seeing more of those things in New York," Gippin says. "But I'd also say those are broader trends that have been happening for a while and go beyond New York. Those are national trends."

Credit: Destination Hotels

Nelson's patio at Terranea Resort, a Destination Hotel near Los Angeles.

New Restaurants

More and more hotels, both in New York and across the U.S., are bringing in celebrity chef restaurants as exclusive, upscale amenities, Gippin says, "Particularly in demand are high-end trendy spots that will really get attention," she says. "There's also more of a focus on high-end lounges and cool rooftop spaces that are perfect for groups. And being able to offer access to those kinds of exclusive restaurants and spaces gives the hotel an advantage in booking the group."

In October, the Andaz Wall Street Hotel debuted its new Dina Rata restaurant and bar, which features upscale American bistro cuisine and a highly inventive cocktail menu. Located in the heart of Lower Manhattan's financial district, not far from the new One World Trade Center, Dina Rata overlooks Pearl Street and the hotel's signature courtyard. The intimate, cozy restaurant seats just over 60 people, so it is particularly suited to smaller groups who want an iconic New York experience. The restaurant specializes in small plates created from locally sourced ingredients from New York State's Hudson Valley.

Another fresh concept in New York is Beer & Buns, a lively burger joint located in The Court, a St. Giles Premier Hotel on East 39th Street, and featuring a wide selection of craft brews and international beers, which are paired with an assortment of burgers, from the classic American version to Pan Asian-inspired sliders. Opened last March and capitalizing on the ever-increasing popularity of specialty brews among discerning groups, Beer & Buns showcases exotic beers such as Xingu from Brazil, Estrella Galicia from Spain and Blanche de Bruxelles from Belgium, as well as better known local favorites such as Blue Moon, HarpoonUFO and New Planet.

Last January, The Wayfarer, a classic American grille from the highly successful and innovative The Metric, a New York-based hospitality group, opened at the super-trendy and wildly popular The Quin Hotel in midtown Manhattan. The Wayfarer features an artisanal menu built around fresh, locally sourced fish and produce, top-quality shellfish and exceptional meats.

Another New York-based hospitality provider, David Burke Group, opened its David Burke fabrick restaurant earlier this year on the ground floor of the Archer Hotel, another super-trendy hotel located in the red-hot garment district. Derived from the Latin term faber, which translates as "artisan" and spelled with a lower-case "f," the 84-seat restaurant is tucked behind a lush courtyard off 38th Street and features an airy dining room that is connected to the Archer's main lobby by a cozy, stylish lounge.

Around the Country

It's not just New York that is creating an ever-increasing list of new dining options for meeting planners who want a special experience for their attendees. The landmark Fontainebleau Miami Beach recently debuted a new StripSteak outpost from James Beard Award-winning celebrity chef Michael Mina, whose StripSteak at Mandalay Bay in Las Vegas has been cited by *Esquire* for serving the best steak in the U.S. — Mina's butter poached bone-in top loin.

"Over the last few years, we've seen an increase in the sophistication of travelers — including meeting attendees — when it comes to food and beverage. Food is something we are all fascinated with now."

Michael Dominguez, Senior V.P. of Corporate Hotel Sales
MGM Resorts International, Las Vegas, NV

One year before he opened StripSteak at the Fontainebleau, Mina premiered modern bistro Michael Mina 74 in the hotel, which also features the Forbes Four Star and AAA Four Diamond Hakkasan, serving modern Cantonese cuisine, and Scarpetta from acclaimed chef Scott Conant.

In Boca Raton, Florida, the new Waterstone Resort & Marina, a Doubletree by Hilton Hotel, has focused on delivering spectacular waterfront dining. Offering two venues, the flagship Boca Landing and more casual Waterstone Bar & Grill, the 139-room hotel specializes in small meetings. Boca Landing features art-inspired interiors and a "water-centric" atmosphere that provides 180-degree views of Lake Boca and the Intracoastal Waterway. The restaurant features fresh seafood sourced from local fishermen and an oyster bar, as well as stone crabs — a renowned Florida delicacy — shrimp cocktail and marinated conch. The menu focuses on small plates and simply prepared fish and meat dishes.

Las Vegas Is King

Early in 2015, Michael Mina also will open a new Bardot Brasserie at the Aria Resort & Casino in Las Vegas — still the center of the culinary universe when it comes to celebrity chefs and over-the-top venues. Open for lunch and dinner, Bardot will pay tribute to the famous café culture of Paris while serving contemporary treats such as a dry-aged steak burger with Comté cheese and bordelaise sauce.

Celebrity chef Julian Serrano will open a new Lago restaurant at Bellagio in Las Vegas in March. Featuring a stylish and sophisticated dining room with floor-to-ceiling windows that offer panoramic views of the famous Bellagio fountains and Las Vegas Strip, Lago will be the first Italian restaurant from the James Beard Award-winning and Michelin-starred Serrano. The menu will feature small plates that celebrate classic Italian cuisine infused with Serrano's creative flavor profiles.

"Las Vegas now has a reputation that creates an expectation from our meeting customers to not only have a new experience, but to have something that is going to be cutting-edge and world-renowned," Dominguez says. "And that's one of the reasons that we look to top chefs like Michael Mina and Julian Serrano to create those kinds of experiences."

The new Della's Kitchen at the Delano Las Vegas is being billed as "historic farmhouse meets urban eatery." The inventive menu, created from sustainably sourced ingredients, "tows the line between healthy and decadent, featuring fresh local and regional ingredients including sustainably grown herbs from the hotel's own greenhouse."

In September, chef Tony Hu opened his critically acclaimed Lao Sze Chuan — which serves Sze Chinese cuisine — at the Palms Casino Resort. Adapted from Chu's hugely popular Chicago restaurant, the Las Vegas Lao Sze Chuan also will serve Mandarin, Hunan and Shanghai specialties created for the Palms location.

A National Trend

In Orlando, another A-list destination, The Ritz-Carlton, Orlando Grande Lakes debuted its new Highball & Harvest restaurant in September. It blends rustic design elements with a level of contemporary refinement associated with the Ritz-Carlton brand. The "interactive" dining rooms feature table-

Healthy Living — More Than Food

Health and wellness programs are a big trend that intersects with the healthy food craze.

Trilogy Spa Holdings, a fast-growing operator of luxury spas, will debut its second Well & Being facility next spring at the Four Seasons Resort & Club Dallas at Las Colinas. It will be the largest luxury fitness and health club location in the U.S. Trilogy also has committed to expanding Well & Being at two additional locations that have not yet been publicly announced.

Currently available at the Fairmont Scottsdale Princess, Well & Being is an innovative spa concept featuring fully customized wellness experiences including fitness, nutrition, integrative medicine, mind-body therapies and advanced skin care. Designed to foster the concept of "evidence-based healthy living," the facility leverages a community of accomplished spa, fitness and health professionals led by a renowned expert in integrative medicine — Tieraona Low Dog, M.D. She provides guests with a personalized assortment of medically guided tools for immediate and long-lasting results. Incorporating healthful meals into daily lifestyle is an

Incorporating healthful meals into one's daily lifestyle is an integrative piece of the Well & Being program.

Credits: Fairmont Scottsdale Princess

integrative piece of the Well & Being program. As such, Well & Being curates special wellness menus available throughout the property and offers guests the chance to consult with nutrition experts onsite who will work to create a customized eating plan tailored to guests' individual needs and lifestyle, make supplement and

side services such as the handcrafting of specialty cocktails and the shucking of fresh oysters. Chef de Cuisine Mark Jeffers continues his dedication to farm-to-table dining and authentic, local experiences. Fresh seasonal ingredients are harvested from the resort's 7,000-sf Whisper Creek Farm, which opened in late 2012. Highball & Harvest also features a raw oyster bar, which serves house-made hot sauce; Pig-n-Potatoes, an all-day breakfast dish of poached egg, potato hash, and tender pork cheeks with sweet peppers, caramelized onions, H&H Hot Sauce and hollandaise sauce; Southern Spreads, pimento cheese dip and smoked fish dip served with pickled veggies, benne seed lavash, and grilled sourdough presented in a metal tackle box; and Smoked Lamb Brisket with boiled peanut "baked beans" and collards.

In Atlanta, the Hyatt Regency Atlanta — one of the city's landmark meeting hotels since 1967 — has created something new from something old and beloved. Earlier this year, the hotel reopened its signature amenity — the rotating, blue-domed, 93-seat Polaris restaurant and lounge that sits atop the 22-story property. Polaris, which officially reopened in June after the hotel underwent a $65 million renovation, serves handcrafted cocktails and creative shared plates that are highlighted by panoramic views of the downtown skyline. Polaris sources its "soil to city" ingredients from local purveyors, as well as produce from the hotel's rooftop garden. Visible from the restaurant, the Polaris rooftop garden features homegrown vegetables, herbs and fruit that are incorporated into food and cocktails. The garden also grows flowers, seasonal plants and features the only peach tree on Peachtree Street. In addition to growing produce, chef Pfefferkorn tends two hives of more than 10,000 honey bees in the garden, where busy insects produce several gallons of fresh honey to be sold at the restaurant and hotel.

"You can...bring the experience directly into the meeting space. You can have the chef prepare his signature dishes as a small plates experience. And that can become something really amazing in a group setting."

Lou Trope, Senior V.P. of Food and Beverage Experiences
Destination Hotels, Denver, CO

The Baltimore Marriott Waterfront hotel, located at the edge of the city's historic Inner Harbor and near downtown, has debuted a new Apropoe's restaurant named after local hero and literary titan Edgar Allen Poe. Designed as a modern au courant restaurant, Apropoe's is billed as more than just a restaurant. It is a versatile, functional space that includes spaces to work, gather and play. Fresh and local ingredients are sourced daily, with some picked straight from the hotel's own herb garden located on

nutrition recommendations, and even help develop shopping lists. Under the guidance of Dr. Low Dog, Well & Being has developed special healthy menu choices at each dining location with meal items that guests can integrate into daily life after leaving the resort setting.

Well & Being is Trilogy's latest extension of the spa facilities it operates at prestigious hotel properties, such as the Guerlain Spa in the Towers of the Waldorf Astoria New York and Spa del Rey at The Ritz-Carlton, Marina del Rey, in Southern California. In addition, Trilogy has been retained to design and manage industry-leading operations including the Boca Raton Resort & Club, Dolce Hotels, Virgin Hotels and the new Wilshire Grand project in Los Angeles.

The Westin Indianapolis also has pioneered a truly innovative health-and-wellness amenity. Its "running concierge" takes groups on scenic runs throughout the city's parks and trails. Trails near The Westin in the heart of downtown Indianapolis include the $63 million, 8-mile Cultural Trail urban greenway, which opened in 2013; the Central Canal, a beautiful 1.5-mile loop lined with murals and monuments; and the White River Wapahani Trail, which runs through White River State Park and along the White River. ***— JB***

Aerial yoga at the Fairmont Scottsdale Princess.

the fifth-floor pool deck. Although the restaurant serves excellent food, it also is noted for the fact that meeting attendees work, relax, plug in, meet and socialize there.

In North Carolina, the Raleigh Marriott City Center has begun an extensive renovation that will add a new Rye Bar & Southern Kitchen to its dining options. The new restaurant will offer a refined take on traditional Southern cuisine, inspired by the high-quality seasonal ingredients available from North Carolina and regional farmers. Rye will represent a next-generation collaboration between a restaurant kitchen and local farmers.

Unique Foodie Amenities

While farm-to-table menus have been a trend for several years, small plates or tapas-style menus are emerging as the next big trend.

"That trend is really being driven by the fact we live in a society now that is all about sharing and also having a social experience," Dominguez says. "And sharing small plate meals is a very social experience. It's also an adventure, because you get to try a lot of different things, rather than just eat one entrée."

Trope agrees that small plates are now a major trend that will gain even more momentum in 2015. "And we're looking at a couple of concepts for future development that are based on small plates and customizing the guest experience," he says, adding that in effect, a small plates menu can emulate the much pricier experience of a chef's seven-course tasting menu. "And it also means you can have more of a communal experience."

Another trend Trope thinks is still in its early stages is a commitment to local brewers and artisanal makers of local spirits. "For example, in San Diego we have a ton of great microbreweries," he says. "So now I'm going to try to make sure I bring microbreweries into meetings and events. But there are also now great local spirits makers in San Diego. And bringing them in means you can do a unique local bar based on locally produced products."

With so many of the new restaurants being opened touting their farm-to-table regimen of locally sourced seasonal ingredients, it's hard to claim any truly unique innovation at this point.

However, the Aloft Hotel in Asheville, North Carolina — one of the least well-known but truly sensational regional food destinations in the country — has indeed discovered something new.

The hotel works with 20-year-old, Asheville-based Wild Food Adventures to give meeting attendees a one-of-a-kind culinary experience. Programs for groups include foraging expeditions in local woods, "show and smell" presentations, cooking classes and five-course wild food banquets. The company's signature experience combines "lookin' and cookin.'" Attendees are taken outside to eat. Expert guides lead them on a woodland shopping spree, gathering wild mushrooms, plants and other extreme cuisine. Small servings are cooked up in the great outdoors, then the rest of the gathered food is taken back to the hotel, where the restaurant or caterer prepares a banquet featuring the unique and healthful, highly nutritious, tasty foods. Wild Food Adventures is the only forage-to-table company in the U.S. Its tours have been ranked by Fodor's as one of the 10 best food experiences in the world. In 2010, *Time* called foraging "the latest culinary obsession." Noma Restaurant of Copenhagen, whose always changing menu is entirely focused on foraging, has been the No. 1 restaurant in the world three of the past four years. It has made foraging and self-catering a worldwide phenomenon that Wild Food Adventures delivers to meeting planners and attendees.

Meanwhile, at Eau Palm Beach Resort & Spa in Florida — formerly The Ritz-Carlton, Palm Beach — executive sous chef Jason McGarry, a graduate of the prestigious Greenbrier chef's apprenticeship program, is focusing on more healthful fare crafted from plant-based foods.

His "meatless menu," which is garnering attention among foodies as well as animal rights activists, was recently featured at a local event for the South Florida Wildlife Center's Wildlife Trauma Hospital.

At Eau Palm Resort & Spa, McGarry is creating an Ayurvedic pantry in the kitchen of the rebranded resort to cater to guests following the traditional healing diet of the Indian subcontinent.

His health-and-wellness menu flourishes at the hotel and includes Middle Eastern Eggs Shakshouka for breakfast and a full Mediterranean breakfast buffet that features more healthful and nutritious options than the typical hotel menu.

"There's a heightened sense of awareness around healthy living, cooking and eating," McGarry says, "and guests are asking for lighter foods, and we are delivering them here at Eau Palm Beach. The important thing is always the purity of the ingredients." He adds that he is encouraged that more and more guests at the resort are interested in more healthful options — including many meeting attendees. And he is delivering, in the hope that his food will become a marketing asset for the rebranded hotel. ***C&IT***

"There's a heightened sense of awareness around healthy living, cooking and eating, and guests are asking for lighter foods, and we are delivering them here at Eau Palm Beach."

Jason McGarry, Executive Sous Chef
Eau Palm Beach Resort & Spa, Palm Beach, FL

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Employees of Becton Dickinson venture off the beaten path at Disney's Animal Kingdom as part of a private sunset adventure that featured a trek through an unexplored forest and a journey across a savanna filled with exotic animals.

Credit: ©Disney

From a Walk on the Wild Side to Wizards, Potter and Penguins, Theme Park Meetings Are All About the Experience

By John Buchanan

In the never-ending quest for elements that can make a meeting special and memorable, more and more planners are using theme parks as venues. And although there is quite a long list of options available across the country, the holy trinity of theme parks — Walt Disney World Resort, Universal Orlando Resort and SeaWorld Orlando — are all located in Orlando where the climate allows for year-round events.

Director Surprises Group with Disney's Wild Africa Trek

Gregory J. Butler, director, global supply chain stewardship at Franklin Lakes, New Jersey-based medical technology provider Becton, Dickinson & Company, heads the 12-person team that plans and hosts the company's biennial global sustainability forum for 100 attendees from 15 countries.

Butler has used a Disney venue in Orlando for his meetings in 2010, 2012 and 2014.

Last year, he became the first planner to use the Wild Africa Trek attraction at Disney's Animal Kingdom for a very special three-hour VIP event for his colleagues.

"It was partially a teambuilding event for the group and partly a 'thank you for a good year' event," Butler says.

At each meeting, every other year, he stages something special for his fellow employees from the company's Office of Global Sustainability, which hosts the important event.

In 2012, that something special was a private dinner and viewing of the acclaimed IllumiNations fireworks display at Epcot Center.

The opportunity to have such unique and memorable experiences is what sets theme parks apart from other offsite venues, Butler says.

"A theme park allows attendees to experience something as part of the group that they might not be able to experience as individuals," he says. For example, for our main group this year, we went over to Hollywood Studios and dined at the Fantasmic! show."

The popular nighttime show highlights Disney's most iconic storybook characters in a spectacular high-tech, interactive environment.

"That's not something you can do as an individual," Butler says. "So doing something like that gives people an experience they couldn't have on their own."

For meeting planners, a venue such as Disney provides infrastructure and support services that make their jobs easier. "The event staff at a theme park is used to working with large groups and therefore can react very rapidly to change," Butler says. "For example, our dinner plans changed very suddenly this year because of unseasonably cold weather for Florida. And Disney was able to move us indoors very seamlessly. That kind of logistical support is another reason why theme parks make it very easy for me as a planner."

"They really felt like they were immersed in an adventure...so 'up close' with the animals. ...The experience really transported you."

Gregory J. Butler, Director, Global Supply Chain Stewardship
Becton, Dickinson & Company, Franklin Lakes, NJ

For this year's VIP event, Butler chose Wild Africa Trek.

"My colleagues have the utmost confidence in me to surprise them at every meeting every two years," he says. "So they just let me go with it. And I always surprise them."

This year, Butler wanted something truly unique that would make his coworkers feel special. "We wanted something that was different enough that they would feel it was a 'thank you' for the hard work they have done all year," he says. "This time around, I really wanted something out of the ordinary."

And Wild Africa Trek delivered.

"We started off on foot through the savannah," Butler says. "Then we were on a shaky rope bridge about 10 feet above a river bed with hippos and crocodiles. It was safe because we were all wearing a harness that was tied off to an overhead track. But it was still exciting. And it also served as a type of teambuilding, since we were all encouraging each other across the rope bridge. Everybody pulled together."

At the end of the walking tour, the group climbed into a

Disney's Wild Trek Africa delivered a one-of-a-kind experience for Greg Butler's team and included *(l)* getting up close to the giraffes, *(c)* an authentic gourmet dinner on the savannah and a safari vehicle ride among the elephants, ostriches and rhinos. Credit: ©Disney

safari vehicle and ventured past elephants, giraffes and rhinos. "Then you have a sunset dinner out on the savannah," Butler says. "We made arrangements to have South African champagne waiting for us, and our vice president toasted the group and thanked us for a good year. The dinner was served camp style, out of metal containers, but it consisted of dishes like curried chicken, tandoori shrimp and air-dried beef — really authentic food accompanied by South African wines."

The evening earned kudos from his VIP attendees.

"They really felt like they were immersed in an adventure," Butler says. "That's because we felt like we were really off the beaten path. Everyone also commented on the fact we were so 'up close' with the animals. And that experience was enhanced by the fact we had great guides. One of them was from South Africa, so with his accent and personality, you really felt like you were on a real safari. The experience really transported you."

Butler also praised the quality of the F&B. "Everything was great, from the quality of the food to the quality of the service," he says. "And even though it was served in so-called 'camp style,' it was a first-class dining experience."

SeaWord — a Unique Combo: Theme Park and Animal Attraction

Jeff Sacks, CMP, vice president, strategic account management, at major independent meeting planning company Experient in Fenton, Missouri, is a veteran planner who has used theme parks successfully over the years.

Last February, Sacks used the new Antarctica: Empire of the Penguin facility at SeaWorld Orlando for Experient's annual 50-attendee strategic account management and sales summit.

"One reason why meeting planners use theme parks is that when you go to a destination like Orlando or anywhere else where an outdoor event is a good option, you want to do something that is outdoors and interactive, and something that will just be a good experience for your attendees," Sacks says. "It's just a good way of taking them out of the meeting room, out of the hotel and doing something outdoors. There are certainly other ways when you go to a destination like Orlando where you can choose a venue and do a reception or a party outdoors. But that's completely different from going to a place like SeaWorld, where not only are you taking advantage of the opportunity to do something outdoors, but you're also doing something that is totally interactive."

Unlike fairly typical outdoor events at a hotel or other off-site venue, where attendees simply gather around food stations, a theme park offers attendees the opportunity to explore a facility that offers a number of different entertainment options, Sacks says. "It's about people being out and enjoying the park and doing the things they want to do together."

Another key advantage of theme parks is that they address the multigenerational issue that has become such a hot topic in the meeting industry over the last few years. "Theme parks really offer something that appeals to every generation or type of person," Sacks says. "There is something for everybody. And I don't know that it is necessarily a generational issue, but at a theme park you can find something for thrill-seekers to do and you can also find something for more passive people to do, like going to a show. But one way or another, it delivers an experience for everybody."

Planner Gives High Marks to Universal Orlando Resort

Jennifer Ruthig, CMP, corporate meeting planner at global crop nutrition manufacturer The Mosaic Company in Plymouth, Minnesota, has used Universal Orlando Resort as a venue three times — most recently in January 2014 — for the company's annual education conference for 425 attendees.

Last year, Ruthig did a buyout of a portion of The Wizarding World of Harry Potter. Early in 2015, Mosaic will return to the park and enjoy a buyout of Marvel Super Hero Island, which features The Incredible Hulk Coaster.

Ruthig makes the theme park excursion the highlight of the second day of her meeting.

Why is she so loyal to Universal?

"The No. 1 reason is that they take care of their customers," she says. "They have a fantastic product. But they also truly listen to the goals and objectives of their meeting customers and they want to fulfill those needs. For example, my goal when I use

Attendees of the Mosaic Company's annual education conference pose at the entrance to Hogwarts Castle at The Wizarding World of Harry Potter.

Credit: Jose Velez Photography

Kept at a brisk 32°F year-round, SeaWorld Orlando's Antarctica: Empire of the Penguin state-of-the-art facility features nearly 250 penguins from four different species.

Credits: SeaWorld

Somewhat surprisingly, Sacks says, even though Antarctica: Empire of the Penguin offers a unique opportunity to get up close and personal with the magical sea creatures, two-thirds of his attendees opted for the Manta — the only flying roller coaster of its kind in the world — fashioned after another fabled sea creature and recently voted the best roller coaster in Orlando.

"It's an incredible roller coaster," Sacks says. "But there were also people in the group who were not thrill-seekers. So while three-quarters of the attendees were riding this great roller coaster, the rest of them could go out and do different things that appealed to them, like seeing the manta rays or penguins."

And those various options are among the things that make SeaWorld so unique, Sacks points out. "You have the combination of a theme park and an animal attraction. That's something very unique."

Like Universal and Disney, SeaWorld also works hard to tailor the venue to the specific desires or preferences of individual groups, Sacks says.

"In our case, we went to them and said, 'This is our group. This is who they are and why it's important that they understand what the park has to offer,'" he says. "And they took it from there. And one of the pleasant surprises for us was that once we got to the Antarctica exhibit, all of the food stations were set up within the Antarctica venue. And the food was really, really good, which was a bit of a surprise for us because most people think a certain way about the quality of food you'll get at a convention center or a theme park. But SeaWorld delivered high-level catering."

Universal is to create a unique networking event, where after a full day of meeting sessions you bring a fun component into it. It brings out your inner child. And in my experience, that means that after people have been screaming on a roller coaster the night before, come Wednesday morning and the final day of my meeting, there is just a buzz in my sessions because you've broken down so many walls and barriers the night before by having people have fun. And that is a unique form of networking."

Universal understands that dynamic, Ruthig says. "So they sit down with you and say, 'How can we help facilitate that effect?'"

That kind of networking is especially important to The Mosaic Company because of the ever-increasing dialogue among customers from different countries as the agricultural industry continues to become more global. "We want attendees to talk to one another and say, 'Tell me what's going on in your country,'" Ruthig explains. "Those kinds of discussions are also more and more important in places like Brazil, which is becoming more and more of a force in the market. And we find that using a theme park like Universal Orlando as a venue for our meeting just naturally stimulates those kinds of important conversations because it's a shared experience. It also allows people to get to know one another in a more personal sort of way that is just

Visiting The Wizarding World of Harry Potter - Diagon Alley is a treat for all ages.

Credit: Universal Orlando Resort

not the same as what you get when people sit in a meeting room all day."

The other key factor for Ruthig is that because the annual meeting is for customers, "We want people to say, 'Wow, Mosaic cares enough about us to bring us here,'" she says. "I can put on a great meeting that people will remember. But I can't build a roller coaster. So that makes it something truly special."

The other practical reason why Ruthig is so loyal to and enthusiastic about Universal Orlando Resort is the quality of its food and beverage and overall service.

"For our Harry Potter event last year, the catering department just blew me away," she says. "The quality of the food and the quantity of the food for the price we paid was just incredible. And the food was perfectly themed to the attraction, with very British dishes like fish and chips and bangers (sausage) and mash. It felt very global, and that was important since so many of our attendees are from outside North America."

As a planner, Ruthig gives high marks to Universal for the quality of its service. "I rate them extremely highly," she says. "And one reason I do is that even though a theme park is, by definition, a highly branded product, they always look for creative ways to incorporate your brand into their product. And they come up with a lot of ideas that help really make your meeting work. And even though they do events for groups almost every day, they never treat you like yours is just another event. They always do everything they can to make your event special."

And in turn, that generates enthusiastic feedback from attendees. "People just appreciate the fact that you go to the trouble of doing something special for them," Ruthig says. "But it also relaxes them and brings them back refreshed for the meeting the next day."

The vast Universal Orlando Resort also features the Islands of Adventure Theme Park; the Hollywood-themed Universal Studios Florida; Wet 'n Wild Orlando, a premiere water park; and the sprawling Universal CityWalk dining and entertainment complex. Among CityWalk's newest attractions is the Hot Dog Hall of Fame where visitors can choose an iconic frank from Chicago, Boston, New York, Los Angeles, or create their own dog.

Credit: Jose Velez Photography

"I can put on a great meeting that people will remember. But I can't build a roller coaster. So that makes it something truly special."

Jennifer Ruthig, CMP *(right)* Corporate Meeting Planner, The Mosaic Company, Plymouth, MN

Credit: Universal Orlando Resort

Authentic, quality food and beverage is a hallmark of a corporate group event at The Wizarding World of Harry Potter and Diagon Alley at Universal Orlando Resort.

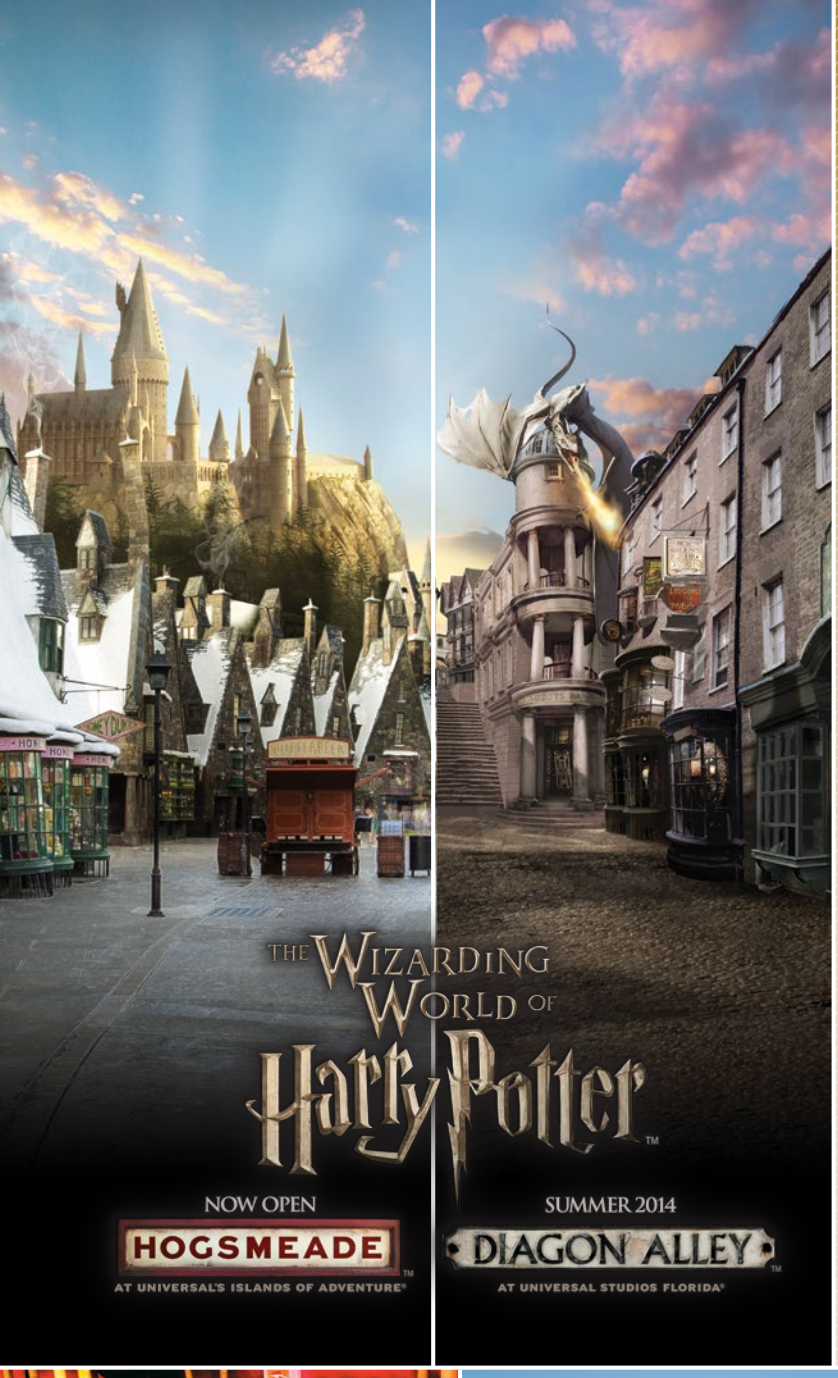
Theme Park Pointers

Although more and more meeting planners are becoming aware of the unique advantages of using a theme park venue, it's important for first-time users to keep some practical advice in mind in order to get the most from the experience.

"If you're going to use a theme park, lean on their staff to help make sure you do it right," says Experient's Jeff Sacks, CMP. "They are the experts when it comes to their venue. So don't take too much on yourself to figure out how to use the attraction. Use the experts that are there to help you do that. They know from past experience what has worked and not worked when it comes to groups that are similar to yours. And you should also make sure to ask what all of the options are so you can make an informed choice."

And most important, Sacks says, make sure to tailor the experience to your group.

"Make sure the facility will deliver the kind of experience that really fits your group. Not all groups are made to go offsite and do an event at a theme park. Quite honestly, there are groups that just need to be indoors at a hotel. But there are also a lot of groups that are a good fit for a theme park. For example, something that a lot of meeting planners are talking about today is that meetings need to be experiences. And a theme park allows you to make a meeting an experience." ***C&IT***



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Budgeting

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The Final Bill

Don't Get Blindsided by Extra Fees and Service Charges That Inflate Meeting Costs

By Gabi Logan

There's no denying it. We're in a seller's market when it comes to hotels and convention centers. And following the lead of the airlines, which have perfected the practice of nickel-and-diming their way into the black, hotels are not only driving negotiations, but they're increasingly making planners check and double-check contracts and bills for extra fees that were once included.

"As long as they tell you ahead of time and you can prepare for those costs in your budget or have a solution or workaround, it's okay," says Heather Cleveland, CMP, senior meeting and event planner for CSP Business Media LLC in Mesa, Arizona. "When it's post-event and you suddenly get a bill, that's worse."

While many fees, particularly when it comes to labor and technology, seem like ever-moving targets impossible to properly set your sights on, savvy planners are finding that finely tuned contract processes and working their network helps them keep their budgets in check.

Beyond the Room Rental

In addition to what you know you'll pay for the physical space in your rentals, many planners are finding unexpected charges related to their meeting space popping up on their final bill — often without being mentioned in the contract or earlier negotiation and correspondence.

"There's one thing that I don't often see, as it depends on what type of program we're doing, but it can hit hard: electrical costs that were never discussed before and show up on your bill," explains Cleveland. "They charge an arm and a leg just to plug in something in the conference room."

Equipment rental charges are more traditional and easier to understand, because the venue had to pay for the piece initially and cover wear and tear, but planners are finding even these prices taking on surprising proportions. "Normally we don't get charged to use easels, and some properties are now charging for them, maybe even $20 per easel, but one of my coworkers had a $45 charge for one once," says Cleveland. "That's absurd, especially if they have one in stock. I understand if they rent it from another company and pass on the charge, but that's something I would expect to be a discussion in advance. If I'm ordering 20 or 50, they should say, 'We only have 10, so you'll have rental fees.'"

One of the space rental-related charges that can be the most difficult to prepare for is labor costs. "Comparing back to the old days — though it also depends on whether it is a union property or not — staff charges in terms of labor fees can be exorbitant," Cleveland continues. "We're in a non-union state, so that's something that we're not so cognizant of or thinking of beforehand, so we have to try to adjust our contracts accordingly because their labor rate is higher. Because we have so many special product placements where we need hotels to assist, we can run into a lot of labor fees, and in the last 10 years, they're just soaring through the roof."

Dawn Sadler, CMP, senior congress planner for Minneapolis, Minnesota-based Medtronic Inc., has a system to forestall getting surprised by most additional fees and charges, but still runs into issues getting venues to clarify labor charges upfront, particularly for AV. "In terms of some of the labor charges, they quote you the cost over the phone, and then you get the bill and there are four hours of labor because that's the minimum," she says.

"Some labor minimums are only an hour; for others, it's four hours. If you have a real short set or if it's just for a dinner or a board meeting that's just an hour, it doesn't make sense," she continues. "They're not doing four hours of labor, so I see what I can negotiate, but it depends on the property, unions and supplier. If it's a really basic set, you have more flexibility than if you have a soundboard.

"I try to get a full advance AV quote,

not just something in a phone call or about how much it costs to rent an AV projector," Sadler says. "I try to get the full exposure and map it out in terms of what I have going on, like if it's a dinner versus a full day of meetings with different rooms at the same time. I want to get the full quote so I can go through line item by line item and flag large expenses. I ask myself, 'Do I really need two techs to do that or can we just bring in one for the actual event and not the rehearsal?' I try to minimize the exposure on that and just bring in the tech for the actual event."

Getting the accurate future charges before your meeting or event is only half the battle for planners, however, because the taxes and fees that pile up on top of them can still upend your budget.

Taxes and Fees Take Their Toll

"There are certainly flags that I see on contracts of things that I watch for on billing," says Sadler. "I try to get service fees, gratuities and taxes at the time that I sign the contract," she continues. "A lot of times they don't list them in the contract because obviously the city or state reserves the right to change them at any time so they don't like to publish them, but they can add as much as an additional 33 percent to an event, and that's a significant amount of money.

"It's common to see the line 'services, fees and taxes as applicable at the time of application' without those being spelled out, but I have to report back to my team at the time, and I can't do that if I don't have all the fees," she continues. "Being a medical device company, there's a certain amount we're allowed to spend on physicians, so we're trying to monitor those costs very closely. For a wild ballpark, I pull in 22 percent gratuities, and tax in the 9 (percent) range, though New York City and some West Coast cities are higher, and there are obviously some cities that are lower."

In particular, Sadler keeps herself updated on the fee landscape in different cities, as in some cases state taxes and city taxes layer in with fees that can be called by other names, such as hospitality service fees, which also can be called administrative or resort fees. "There are things I've learned to look for over the years. In certain cities they tend to add a certain fee. In DC, there is something called a convenience fee for when you use a venue and you have to bring in catering. Then you have to pay 10 percent of the catering bill to the hotel as a convenience fee," she says.

"Resort fees are negotiable, because, well what does that include?" she continues. "Is it towels at the pool? This is a business meeting; we're not using the pool. It can also be called a recreation fee or charge, though I haven't run into one of these in a while, that says pool use and a towel fee. In those cases, I tell them that I'm doing business meetings and we're not anticipating that they're going to use the pool or we're there such a short time that they might have 30 free minutes the entire time, and I try to negotiate out of it."

Dawn Sadler, CMP
Senior Congess Planner
Medtronic Inc.
Minneapolis, MN

"I try to get service fees, gratuities and taxes at the time that I sign the contract. ...They can add as much as an additional 33 percent to an event."

"I hate material and handling fees," says Lauree Simes, CMP, senior corporate event planner for Plano, Texas-based Tyler Technologies Inc. "I really do. I struggle with the fact that it can cost $150 to bring a pallet one way and I can get it myself in 10 minutes. Like parking, where if the parking structure is owned by a third party, there's not as much leeway; handling fees are harder to negotiate if the provider is a third party like FedEx or UPS. Most of your major brands are going to do third-party shipping.

"Their hands are tied somewhat, because they can't give discounts on third party because they have to agree," she explains. "I've been in the industry for 15 years, and the negotiations that happen are hand-in-hand with your relationship and the honesty they give you and you can give them. One thing that new planners need to realize is that there are some concessions they can give and some they can't."

Finagling Food and Beverage

Unlike room rentals, food and beverage has a near infinite number of permutations of packages. It's one of the areas that planners try to find the most wiggle room yet it's an area that is difficult for hotels to discount. "Hotels' biggest money is made on sleeping rooms. F&B is a wash. They don't typically make money," explains Simes. "On the other hand, the sleeping room rate is very negotiable."

Because of the narrow profit margin for hotels, they typically try to structure the pricing to make sure their costs are covered as best as possible, but planners often find these charges out of line. "Coffee à la carte can be $60 per gallon at convention centers but $90 per gallon at hotels," says Simes. "It can be an indicator of how expensive a venue is, so I try hard not to do à la carte because of that, but the larger the group you have, the harder it is to determine how much they'll drink."

Simes finds that she avoids unexpected charges and accommodates her attendees best with a per-person package for drinks. But Sadler has found a compromised approach to à la carte that takes a little more effort for her team, but provides substantial savings. "Especially if I have rolling beverages going all day, I will do an initial setting in the morning for X number of gallons of coffee and tea, and I set up a refresh time, but I ask that they check with me before they supply replenishments. So rather than say at 10 a.m. I need five

more gallons of coffee, we can only refill what we need," Sadler says.

Per-person pricing for meals, whether buffet or seated, is preferred by many planners for keeping meal costs in check, but it requires finding a menu option that everyone is happy with. Cleveland says, "I haven't had anybody give me an issue with a per-person rate, but I have had people push back regarding customizing menus for me. Usually they make it work, but sometimes it's about the chef. Sometimes they like to think out of the box and sometimes they are very protective of their menu."

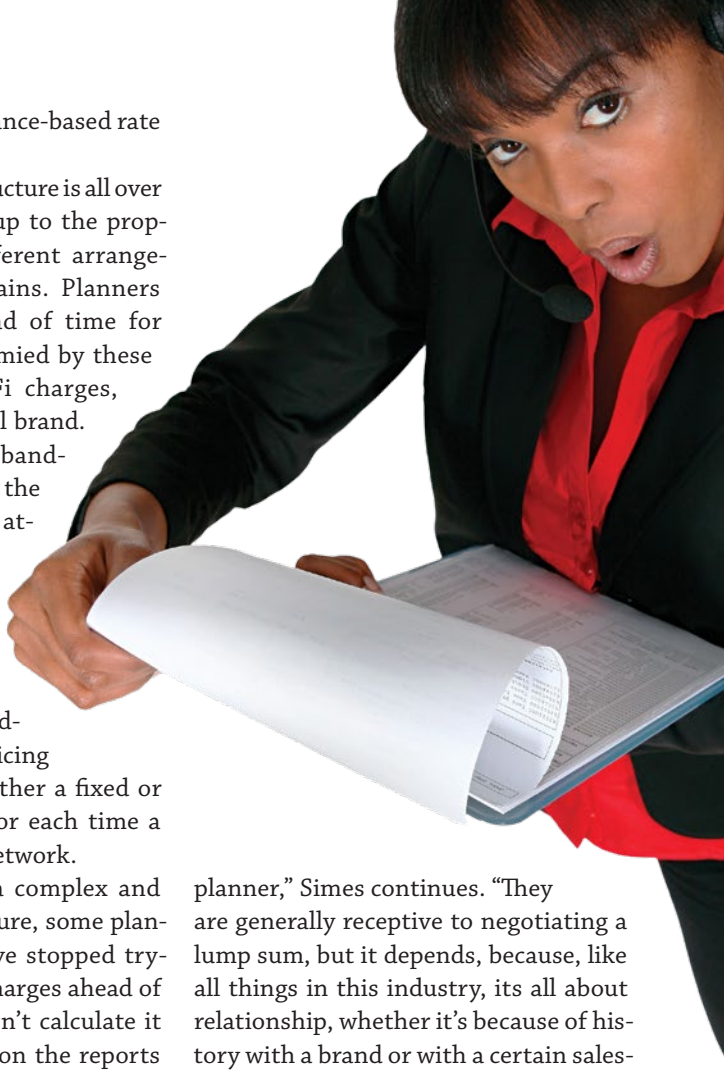
Paying to Connect

With company broadband requirements and hotel technology capability frequently at odds and always changing, it's natural that the Internet fee field is in a state of constant flux. But the highly irregular Internet fee landscape has made it something many planners love to hate. A meeting planner, who preferred to keep this comment anonymous, says, "If you get enough meeting planners in a room with some drinks, the conversation always turns to Internet charges."

Says Cleveland, "Internet charges are the hot topic right now. In many places, for the in-room Internet, they are finally switching over. It's free, and everybody gets it. But when it's not, they're not as flexible about giving in-room Internet away free as they used to be. They just won't throw it in, and we're like, 'It's already on. It's already there. We just need to access it.' "

Simes agrees, "It's the largest pet peeve of mine in any hotel that I book and do a program in. One of the first concessions that I get is complimentary Wi-Fi in the guest rooms, but the meeting space is a whole other story. They charge you up the wazoo, and you know it has been paid for a million times over since they put it in their building. You expect the Wi-Fi to be one thing, and then they say the instances were more. But instances can be devices to an IP, not just IP address. If a person has an iPad, a phone and a computer, it's still the same person accessing just at the different times. The instance-based rate is increasingly common."

"For events, the fee structure is all over the place. It's basically up to the properties. I've seen all different arrangements," Cleveland explains. Planners looking to budget ahead of time for their bandwidth are stymied by these inconsistencies in Wi-Fi charges, even with the same hotel brand. While getting enough bandwidth to run an event at the appropriate speed for attendee needs is less of a problem, many enterprising hotels have switched from charging a lump sum for a certain amount of bandwidth to the instance-pricing model, which charges either a fixed or bandwidth-related fee for each time a device connects to the network.



In the face of such a complex and ever-changing fee structure, some planners, like Cleveland, have stopped trying to plan their Wi-Fi charges ahead of time. "Sometimes we don't calculate it in advance, and we rely on the reports from the hotel on how much is being utilized then," she says. "It depends on the type of event you're doing. We have a tech conference that we're putting on, and we're going to need a lot more bandwidth and details on the type of Wi-Fi the event can accommodate. It's different with training. If you have a tech program, you want to make sure you have higher bandwidth if you know you're going to have 1,000 people and people will have multiple devices as opposed to at educational where maybe only 40 percent of people will have a device."

Simes has found it best to avoid any sort of instance-based or bandwidth-metered rate and agrees on a lump sum upfront. Somewhat surprisingly, many hotels are amenable to this approach if you set it up in advance, she says. "In the negotiating, we're starting to negotiate a package where it doesn't matter how many instances, 100,000 or whatever, and we get to pay what we want in one lump sum," she says.

"Very rarely do we lose on that as a planner," Simes continues. "They are generally receptive to negotiating a lump sum, but it depends, because, like all things in this industry, its all about relationship, whether it's because of history with a brand or with a certain salesperson. Whatever relationship has been built, you're better off."

Final Thoughts

Simes adds, "In all things hotels, it's all negotiable; it's just that some areas are more so than others." But planners can only negotiate upfront, not once the bill comes, and savvy planners have found that no matter how long it takes — Cleveland finds some new relationships take a month to get everything ironed out — getting all the details discussed and in writing ahead of time can save both money and your relationship down the line.

"I think a lot of planners, especially association or new planners, have been given a morbid picture that hotels are out to get you no matter what," Simes continues. "But they're not the bad guys. They're in business to make money, but so are we. Honest to goodness, it's about the relationships you've built that help you get through your contract and get through your meeting." ***C&IT***

The Transformative Tech Revolution

A Blizzard of Dramatic Change Is Driven by Mobile Technology Combined With Social Media

By John Buchanan

The explosion of technology continues to be the single most dramatic factor in the meeting industry. Like it or not, new technologies that appear with the regularity of tides are transforming meetings for both planners and attendees.

"On the planning side, technology has just made the process more efficient," says Alex Schutte, corporate marketing manager at technology developer Qvidian in Cincinnati, Ohio. "For example, we do everything in Google Drive, or what used to be called Google Docs. That makes it easy to collaborate on things like our budgets, session descriptions and communication plans. The event manager will usually take the lead in creating that document, but then the whole team will collaborate on refining and finalizing that document. The important thing is that it's a real time form of collaboration, so it eliminates a lot of the back and forth that usually makes the process inefficient."

Until now, most meeting planners have tended to view technology more as a matter of convenience than one of transformation. One reason: Many planners, especially older ones, are admittedly intimidated by technology.

Such fear and trepidation are common, says meeting industry technology expert Corbin Ball, CMP, who regularly tracks more than 1,700 technology products in more than 60 categories. "I think most people, in general, feel that way," he says. "It's not just meeting planners. We're living in a time of unprecedented change. But when it comes to meeting planners, putting together a meeting today is like putting together a thousand-piece jigsaw puzzle. And if you forget or ignore a piece, you don't have an entire picture. So technology certainly represents a few pieces of that puzzle. But there also are many, many more things out there that planners have to understand and put into that jigsaw puzzle. And all of that adds up to a blizzard of change in the way planners do events. That's really what planners have to cope with now."

Meanwhile, Ball says, the pace of technological change is accelerating every year *(see box on page 30)*.

"When it comes to meeting technology, we are living in really interesting times right now," says Ball, who is a frequent speaker at major meeting industry events. "Things are changing pretty dramatically. And the real drivers are mobile technology, combined with social media. Those two things are working together to cause big change."

A recent survey by Meeting Professionals International (MPI) found that 85 percent of planners either use or plan to soon use mobile apps for their events. "Three years ago, the number was seven percent," Ball says. "So that tells you that the adoption rate of mobile has been phenomenal."

A critical factor in the technology equation is that virtually every meeting planner and attendee now owns a smartphone. "That means they have cutting-edge technology in their pockets," Ball says. "And that is the real game-changer, because the smartphone has become a Swiss army knife of capabilities and apps that are changing all of the old rules for meetings and events. Mobile technology has now become a totally disruptive technology in the meeting industry."

Cate Banfield, senior manager, event services at Santa Ana, California-based B2B technology provider Ingram Micro, agrees that mobile is the current 800-pound gorilla of the meeting industry. "Mobile is huge now," she says. "We don't do many of our major meetings and events anymore without having a mobile app for it. And for our major events, a mobile app is now our first go-to tool in terms of enhancing the attendee experience. But we also use it to help us as planners and marketers get our message out about the meeting."

Laura Baumgardner, senior product marketer at CRM and business management service provider Thomson Reuters Elite in New York, is another enthusiastic user of mobile apps. But her deployment of the technology is still relatively simple.

"For us, having a mobile app is important because things like our program guide or agenda are always changing for our conferences," Baumgardner says. "And with mobile technology, we are able to manage those changes better than before when everything was on paper. It's easy to update things like the agenda."

However, she says, mobile technology also facilitates easier communication with attendees, especially onsite. "And it also allows us to make sure they know about things like a special event we want them to get to," she says. "And those are capabilities that we never really had before."

She also views the growing use of mobile technology by Thomson Reuters as an attendee engagement strategy. "We do things now like monitor the tweets that are coming from attendees during the conference and then displaying those as a way of engaging people," she says. "And we did not have that capability in the past either."

The Next Big Thing — Analytics

Until fairly recently, meeting planners had almost no clue what was actually happening at their meetings, Ball notes. And by the time they found out in a post-event survey, it was too late to do anything that might have caused concern or frustration during the meeting.

"Planners were flying blind during the

Credit: EIBTM

Credit: Reggie Ige Photography

(Left) Time to test Google Glass on a QR code T-shirt — at EIBTM. *(Right)* Emcee/host James Cunningham *(l)* and Paul Bay, president technology solutions, North America Ingram Micro, taking a selfie at the company's ONE event at Aria.

meeting," Ball says. "Now you can have access to the kinds of analytical details that can tell you exactly what people are doing and thinking during the event. You can know what they like, what they dislike and how things can be improved — right this minute. That is a gold mine of information that never existed before in real time."

However, Ball says, only a relatively small percentage of planners realize the availability or recognize the potential of such granular data, nor have industry organizations called much attention to it yet. "For example, in a recent MPI survey, analytics is not even on the list of reasons planners are using mobile apps," Ball says. "When people talk about mobile technology, most of them still talk about things like replacing paper products like programs or exhibition guides or surveys. In other words, they're looking at what mobile is replacing, not what the potential is."

In the near future, Ball predicts, so-called "big data" — the technique of mining vast amounts of information for important insights — which was the secret weapon that against all odds got Barack Obama re-elected president

Big Technology Trends of 2015

Each year, it seems, the pace of technological transformation in the meeting industry accelerates.

And 2015 will be no exception, according to well-known meeting technology guru Corbin Ball, who has identified the key trends to keep an eye on.

BLE (Bluetooth Low Energy) and iBeacon will create new options for planners and attendees. So-called "geofencing" will start to become a significant factor in meetings and events. Soon after Ball made that prediction last September, Apple released its iOS7 operating system, which incorporated iBeacon technology. iBeacons can interact with and share information with Apple and later model Android mobile device apps. Already installed in some sports arenas, museums, airports and a growing number of retail stores, "the technology holds great promise for events," says Ball, who adds that it can be used to provide location information and navigation assistance for meeting attendees. For example, iBeacons can guide pedestrians to a nearby restaurant or retail store. It also can help meeting hosts and exhibitors measure how long attendees spend in a booth. Planners also will be able to track where attendees spend time during a meeting or provide automated product demonstrations from sponsors.

Real-time, automated language translation will become a reality. Although Google Translate has been around since 2007, the ability to reliably translate meeting presentations or support materials from English to other languages for international attendees has remained an expensive proposition. New mobile apps such as Translate Voice Free and Jibbigo make voice translations easier and much cheaper. Mobile apps such as WordLens enable real-time translations of things such as signage, slides and menus for just $4.99 per language. Microsoft's Skype will soon offer Skype Translator to provide two-way video translations.

Good Wi-Fi at hotels and other meeting venues will become expected and widespread. Free, high-quality

BALL

(broadband) Wi-Fi in hotel rooms is the No. 1 amenity on the personal wish lists of both planners and attendees. Because mobile apps have become the engine for more and more meetings, connectivity has become "the lifeblood of event communications," Ball says. Hotels and other meeting venues have finally gotten the message and are rapidly upgrading their services to gain a competitive edge based on burgeoning demand. Meanwhile, savvy planners are asking questions in their RFPs about the exact technical specifications of a venue's Wi-Fi system.

Meeting attendees will become known as "participants." Under the banner of engagement, the powerful combination of mobile technology and social media has turned the traditional meeting paradigm upside down. Instead of top down, meetings are now a bottom up exercise, with attendees participating more and more in shaping the event from start to finish. Hence, Balls says, the longstanding term "attendee" will give way to a more accurate characterization: participant. And their participation will impact every aspect of a meeting — before, during and after the event.

The best trend of all — **face-to-face meetings** — will continue to rule the roost. Although virtual meetings and webinars continue to gain popularity for certain kinds of events, the most important events in a company's fiscal year will continue to be held as face-to-face events.

Thanks to the tireless efforts of industry coalition Meetings Mean Business, it is now widely accepted as reality that no technology will ever supersede the importance of face-to-face contact, although meeting sessions themselves will continue to get shorter and be increasingly more focused because attention spans will continue to decrease. ***— JB***

of the United States in 2012 — will become a key component of event design and marketing.

"The question of big data really has two parts," Ball says. "First there is the question of tracking consumer trends such as Web searches that allow you tap into very large databases of information. Until now, that capability has been expensive. But now it's available as a service. So meeting planners can use it now to do a better job of creating their events. But another thing that is starting to become a trend is the ability to combine multiple data sources around an event. And attendees create all sorts of interesting data points, from registration to their actions onsite to what they say they like and their social media activity. So to be able to use technology to aggregate and interpret those kinds of things will also start to give planners and meeting hosts a better picture of what is happening as a result of the meeting."

At Ingram Micro, Banfield and her colleagues have only recently started looking at fast-evolving analytical capabilities. "Certainly, the data side of things is very important," she says. "And the first time we tried, we were able to accumulate, through our partnership with SpotMe, a level of data that we had never gotten before. We were able to tell, in real time, who was in breakout sessions and send them surveys. And then the data from those surveys also gave us another level of analytical data that we could use to assess and measure the success of various sessions. Now, we want to really work with SpotMe even further to be able to build on that. And the way we look at it, in the long run, doing that will allow us to become more proactive than reactive."

At Thomson Reuters, Baumgardner has only recently recognized the trend and begun to think about ways to exploit the capability.

"People come to our conferences for different reasons," she says. "But one of the obvious ones is the transfer of knowledge that comes from our content. So we want to make those sessions as effective as we can, because people pay a lot of money to come to our conferences. So we want to make sure that not only are we providing them with information that will help them do their jobs better, but also that they agree we are doing that. So one of the things we do is ask a lot of survey questions."

The Gamification Revolution

Baumgardner works with industry-leading mobile technology provider QuickMobile and has increasingly incorporated its innovative gamification capabilities into her tool kit.

Alex Schutte
Corporate Marketing Manager
Qvidian, Cincinnati, OH

"We do everything in Google Drive. That makes it easy to collaborate on things like our budgets, session descriptions and communication plans."

Gamification prompts attendees to participate in games and earn points that can be redeemed for various kinds of prizes and other rewards. The underlying purpose of gamification is to motivate particular kinds of behavior, such as attendance at key sessions or activities such as onsite tweeting of comments about meeting content.

"We have attendees play a game so we can get the information we want," Baumgardner says.

"And we have gotten tremendous feedback from the way we do that. For one thing, it's easy to use the app. People don't have to complete a paper survey like they did in the past and turn it in. So the process is quick and easy."

The company also can ask open-ended questions that give them even more detailed feedback. "And we use that now to find out what people don't like about the conference so we can improve that for next year," Baumgardner says.

Thomson Reuters first used gamification for one of its major annual conferences in 2013. "We got a ton of information from doing it," says Baumgardner, adding that the company got an astonishing 86 percent adoption rate from attendees.

Banfield and her team have worked with SpotMe to develop innovative ways to use gamification as an attendee engagement strategy. "It starts just by having people download the app," she says. "But from there, we ask you to do all kinds of things, from sending tweets to attending a session to participating in a business card exchange, and you get points for doing those things. Then it grows from there to engaging with certain vendors or customers."

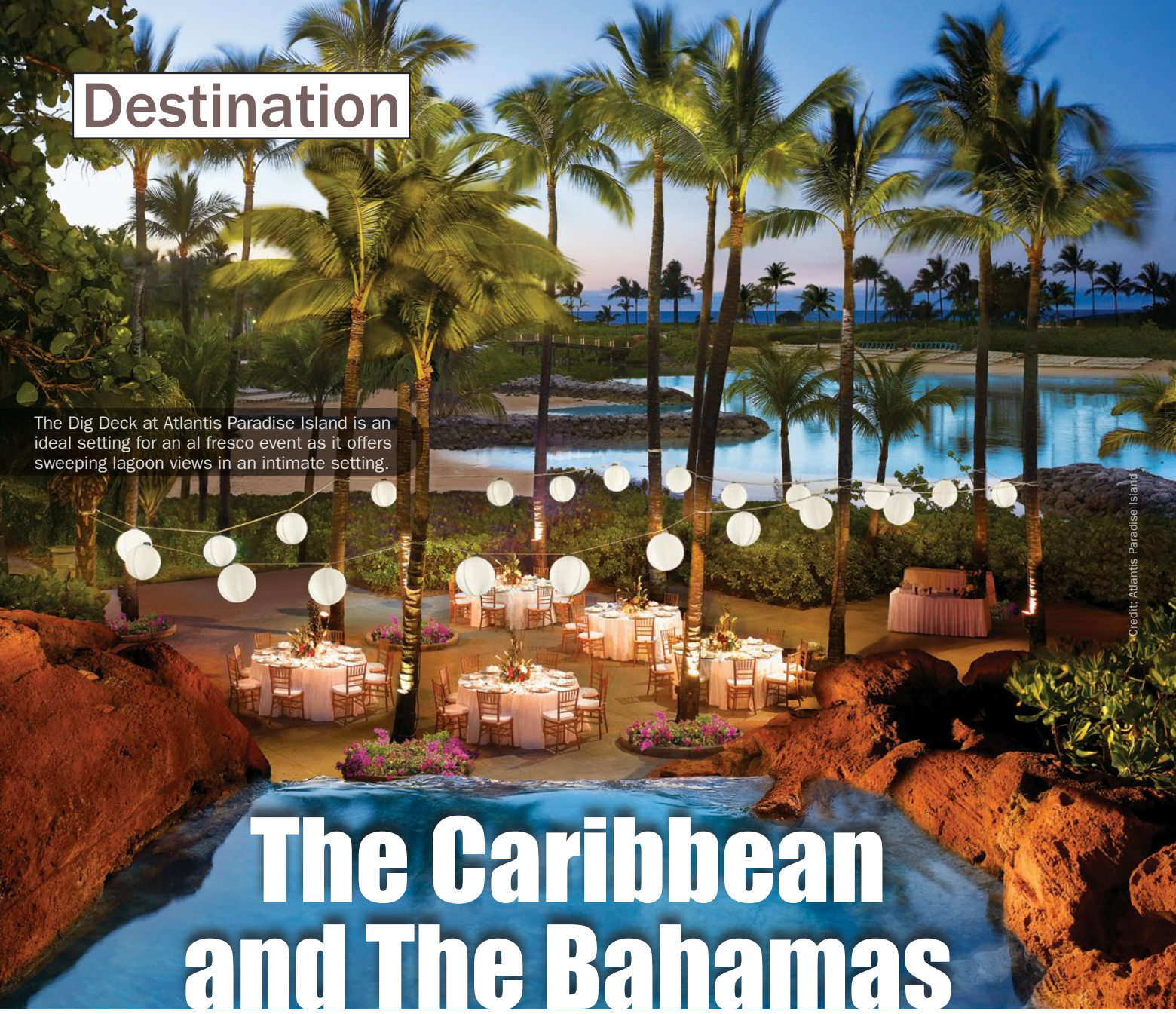
Ingram Micro created an onsite retail store that awarded prizes from event technology sponsors such as Cisco, IBM, Dell, Lenovo and Samsung.

Schutte has incorporated gamification into Qvidian's customer loyalty and advocacy program, known as "Club Q," an invitation-only customer appreciation and engagement program.

"Those customers get a log-in to a third-party portal and within that there are different challenges they can complete and get points from," Schutte says. "Then they can redeem those points for rewards."

Baumgardner, Banfield and Schutte agree wholeheartedly that gamification is probably the single most important technological innovation in the meeting industry over the last 12-18 months.

But, Ball says, many more important innovations are still to come. ***C&IT***



The Dig Deck at Atlantis Paradise Island is an ideal setting for an al fresco event as it offers sweeping lagoon views in an intimate setting.

Credit: Atlantis Paradise Island

The Caribbean and The Bahamas

A Tropical Oasis

By John Buchanan

The Caribbean — and the almost endless list of options it offers — has been wildly popular with meeting and incentive planners for more than a half-century. And although its use declined during the deep recession of 2008–2010 and the optics era of destination selection in the wake of high-profile meeting industry scandals, it now has returned to its preeminent position as a go-to choice for many companies, especially those who want to reward their top people with a restful and relaxing program at a luxurious property.

And there is a choice for literally every taste and budget, from the exclusive to the affordable and from the exotic to the familiar.

Since the recession five years ago, all-inclusive resorts in the Caribbean have become particularly popular with meeting planners. Although there is an ever-increasing number of all-inclusive operators in the region, the dominant force is Sandals Resorts, which now has seven properties in its native Jamaica, three in St. Lucia, two in the Bahamas and one in Antigua — with new Sandals resorts in Grenada and Barbados. The brand touts itself as the best value in the region, since all food and beverage and water sports activities are included in a single per-attendee cost.

As for individual destinations, *Priceline.com* recently named Puerto Rico the top Caribbean destination for travel in 2015. The island, a U.S. territory, offers the unique advantage of not requiring a passport for entry, which makes travel to the island much easier.

Puerto Rico also boasts one of the most acclaimed meeting hotels in the entire Caribbean, the landmark Caribe Hilton, which is conveniently located on 17 tropical acres

near Luis Munoz Marin Airport in San Juan and the Puerto Rico Convention Center. The hotel features 65,000 sf of meeting space.

Aruba

Although not as well known as islands such as The Bahamas, Puerto Rico or Jamaica, Aruba — located in the southern Caribbean just off the coast of Venezuela — is an excellent choice for discerning planners.

Tim Zula, director of special events and trade shows at Miamisburg, Ohio-based software vendor Esko, chose the Radisson Aruba as the venue for the company's most important program in 2013. The six-day, five-night trip drew 80 attendees.

"At the time we were planning the program, our president was looking for a destination within the Caribbean that we considered pretty exotic, some place that most of our people probably wouldn't go to on their own," Zula says. "Or maybe a place they would want to go to, but not have the opportunity to go."

When he was assessing the destination, Zula discovered that Aruba also offers solid value.

"Cost is always a consideration for us," he says. "And when we looked at not only flying people in from the U.S. and Canada, but also from Latin America, we found all of the flights to Aruba to be very reasonable, with the airlift from various places also being very good. So those things became strong factors in our selection of the destination."

Another important factor in Esko's decision-making when it comes to destination selection is the importance of its flagship incentive program. "This is a program for our salesforce," Esko says. "And they work very hard. We set very strong goals for them. And so the destinations we choose for this group have to be worthy of what they have achieved throughout the year. And we thought Aruba was just a perfect destination."

Zula discovered the Radisson by accident while on a site visit. "When I went down, I had three properties that had been recommended by HelmsBriscoe, the third-party company we use to help us," he says. "So I looked at all three hotels, but I didn't really feel comfortable with the first two. The third one met all of my expectations, but it was a little far down the beach from where most of the activity is that goes beyond just the beach."

On the third day of his visit, he was walking on the beach and just happened to take notice of the Radisson as he strolled past. "I just walked in and took a look at the place and instantly called my HelmsBriscoe representative and said, 'I've found a fantastic resort, and I need to talk to these people.' I met with the staff the next day and they comped me a room that night. And it was just perfect in terms of what we were looking for."

Foremost among the factors that clinched the deal, he says, is that "The Radisson has an exotic island feel beyond anything else I had seen on the beach in Aruba. They have a garden area that has immaculate vegetation. They have little waterways throughout the property that just help give it that tropical feel. And the lobby reception area is very open and green. It's just a very inviting property."

The Esko incentive program also includes meeting sessions, and the Radisson's meeting space also perfectly fit Esko's needs.

Based on the experience he had, Zula gives the hotel high marks for everything from its food and beverage service to its overall service.

"The F&B was excellent," he says. "Every meal was immaculate. And overall, the service was impeccable. From the time I first noticed the hotel and just walked in, they were courteous, helpful and totally professional. It was one of the best hotel experiences I've ever had and that is particularly important because this is our premier incentive program and top achievers."

In fact, Zula, his management and attendees were so unanimously pleased with the Radisson Aruba that the company is going back for the 2015 program in late January.

The Bahamas

Emily Dunn, director of groups, meetings and events for Aladdin Travel and Meeting Planners in Winston-Salem, North Carolina, is a longtime and enthusiastic user of Caribbean destinations. Among her favorites is The Bahamas.

Every year except one for the last decade she has used fabled Atlantis, Paradise Island for a continuing medical education meeting for 100 physicians and nurse practitioners.

Dunn favors The Bahamas because it is a relatively inexpensive destination and easy to get to, she says. "And the flight options are really attractive," she adds. "The airlift is good enough to get most people there with one connecting flight."

But most of all, given the voluntary attendance for her meeting, The Bahamas is a consistent draw. "The meeting is always in January or February, and most of our attendees come from the East Coast and the Northeast, as well as Canada,"

Credit: Puerto Rico Convention Bureau

What could be better than meeting under the palm trees with your colleagues on this beautiful island — the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico.

Credit: The Grand Lucayan Beach & Golf Resort

The Grand Lucayan Beach & Golf Resort in Freeport, Grand Bahama Island, has outdoor activities galore as well as 20 distinct meeting spaces totaling 90,000 sf.

Dunn says. "So from an attendance perspective, it has been a very successful destination for these meetings."

She also is loyal to Atlantis because it offers some unique attributes.

"One nice thing about Atlantis is that you have multiple options in terms of price points at the same resort," she says. "You have high-end options, but you also have lower-end options."

Those options range from the exclusive The Cove to The Reef, Royal Towers and Coral Towers — each at a separate and distinct price point: value-oriented to exclusive ultra-luxurious experiences. All guests receive complimentary access to Aquaventure — the 141-acre water park, beaches, pools, aquariums and restaurants. "The primary attendees are physicians, but they also have a wide range of incomes," Dunn says. "And that means some of them also have lower paying jobs in a particular field. So we want to make sure they can find the value they need."

For example, for their most recent meeting, Dunn says, rooms were available for under $300 per night in Coral Towers.

Because of the importance of the medical presentations at her meeting, Dunn also takes comfort in knowing that Atlantis boasts top-notch technology. "For these meetings, most of the attendees are radiologists, and they're looking at images that have to be well projected in a very dark room for them to be able to see what is being talked about," she says. "And the technology capabilities at Atlantis are just excellent, as is the support."

However, despite the serious content presented during half-day general sessions, it also is important that attendees unwind and have fun. "So it's also attractive to our physicians and other attendees that we also choose great spots to do the meetings and give them enough free time to enjoy themselves," Dunn says. "And that's especially important for the people who bring their families, so we make sure to build some R&R into the meeting, because they are also working hard during the meeting sessions."

As a planner, Dunn also has great respect for the level of support services Atlantis consistently provides.

"And one reason for that is that they have encouraged all of their in-house planners to get their CMPs," she says. "That really shows their commitment to and investment in having the best people. And for the past five years, I've worked with the same two women to plan my meeting. That kind of consistency and longevity is almost unheard of these days, and it has allowed me to really form a relationship with them and the hotel. And that means we work together really, really well."

From an attendee perspective, Atlantis also earns accolades. One key reason: its vast and varied infrastructure, which includes a roster of excellent restaurants, including the celebrity chef restaurant Nobu; the Mandara Spa Atlantis; and the world-class water park Aquaventure. "That range of amenities is really what makes Atlantis different from any other hotel in the Caribbean," Dunn says.

And its size and scope also provides room for growth from year to year. "And because they have a lot of meeting space, we've also been able to change meeting rooms at the last minute if we need to," Dunn says. "And that's something that you cannot necessarily do anywhere. The hotel has been very good at working with us to make sure everything goes well, and part of that is the flexibility they can provide because of the size of the resort."

"One nice thing about Atlantis is that you have multiple options in terms of price points at the same resort. You have high-end options, but you also have lower-end options."

Emily Dunn, Director, Groups, Meetings and Events
Aladdin Travel and Meeting Planners, Winston-Salem, NC

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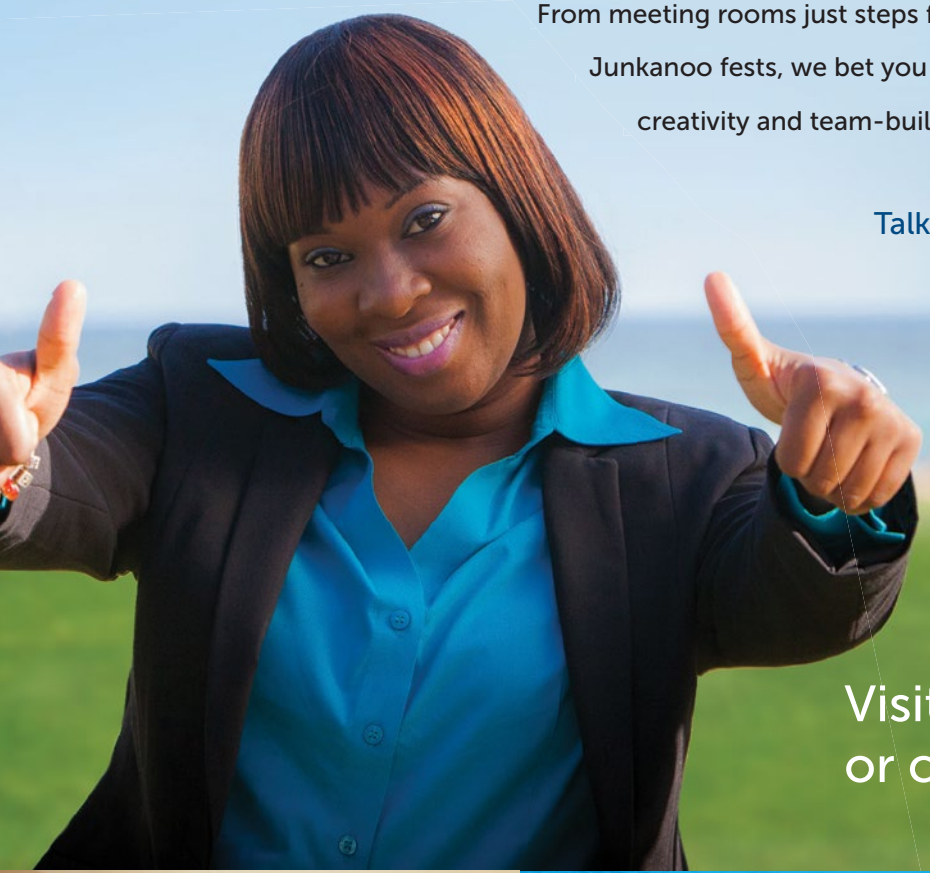

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Credit: Baha Mar Resort

Baha Mar, located 10 minutes from Nassau's expanded international airport, will welcome its first guests in March 2015.

In 2015, the dominance of Atlantis will be tested by the new $3.5 billion Baha Mar resort complex that will make its much heralded debut after several years of growing anticipation. Baha Mar will welcome guests beginning March 27, and online reservations are available now for Baha Mar Casino & Hotel, Rosewood at Baha Mar and SLS Lux at Baha Mar. The Grand Hyatt at Baha Mar will open shortly after. Hailed since its inception as the largest single-phase project in the history of the Caribbean, the mega-resort is set on 1,000 acres along 3,000 feet of Cable Beach in Nassau, which they are touting as the New Riviera. The resort also will feature 200,000 sf of convention facilities, a Jack Nicklaus Signature golf course, an ESPA spa and 40 restaurants.

Although Baha Mar has generated more publicity, another Bahamas project made its debut first, with the opening last July of the $24 million Resorts World Bimini Bay Casino, a joint venture between developer Rav Bahamas and casino operator Genting Malaysia Berhad.

Known for decades as a high-end luxury fishing destination, Bimini is now an ideal location for small incentive groups and conferences.

New good news for planners: According to various published reports, The Bahamas will cut its 10 percent hotel tax to 7.5 percent in an effort to woo more visitors.

St. Maarten

Although the Caribbean can claim many exotic islands, perhaps none is more exotic than relatively little-known St. Maarten. The small island actually consists of two countries, the French St. Martin to the north and the Dutch St. Maarten, which occupies the southern third of the island.

Barbara Suggs, corporate events manager at Ricoh USA in Tucker, Georgia, near Atlanta, chose The Westin St. Maarten Dawn Beach Resort & Spa for a five-day incentive trip last July for 220 service technician attendees and their guests.

"Every other year, we choose a beach destination," Suggs says. "And in the other years, we do a U.S.-based program. For the 2014 program, we looked at St. Maarten because of the beauty of the island and the numerous activities there are to do there. And the friendliness of the people was also a factor."

She did a site visit in October 2013 and only looked at The Westin St. Maarten. "We have a third-party, Ohio-based consultant we work with for this program called Aimia," she says. "I've been working with them for five years, and they manage the entire trip. They had recommended The Westin as the property to use. But before we actually sign a contract, I do a site visit to go see the hotel and make sure that everything is OK."

There were several key factors that led Aimia and Ricoh to select The Westin St. Maarten. "The first was pricing and the concessions we were able to get," Suggs says. "The hotel also has a nice location that is away from everything. It's secluded. And the beach is just beautiful."

A deciding factor for Suggs was the treatment she received on her site visit. "Everyone at the hotel was very responsive, from the top management all the way down to housekeeping," she says. "Their people are exceptional."

She also was pleasantly surprised by the room rate she received. "We got a fantastic deal," she says. "And that really surprised me now that everyone knows hotels are back to a seller's market. For us, it was just a matter of timing, because we were going in the off-season, and they really wanted our business, so they did what they had to do to bring us in."

Among the highlights of the trip was The Westin's F&B service. "The food and beverage service we got was outstanding," Suggs says. "We got a lot of positive remarks on our survey about our food, which was Caribbean-style food and very high quality. It was extraordinary."

Likewise, the overall support services Ricoh received also were exemplary.

"The service we got, whether that was from the banquet staff or from room service, was also excellent," Suggs says. "Everyone was very attentive to us. No one's glass was ever empty. And even the service around the pool during the day was truly excellent."

Most important for Suggs was the fact that the staff clearly understood the trip represented a very important incentive program for a major U.S. company and treated the group accordingly. "That was definitely the standard," Suggs says. "But from what I saw, they also treat all of their guests that way. For example, staff members knew people by name — not just in our group, but for guests in general. And they were very friendly and enthusiastic. And I credit the management of the hotel for that level of service. I believe that everything starts at the top and flows down through the staff. And the top management at the hotel is also very involved with the guests and getting to know them. And when the employees see that, in my experience they emulate their management." ***C&IT***

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Las Vegas

New Year's Eve fireworks on the Las Vegas Strip as seen from the High Roller observation wheel.

Credit: Erik Kabik/Kabik Photo Group

Sin City's Never-ending Novelty Lures Meeting-goers Year After Year

By Gabi Logan

What do Madonna and Las Vegas have in common? It may sound like a bad joke that can have a lot of endings, but the queen of pop and the home of countless impersonators of the king of rock 'n' roll both know how to do one thing better than all their competition: reinvent themselves.

After a brief stint in the early 2000s trying to turn itself into a family-friendly destination where children could enjoy the pool and roller coasters and families could easily eat on a budget at the buffet, Las Vegas is once again owning up to its sin city reputation, but with a new polish that makes it an ideal meeting destination.

This December, the Las Vegas Convention and Visitors Authority even resurrected one of the city's most enduring phrases, "what happens in Vegas stays in Vegas," as the tagline of its new advertising campaign.

All of the latest Las Vegas hotel openings, especially this year's SLS and Cromwell, have brought a new vibe that is more Miami Beach meets Alexander McQueen haute couture than either the city's family-friendly phase or its usual something-for-everyone casino culture.

This mix of sophisticated elegance and an edge of exclusivity — especially with the plethora of unique celebrity chef-driven dining options and all-suite properties such as The Venetian and Palazzo favored by many planners — has transformed Las Vegas from an excellent meeting and event destination with good airlift, lots of space and frequent deals to an even more powerful draw for the most high-end executive meetings and retreats.

A New Groove

Debbie Dalton, CMP, CMM, AVP, shows and events, for

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Credit: Brian Jones/Las Vegas News Bureau

The 1,600-room SLS Las Vegas resort and casino celebrated its grand opening with a fireworks display in August 2014.

New York, New York-based Redken & Pureology, a division of L'Oreal, holds the majority of her events in Las Vegas, and not just because she's local. "There's been so much that has developed in the last 10 years," she says. "Everything has changed. It's like they're trying to create this urban experience. If you go to The Linq, you have shopping, restaurants and the new (High Roller observation wheel)."

> ***"I've taken my events to lots of cities, and here there's always something new and appealing: the London Eye look-a-like, the celebrity chefs or new entertainment."***
>
> **Debbie Dalton**, CMP, CMM, AVP, Shows and Events
> Redken & Pureology, New York, NY

Like many planners specializing in ultra-large events, Dalton, whose main event is a 10,000-person biannual meeting, originally found herself locating her event in Las Vegas because, "there's not another destination in the U.S. that can hold an event that size," she explains. But her audience, which includes attendees from 33 countries, comes back year after year for the eternal novelty only Las Vegas can provide. When she took her event to Orlando, attendance dropped by half.

"What I really like about holding events here is that everything is pretty much always new," she says. "All the technology is cutting-edge and that goes with our brand because it's new and current. I've taken my events to lots of cities, and here there's always something new and appealing: the London Eye look-a-like, the celebrity chefs or new entertainment."

Unexpectedly, a lot of the buzz in Las Vegas, including the properties that are leading the changing charge, are not even on The Strip. "Another event I do for 1,000, I took off The Strip to the Red Rock. It's very hip and trendy, which goes with our branding," says Dalton. "It's got wonderful meeting space, and it gives people a different feel of Las Vegas, like the new SLS, another great hip, trendy venue. They also have one in Beverly Hills."

For meeting planners, one of the big draws of the new SLS, which opened August 2014, is that it's situated toward the end of The Strip, closer to downtown Las Vegas, the country club and the convention center. There's less to worry about in terms of attendee distraction, and the hotel, with 1,613 rooms and interiors by Philippe Starck and Lenny Kravitz, maintains a boutique atmosphere despite its Las Vegas scale.

Eight flexible meeting rooms, including a 9,000-sf ballroom, offer a total of 30,000 sf of meeting space, but there is a total of 80,000 sf of rental space available for groups. Other unique SLS venues, such as the 10,000-sf Beach Life with an open-air rooftop pool, can also be used for private events. Catering comes from the hotel kitchen driven by celebrity chef José Andrés, who also has created a gourmet menu of craft cocktails and food for the onsite casino. Named by *Eater* as "2014 Las Vegas Restaurant of the Year," Bazaar Meat by José Andrés is the James Beard Award-winning chef's celebration of the carnivorous, in all its forms.

Coming in March 2015, a $200 million renovation of the Tropicana Las Vegas – a DoubleTree by Hilton will bring even more South Beach to Las Vegas, with new beachhouse-style suites and luxury villas. An expansion of the Tropicana Pavilion, the resort's main meeting venue, will bring the self-contained space up to 55,000 sf with 26,000 brand new sf of meeting space, including 11 breakout rooms. After the expansion is complete, the resort will have a total of 100,000 sf of meeting space.

Central and sophisticated, the Cosmopolitan, with 200,000 sf of meeting space including eight ballrooms ranging from 7,000 to 40,000 sf, has become a hot choice for planners since it opened in 2010. "In July, I had a meeting at the Cosmopolitan," says Dalton. "It's an awesome space, very trendy, and offers a lot of restaurants.

Credit: Tropicana Las Vegas – a DoubleTree by Hilton

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The Westin Lake Las Vegas Resort & Spa in Henderson, Nevada, can accommodate up to 2,100 guests among a number of Lake Las Vegas meeting spaces.

Credit: The Westin Lake Las Vegas Resort & Spa

"They have a venue in there that holds about 2,500 people and can be rented out for corporate functions that's right in the heart of everything, right there in the middle of The Strip," she continues. "The Cosmopolitan also has four different meeting levels that are very self-contained. The way their space is laid out, you wouldn't notice if there were people on other levels."

"We had an event at the Cosmopolitan in the last year, a property that definitely exudes more of a boutique feel," says Kelley Butler, director of meetings and events for Oak Brook, Illinois-based McDonald's Corporation. "Places like the Mandalay Bay and Venetian are so much larger, and as a result, they cater to a different audience. From a design and innovation perspective, the Cosmopolitan is truly unique and stands out from the competition — particularly with the lobby design and their approach to customer engagement. There's a lot of flexibility in how they can be innovative with their space."

Regarding newer venues such as the SLS and the Cosmopolitan, Butler says, "I think the smaller properties can offer a level of service and creative details that can meet a higher level of expectation than larger properties due to this flexible approach and their various service and amenity offerings. Especially during this turnaround, I've watched the culture change, and customer service has been a noticeable focus. To keep corporate business, you have to prioritize that."

Regarding newer venues such as the SLS and the Cosmopolitan, Butler says, "I think the smaller properties can offer a level of service and creative details that can meet a higher level of expectation than larger properties, because of the number of things going on in them. Especially during this turnaround, I've watched the culture change, and customer service has been out in front much more. To keep corporate business, you have to prioritize that.

More Options Mean More Meetings

Though the Cosmopolitan has been around long enough that it's somewhat old news for planners who come to Las Vegas often, the 2014 completion of the long-awaited Linq Hotel and Casino by Caesars Entertainment, a complete re-imagination of the Quad Resort & Casino that features 2,256 brand new rooms and suites, was the watershed moment for the shifting tide in Las Vegas' image.

The hotel is located within the The Linq retail, dining and entertainment promenade, which is home to the High Roller, the world's largest observation wheel. The Linq also will add renovated meeting space to its offerings in spring 2015.

If the current rental opportunities, which include an 82,000-sf private bowling and performance space, an 8,500-sf Andy Warhol Museum and Polaroid Fotobar, and a craft cocktail piano bar with floor-to-ceiling views of The Linq fountains, are any indication, they will be some of the most exciting meeting and event spaces on The Strip.

Also from Caesar's, The Cromwell Las Vegas, heralded as the only boutique hotel on The Strip, opened this year in a completely overhauled 1979 Bill's Gamblin' Hall and Saloon space. Though The Cromwell does not have its own meeting space, the concierge service available in its 188 rooms make it an easy choice for planners looking for executive rooms for The Linq meeting facilities next door.

"Las Vegas is...a place where business and pleasure can coexist, and meeting objectives can be achieved with ease."

Kelley Butler, Director, Meetings & Events
McDonald's Corporation, Oak Brook, IL

"There are so many unique venues now with the High Roller there," adds Butler. In addition to the great meeting space, it's a destination that has great amenities, and quality food and beverage options. There's a plethora of entertainment options that can be easily accommodated, and airlift is easy. In my opinion, Las Vegas is truly an all-encompassing destination; a place where business and pleasure can coexist, and meeting objectives can be achieved with ease.

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Credit: MGM Resorts International

The executive boardroom at The Mirage Hotel & Casino.

"It's attractive to returning planners who are looking for ways to change programs with tight budgets," she continues. "The value of corporate business has turned a corner for them. Like so many businesses and organizations out there, they're trying to anticipate what the next 'golden' moment will be. They try to get all the incentive, meeting and leisure business while simultaneously providing family aspects to alleviate any concerns some organizations have of choosing Vegas for events."

Due to the increased excitement around Las Vegas's offerings for high-end meetings, Butler has found herself doing many more events in Las Vegas than in previous years. Every other year, she brings three waves of 5,500 to 6,500 managers and operators together to educate them about business initiatives and create an opportunity to discuss their franchises together over three days per group, often back to back.

As the event is optional, the location is an important factor for attendees, but a destination that can handle both the number of attendees and the quick turnaround Butler needs is paramount. She's increasingly found that Las Vegas is the ideal place to check off all these boxes.

Work Hard, Play Hard

One of the unusual upsides of all these activities for planners is that having so much going on all night actually helps get derrières in chairs during daytime meetings. While many planners worry destinations with a lot of distractions make attendees choose between sightseeing and sessions, Todd Thrall, director of meetings and events for Phoenix, Arizona-based Best Western International, actually has found the exact opposite to be true.

"We see strong attendance at business sessions from eight to five, because attendees know they can go out in the evening," he says. Thrall has been involved with the annual meeting for nearly 25 years and directed the department for 13 years, and has been using Las Vegas often throughout his tenure. "In my experience, I know a lot of groups have a reluctance to take business meetings to Vegas because of perception, but we have found — and we've done meetings for a long time in Vegas — they will attend business sessions because they know they have time to explore later.

"We've done this event in a lot of destinations, and we're going to Honolulu, Hawaii, in October with this group, for instance," he continues. "There, we have to craft an agenda that lets people go out during the day to enjoy the sun and the beach, and to a certain extent we find that also in Orlando. You have to give people an opportunity to do theme parks during daytime hours when they're open. In Vegas, at least for my group, we've been very pleased with the turnout at the daytime meetings, because there's 24-hour opportunities to do other things."

You may think the 24-hour entertainment would cause morning session attendance to drop off, but Thrall says they move start times back a touch, to 8:30 or 9 a.m. rather than 7:30 or 8 a.m. and "generally attendees are able to muster and be there at the beginning."

Rather than detract from business functions, the energy and entertainment in Las Vegas seems to invigorate attendees and stave off the usual lag that sets in at the end of several days in windowless meeting spaces. Work hard, play hard may soon be the new Las Vegas meetings motto.

2015 and Beyond

As the U.S. hotel industry rebounds, planners have been having a more and more difficult time securing the dates, rates and amenities they want. Now that the economy is bouncing back, you don't always see the hotels and meeting space you need, but Butler has found, "The Vegas pattern works well (for us) because our team doesn't have to travel on the weekends. For us, our size can be a challenge because our programs are so large, and it can be very difficult to get the dates that we seek for various events. Therefore, for our largest programs, we're looking in the 2026-2028 time frame."

Las Vegas offers a welcome change of pace in that regard. "For us more recently, the value equation has changed a bit, but from a travel perspective Las Vegas rooms are reasonable compared to major destinations in North America," says Thrall.

"I agree that it's a cost-effective option, and the reason is that if you don't have the budget to entertain in the evening, attendees can go to restaurants and shows," says Dalton. "It's more cost-effective because you don't have to entertain them at night. And people want that."

However, this domestic sweet spot won't remain an easy

Credit: MGM Resorts International

A rendering of chef Michael Mina's newest concept, Bardot Brasserie, which opened at Aria Resort & Casino this month.

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solution for planners forever, and some are already starting to feel a pinch on availability. "Frankly selecting on availability and rate, we've seen certainly in the last two to three years that the pendulum has swung," says Thrall. "Business in Vegas is strong, and it's increasingly difficult to find availability on The Strip."

With increased market pressure, prices will likely begin to rise soon, but local planners, like Dalton, have found that having more energy and events in the city actually can make Las Vegas events even more budget-friendly.

"I prefer to bring in the entertainment, because it's better to negotiate the bar and food at the venue, but I figure out who is entertaining at another corporate event and tag on to that," says explains. "I go through a large DMC and ask, for instance, 'who's at the consumer electronics show that happens right before us and what would it cost us to hold them over two nights to entertain at our event?' Because there are so many back-to-back events, you can figure it out."

Butler has found that the biggest change coming down the pipeline isn't in any individual or even group of properties, but in the destination's approach to visitors, especially meeting business. "It's operating in a similar fashion to how our events have transpired in Orlando," she says. "They're coming together as a community and starting to understand how to market the city as whole."

You might soon find, too, that meetings that happen in Las Vegas stay in Las Vegas.

New and Noteworthy

By mid-December, Las Vegas reported that it had surpassed its record for annual visitation, drawing more than 40 million people of which roughly 5 million were in the city for a meeting or convention.

Credit: MGM Resorts International

Stay Well meeting rooms at MGM Grand Las Vegas provide healthful environments including air purification and much more.

"Las Vegas couldn't have reached this milestone without the continued investments of our resort partners, and the more than 40 million people who came to experience all the destination has to offer," said Rossi Ralenkotter, president/CEO of the Las Vegas Convention and Visitors Authority. "Ongoing developments in the destination, including new, renovated and rebranded resort properties, exciting new attractions, world-class entertainment, incredible culinary offerings and more are what keep first-time visitors and loyalists returning to Las Vegas time and time again."

Credit: Erik Kabik

The South Point Bowling Plaza, a 90,000-sf facility, features 60 lanes with two parallel rows of 30 lanes and a huge digital display.

Offerings such as the following:

Award-winning chef Michael Mina opened **Bardot Brasserie at Aria Resort & Casino** January 16. Offering a modern and sexy take on the traditional French brasserie experience, Bardot will present an exquisite array of Parisian cuisine, transporting guests on a culinary journey through The City of Light. Located on the second floor of Aria, Bardot is open from 5 p.m. to 11 p.m. daily.

Among **MGM Grand's** 5,044 guest rooms is the 14th floor comprised of 171 **Stay Well rooms**, completed in January of this year. The Stay Well guest rooms feature vitamin C-infused shower water, advanced room lighting tailored to sleep/wake cycles, air purification systems, EMF protection and more. The resort offers a Stay Well mobile app that provides wellness recommendations such as techniques to reduce the effects of jetlag.

Stay Well Meetings was officially unveiled in late summer. Created by Delos, the pioneer of Wellness Real Estate, whose advisory board includes alternative medicine guru Deepak Chopra, M.D., the program incorporates healthful environments in meeting rooms and spaces such as ergonomic seating, air purification, circadian lighting, virtual window lights, aromatherapy, healthful menu items and much more.

South Point Hotel and Casino's new $35 million bowling tournament facility, **South Point Bowling Plaza**, rolls into Las Vegas early with a full schedule of tournament events. The South Point Bowling Plaza, a 90,000-sf facility, features 60 lanes with two parallel rows of 30 lanes, a 360-seat viewing area and a 720-unit locker room.

Hakkasan Group has announced its newest nightclub concept, **Omnia**. Omnia will take over the former space of the iconic Pure Nightclub at **Caesars Palace** in Las Vegas. The multifaceted destination is set to open spring 2015.

Designed by the internationally renowned Rockwell Group, Omnia spans 75,000 total sf. The multilevel venue will encompass a seductive ultra-lounge, a high-energy main room and mezzanine, as well as a breathtaking rooftop garden, showcasing panoramic views of the Las Vegas Strip. Omnia will boast opulent design as well as interactive features.

Westgate Resorts announced the renovation of its newest acquisition — the **Westgate Las Vegas Resort & Casino**

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Credit: Westgate Las Vegas Resort & Casino

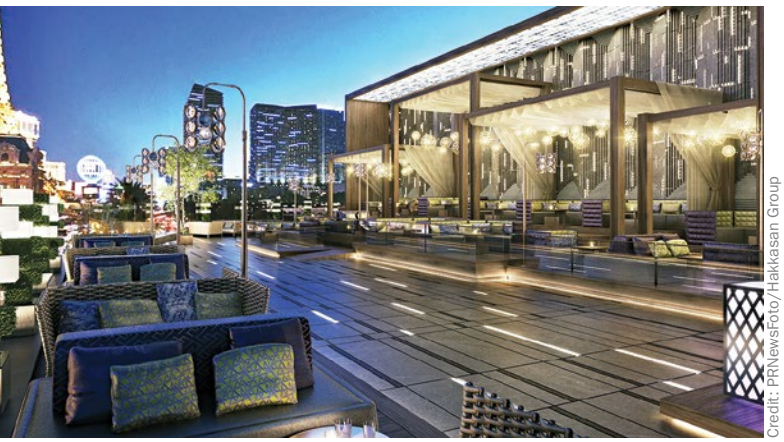
The Westgate Las Vegas Resort & Casino features more than 200,000 sf of meeting space.

— a landmark property, which is located one block off The Las Vegas Strip, adjacent to the Las Vegas Convention Center, and is one of seven stations on the Las Vegas Monorail.

Over the next several months, in addition to the updating of the 1,200 Central Tower guest rooms, the renovation project will include enhancements to the convention areas, renovations to the pool area as well as the Health Club & Spa and Cabanas; sports book improvements such as new seating and state-of-the-art TVs; new LED lighting throughout various areas of the property; a new guest service program and customer-service training. Also, several new restaurant concepts are in the planning stage.

Westgate Las Vegas Resort & Casino features a 95,000-sf casino, 200,000 sf of meeting and convention space, restaurants, entertainment, a spa and fitness center, pool with luxurious cabanas, access to golf at the exclusive Las Vegas Country Club, and the world's largest race and sports SuperBook.

The three-level **Mandalay Bay Convention Center** recently unveiled plans to expand the facility to more than 2 million sf from its current 1.7 million sf of event space. Plans call for the addition of more than 350,000 sf of exhibit space, as well as underground parking and additional carpeted ballroom space. New exhibit space is expected to be available in late summer 2015.


Credit: PRNewsfoto/Hakkasan Group

The Rooftop Garden at Omnia Nightclub, which will open in spring 2015 in place of Pure Nightclub at Caesars Palace.

Circus Circus Las Vegas recently debuted the "gravity defying" new roller coaster **El Loco at The Adventuredome**, one of the world's largest indoor theme parks. The thrill ride features "a greater-than-straight-down diving drop producing a negative 1.5 'vertical G.'" Circus Circus also boasts the world's largest permanent circus, which performs under its hallmark Big Top. The Adventuredome is available for private groups of up to 4,000 attendees.

Wynn Las Vegas introduced a new multimillion-dollar show element to **"Le Rêve – The Dream"** to mark the 10th anniversary of the aquatic production show. The new "dénouement" scene is situated as the penultimate act in the 75-minute production. More than 18 months in the making, the "dénouement" includes 172 high-powered fountains, 120 individual LED lighting fixtures and 16 fire-shooting devices.

"Over the past 4,500 shows, we've continued to introduce new elements, costumes, music and scenes to "Le Rêve – The Dream." The 'dénouement' stands as one of the greatest advancements in the show's history," said Rick Gray, general manager of entertainment operations for Wynn Las Vegas.

Credit: Wynn Las Vegas

"Le Rêve – The Dream" is marking its 10th year at Wynn Las Vegas and Encore with a new multimillion-dollar show element.

"We do this for our guests. As no two dreams are ever truly the same, neither is our show — and we take pride in that."

Future Trends

According to Chris Baldizan, senior vice president of entertainment for MGM Resorts International, future entertainment trends include the emergence of festivals. "Interactive and social forms of entertainment, like music festivals and outdoor events, will be a major focus in Las Vegas," he says. From the Electric Daisy Carnival at the Las Vegas Motor Speedway to Life is Beautiful in Downtown Las Vegas, multiday music festivals will continue to find homes in Las Vegas in 2015. Notably, the May U.S. debut of Brazil's iconic Rock in Rio, the world's largest music festival, will deliver top acts such as Taylor Swift, Bruno Mars, Metallica, John Legend and more. Other events on the horizon for 2015 include the return of Wine Amplified, an alternative rock music and wine festival; and the Route 91 Harvest Festival, which features the best talent in the country music industry. ***C&IT***

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Cheyenne Mountain Resort, Colorado Springs, Colorado, has named Curtis T. Bova as director of sales and marketing and Thomas J. Walker as director of sales. Bova formerly served as vice president of sales and vice president, national sales for Destination Hotels & Resorts. Walker most recently served as director of sales for the Antlers Hilton Hotel in Colorado Springs, Colorado.

The Wigwam, Phoenix, Arizona, has named Bob Nee as vice president of resort sales and marketing. He most recently served as regional director of sales and marketing for 12 hotels within the TPG Hospitality portfolio located throughout the mid-Atlantic and Southeast regions.

Omni Hotels & Resorts has named Ryan O'Byrne as global director, sales in the New York global sales office. Most recently, he served as the director of sales and marketing for the Park Central Hotel in New York City.

Gino Marasco was promoted to director of sales and marketing at the Walt Disney World Swan and Dolphin Hotel in Orlando, Florida. He joined the Swan and Dolphin as director of sales in May 2014.

Delano Las Vegas has named Sarah Lantzer and Nick Taylor as sales managers. Lantzer, responsible for the East Coast, Midwest, Canada and Europe markets, most recently served as sales manager at MGM Grand in Las Vegas. Taylor, who is responsible for the West Coast, Mexico and South America markets, was executive meetings manager for Mandalay Bay in Las Vegas.

Jim Bullock was named director of sales and marketing for Streamsong Resort in Streamsong, Florida. He formerly served as vice president of group sales for Sandals and Beaches Resorts locations in Bahamas, Jamaica, St. Lucia, Antigua, Grenada, Barbados and Turks & Caicos.

Visit Orlando has named Barbara Balaguras as senior national account executive. She formerly served as director of corporate sales at Choose Chicago. ***C&IT***

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