The New Face of Incentives
Creating a More Personalized Experience
PAGE 10

Kurt Paben
President, Channel and Employee Loyalty, U.S. Aimia Inc.
President, SITE Foundation

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Gaming Resorts
PAGE 14

Safety & Security
PAGE 18

Orlando
PAGE 26

F&B Trends
What’s In, What’s Out, What’s New
PAGE 22
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DESTINATION

26 All Aboard Orlando

“Everything You Could Ask for in a Destination”

By John Buchanan

DEPARTMENTS

4 Publisher’s Message
6 News & Notes
7 Snapshots
34 People on the Move
34 ReaderServices

THEME

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F&B Trends
Topping the Trends for 2015 Are Individualized, Personalized Experiences

By Karen Brot

DEPARTMENTS

22 F&B Trends
Food — “The New Interactive Experience”

By Christine Loomis

DEPARTMENTS

14 Gaming Resorts
A Go-to Resource for Planners

By John Buchanan

DEPARTMENTS

18 Traveler Beware
Safety and Security Concerns

Have Never Been Greater

By Patrick Simms

DEPARTMENTS

Features
10 The New Face of Incentives
Topping the Trends for 2015 Are Individualized, Personalized Experiences

By Karen Brot

DEPARTMENTS

DEPARTMENTS

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F&B Trends
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Making Business Personal

We have been reading about customized, personalized experiences for quite some time now, and it appears they have taken hold in the incentive travel business for the benefit of participants and planners. The Society for Incentive Travel Excellence (SITE) Foundation’s most recent study reports that incentive travel is on a roll and will continue to grow into 2016 and beyond.

Kurt Paben, who graces our cover this month, is president, channel and employee loyalty, U.S., for Aimia Inc. and also serves as president of the SITE Foundation. “We’re seeing the use of incentives as a business tool just continuing to rise,” he says in our cover story on page 10. Paben says that customers “have gotten really good at understanding what the business value is and how to structure incentive programs so that by running them, they drive business results for the company.”

Furthermore, the makeup of the work force nowadays, which may include up to four generations, is so diverse that an effort must be made to give every incentive winner a memorable experience, albeit a personal experience. Paben explains this notion: “I think what we see is a huge trend toward making business personal and how, although you’re doing group incentive travel, you create experiences that are meaningful on a personal basis that connect with individuals.”

Developing a personalized program is a multifaceted process, says Paben. “It’s how you create every touch point to be a more personal one, so it’s not just about activities. I think it can go all the way down to the kinds of gifting that you do on incentive programs as opposed to giving everyone the same room amenity or the same room gift. It’s trying to understand what they are interested in, what would be meaningful to them. The more we can learn about people and the more they’re willing to share gives us the ability to construct a whole experience — not just activities — in a way that is much more meaningful.”

Food can be and should be a meaningful and personalized experience, too, say the experts in the F&B Trends feature on page 24. From brain food to a special dinner at a celebrity chef restaurant or a wine vs. beer pairing event, planning pros are discovering new ways to build relationships and create interactive, learning experiences that are healthful and delicious to boot.

Reward your best with an incentive in New Zealand.
Golden Nugget Las Vegas Completes $6.5 Million Convention Center Renovation

LAS VEGAS, NV — Golden Nugget Las Vegas invested $6.5 million to transform their 20,000-sf convention center. The project included a complete overhaul of the existing convention center footprint. Renovations included new flooring, enhanced lighting, new wall coverings, upgraded technology and a state-of-the-art digital signage system throughout the existing space.

The convention center houses 13 breakout rooms, which are customizable and the 5,000-sf Bell Room, which includes a prefunction foyer. “This area provides what meeting planners are looking for... easy access, flexibility and meeting space that is easy to navigate. You can walk from one end of our conference center level to the other in less than a minute — which is a rarity in Las Vegas,” said Michael Toney, vice president of sales.

Additional convention space at the Golden Nugget Las Vegas includes the 12,000-sf Grand Event Center, which is located on the casino floor. The renovation also involved a makeover of the Golden Nugget’s building entrance located at the intersection of Carson Street and First Street. The entrance is steps away from a new cascading staircase that leads directly to the convention center.

Anchoring the staircase is a beautiful 18,000-pound chandelier made up of 208 glass tubes and designed exclusively for the Golden Nugget Las Vegas by the Landry’s Inc. development team.

Additional 2015 projects will be announced soon.

www.goldennugget.com

Mohegan Sun Is Expanding, Unveils Plans for a Second Hotel

UNCASVILLE, CT — At a recent press conference, Mohegan Sun executives shared details on a second hotel being added to the flagship property in Uncasville, Connecticut. The seven-floor, 400-room Earth Hotel will allow for an opportunity to recapture the almost 500,000 room nights turned away in 2014.

At the event, Kevin “Red Eagle” Brown, chairman of the Mohegan Tribe remarked on the Tribe’s commitment to the state. “Many of you here today, I’m sure, can remember when the Mohegan Tribal Nation first entertained the notion of developing a casino and entertainment complex in Uncasville. Since that time, we have invested well over a billion dollars that has made the tourism industry sit up and take notice. We take very seriously our role in Connecticut’s tourism industry and economic welfare.”

Mitchell Etess, CEO for the Mohegan Tribal Gaming Authority (MTGA) added, “The Earth Hotel could not come at a better time as we position ourselves for the increased regional competition and ensure that we continue to be the premier entertainment and gaming destination on the East Coast. Many team members here have been working tirelessly on this project for a long time. It’s exciting to see their efforts come to fruition.”

Modeled after the existing Sky Hotel design, the Earth Hotel reflects the Tribe’s sensitivity to the natural landscape in that it pays homage to the geological and natural forms present on the property’s riverfront site.

www.mohegansun.com

Atlantis, Paradise Island Reveals First-Ever All-Inclusive Experience for Groups

PARADISE ISLAND, THE BAHAMAS — Atlantis, Paradise Island debuted an all-inclusive experience for groups at Atlantis, bookable immediately for stays fall 2015 through 2017. The all-inclusive plan allows groups to bundle a host of Atlantis activities, varied dining opportunities from the Bahamian Club to Virgil’s Real BBQ, and daily amenities such as WIFI all under one comprehensive pricing structure.

“We are thrilled to now offer our valued meeting planners this all-inclusive option for the first time in Atlantis’ 20-year history,” says John Waskish, VP of group marketing and sales for Atlantis, Paradise Island. “We’ve made it a priority to develop a plan that combines savings and convenience while maintaining our high level of service and the one-of-a-kind Atlantis guest experience."

The plan is available for fall group bookings of 10+ rooms and 3+ nights starting August 24, 2015 through 2017 (blackout dates apply). The plan includes:

• Accommodations in Coral Towers and Royal Towers, including all resort fees, surcharges, gratuities and taxes.
• Meals: breakfast, lunch and dinner daily, including both alcoholic and non-alcoholic drinks.
• Wi-Fi in lobby, room and conference facilities for up to four devices per room.
• Activities: Aquaventure water park, The Dig marine exhibit, fitness center, tennis courts and more.
• Event setup: Linens, basic staging.
• Group menus: Set menus for buffet, plated options for breakfast, lunch and dinner at no additional charge.
• Value offers: 20 percent off dolphin interactions and spa treatments, 95 percent off Ocean Club Golf Course green fee.

www.meetingsatatlantis.com

Experience for Groups

PARADISE ISLAND, THE BAHAMAS — Atlantis, Paradise Island debuted an all-inclusive experience for groups at Atlantis, bookable immediately for stays fall 2015 through 2017. The all-inclusive plan allows groups to bundle a host of Atlantis activities, varied dining opportunities from the Bahamian Club to Virgil’s Real BBQ, and daily amenities such as WIFI all under one comprehensive pricing structure.

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www.meetingsatatlantis.com

Snapsshots

1 Participants enjoying the ADME International Conference, held February 12–14, 2015, at the Fiesta Americana Grand Los Cabos in Los Cabos, Mexico, include: 1) to 7) Kevin Brewer, DMCP; Airika Gigas, DMCP; Jessica Cutler and Cindy Brewer, DMCP; all of LEO Events, Memphis, Charleston, Myrtle Beach along with 2) Joshua Jones, DMCP; Hosts Las Vegas; Hilary Patraquin, Hosts DC; and Daniel Ecklund, DMCP, Hosts Chicago. 3 Also, Nicole Marsh, DMCP, CMP, AXS Group, celebrates two Excellence Awards of LEO Events, Memphis, Charleston, Myrtle Beach along with 2) Joshua Jones, DMCP; Hosts Las Vegas; Hilary Patraquin, Hosts DC; and Daniel Ecklund, DMCP, Hosts Chicago. 3 Also, Nicole Marsh, DMCP, CMP, AXS Group, celebrates two Excellence Awards

2

3

4

5

6

7
Perspective

By Scott Steinberg

An Insider’s Guide to Getting More From Professional Speakers

Thinking about hiring a professional speaker for your next business meeting, conference or event? It may help to understand where expert presenters best fit into keynote schedules, breakout tracks or larger overarching programs, and how these individuals can maximize audience awareness and empathy. Several factors are involved in choosing and retaining the services of leading authorities, and best leveraging these practitioners, all of which can weigh into the decision of whether or not to utilize their services. Following, you’ll find several hints, tips and strategies for deciding whether to retain a pro keynote speaker for your occasion, how to select the best fit and ensure that the process runs smoothly from end to end.

What Do Professional Speakers Do?

Professional speakers appear at events with the specific goal of reinforcing key program themes (i.e. providing “keynote” speeches that cement the tone and topic for the event) and driving positive change and growth in attendees. Common goals they’re tasked with include engendering support and enthusiasm for specific topics or initiatives, encouraging that teams are on the same page, and showing organizations and individuals how to overcome challenges and achieve peak performance. Presenters essentially aim to provide fresh insight and perspective, and provide both a shift in mindset and actionable tools that enable viewers to embrace professional transformations and personal growth.

Equipped to deliver inspiring messages in the form of keynote speeches, breakthrough seminars and workshop sessions, speakers are the jack-of-all-trades in their field. Programs typically cover a variety of professional topics from change management to leadership, sales, teamwork and more. Often, speakers are subject-matter experts, thought leaders or best-selling authors — credibility is key when establishing audience trust. However, leaving ego at the door is essential when delivering presentations. Ultimately, it is their goal to help both organizations and individuals by delivering thought-provoking solutions that can help all overcome adversity and improve business practices. Common types of motivational speakers include:

- Industry or community thought leaders
- Best-selling authors and TV presenters
- Brand-name authorities or celebrities
- Training and development professionals
- Futurists and trend experts

Many offer a preset range of presentations to choose from. But to maximize impact, you’ll wish to request a customized program that’s tailored to incorporate both personalized business insights and the event’s corresponding theme. Crafting programs to match your organization and audience allows presentations and messages to better resonate with attendees, provide better context and make it possible to provide actionable steps for audience members. When weighing the decision to hire an event speaker, take into account your objectives, the role that presenters will help play in meeting them and the shape of presentations. As an example, a program designed to provide positive skills transfer for managers should differ greatly from one meant to inspire awareness for brand repositionings or new organizational initiatives.

Maximizing Speaking Programs

All speakers possess their own presentation style, from informational to comedic to arresting. In all cases, grabbing and maintaining an audience’s attention is crucial during a 60- to 90-minute speech, seminar or lengthier workshop program. However, successful motivational speakers will always listen before they speak, getting to know organizations and key stakeholders, listening to their concerns and challenges, and understanding their marketplace and corporate culture. By doing so, they can format their speech around these specifics and include stakeholders or audience feedback, thereby heightening viewer empathy and interest. A truly exceptional speaker is also a great researcher and consultant, and will not deliver a generic speech at each event they attend. Such experts will always customize their message to the needs of their client — i.e. you, the meeting planner — in order to provide maximum value.

While presentation styles differ among speakers, an effective presenter will look to connect with their audience by pairing substance with storytelling. In addition to everyday anecdotes, it’s vital to incorporate case studies or industry trends into speeches to paint a compelling business picture. But care must be taken not to bombard listeners with facts and figures as well — introducing everyday real-life examples that underscore featured points allows presenters to connect with a wider cross-section of individuals and allows these viewers to better comprehend the material. Speakers also should offer key next steps and strategies for improvement that audience members can act upon immediately. By explaining to viewers where to turn for further research and insight when pursuing topics, a speaker can help attendees effect ongoing change and circumvent perceived limitations.

Ways to Best Utilize Speakers

As a major part of the decision to retain a professional speaker’s services, consider the role you wish presenters to play at your special event. Many potential options are available. Looking to achieve myriad objectives, planners will often opt for a combination of presentation methods (i.e. keynote and breakout, half-day workshop and master class, lunch speech and panel discussion). Common goals that speakers can facilitate:

- Setting a positive tone for new programs or ventures
- Reinforcing event themes in ways that prove empowering
- Providing authoritative insight into new markets, trends and topics
- Inspiring teams to heightened levels of performance, and driving ongoing growth and development
- Engaging and inspiring attendees, helping engender enthusiasm, provide fresh perspective and insight
- Raising awareness and support for topics, trends and ventures of interest throughout the organization
- Educating and delivering learning and skills transfer

Possible program options you might retain speakers to assist with include, but are not limited to: keynote speeches, breakout sessions, workshops, seminars, question and answer sessions, after-meal presentations, training programs, master classes, panels, meet and greets, case studies and book signings.

Why Choose a Motivational Speaker?

Are you rolling out new programs, initiatives or business ventures, or looking to promote heightened awareness for specific topics? A keynote presenter can help solidify and secure organization-wide support for these efforts through inspirational stories and expert advice, or provide crucial insights that allow teams to overcome challenges like never before. Therefore the choice of professional speaker you add to your itinerary can be a decision that’s every bit as vital as the theme, venue and setup for the occasion.

Wondering where to find a pro keynote presenter and how to select the best fit for the program? Start by clearly defining a purpose, topic and vision for your event, then ask professional colleagues for speaking references and recommendations. Consider audience demographics and the type of speaker most likely to connect with them.

It’s also important to align speakers and topics with stakeholders’ overall expectations for the program up front. In many cases, a speaker’s bureau can aid with selection and help you manage the process from beginning to end.

Once you’ve chosen the right motivational speaker for your meeting or event, embrace their words of wisdom and advice, and encourage your employees to do the same. Think of the speaker’s services as an investment in your organization’s future. By adopting new ideas and advice from these thought leaders, your organization can reach new heights and potential — a partnership made possible through your direct support and effort.

“Think of the speaker’s services as an investment in your organization’s future.”

Scott Steinberg is an award-winning professional speaker. A best-selling expert on leadership and innovation, Steinberg is the author of Make Change Work for You: 10 Ways to Future-Proof Yourself, Fearlessly Innovate, and Succeed Despite Uncertainty. Steinberg is among today’s leading providers of keynote speeches, workshops and seminars for Fortune 500 firms. His website is www.AKeynoteSpeaker.com.

March 2015 • Corporate & Incentive Travel • TheMeetingMagazines.com
The New Face of Incentives

Topping the Trends for 2015 Are Individualized, Personalized Experiences

The future looks bright for incentive travel. Each year, the Society for Incentive Travel Excellence (SITE) Foundation conducts an analysis of the motivational events industry and releases its projections for the future. In its most recent study results, the foundation reported that incentive travel continues to be on an upswing and is predicted to grow into 2016.

Kurt Paben is president, channel and employee loyalty, U.S., for the loyalty program company Aimia Inc. and also serves as president of the SITE Foundation. His company works with clients in a variety of vertical markets, including automotive, high-tech, pharmaceutical and health care. “We’re seeing the use of incentives as a business tool just continuing to rise,” he says. “We see more and more of them. I think our customers, along with our help, have gotten really good at understanding what the business value is and how to structure incentive programs so that by running them, they drive business results for the company.” He says that those results might be related to sales, service, employee retention or another company goal.

Paben noted a few trends that he’s seeing in incentive programs. “International travel continues to be popular and on the rise. That said, the length of programs typically has shortened by a little bit to anywhere from four to six nights on average.” He says the challenge is to figure out the best way to construct an incentive program when a shorter time frame is involved.

The Personal Touch

“The notion of a trip where everyone does the same thing has gone away,” Paben explains. “It’s now much more customized to the individual, and I think that’s a very big change. You have multiple generations in the work force, so how do you construct things in a way that really makes sense for the participant? I think what we see is a huge trend toward making business personal and how, although you’re doing group incentive travel, you create experiences that are meaningful on a personal basis that connect with individuals.”

Paben says that creating a personalized program is a multifaceted process. “It’s how you create every touch point to be a more personal one, so it’s not just about activities. There’s a lot more work done on really understanding what the demographics of the group look like, so we look a lot at the different personas and types of folks we have on client programs and plan experiences so they can really connect in a very personal way. I think it can go all the way down to the kinds of gifts that you do on incentive programs as opposed to giving everyone the same room amenity or the same room gift. It’s trying to understand what they are interested in; what would be meaningful to them. The more we can learn about people and the more they’re willing to share gives us the ability to construct a whole experience — not just activities — in a way that I think is much more meaningful.”

Generational Differences

The SITE survey also found that generational diversity needs to be considered in program design. According to the report, “There is no significant difference in beliefs about the effectiveness of motivational tools based on generation. However, it is apparent that it takes different rewards to motivate different generations. Boomers continue to be most motivated by extrinsic rewards. There is strong agreement that millennials are less motivated than other generations although traditionalists come close.”

Changing Communications

The way in which incentive trip sponsors communicate with their attendees is also changing. “Most of that has moved to the handset,” Paben says. “Mobile technology allows you to have very individualized, personalized communication. It’s where you can drive personalized itineraries, drive personalized communications, right on their handset, about information that they specifically need to know versus what everybody needs to know. It can also be a place to have contained social media within the group.

If you look at the way that consumers, in general, interact with brands, you can bring that similar mobile experience to events.”

Kristin Twombly, global event manager for Zynx Health, plans an annual sales incentive trip that ranges in size from 25 to 75 couples. She also is seeing technology playing a bigger and bigger role in her programs. “We’ve always done event registration, but we’re really into mobile apps right now. We have been doing those for different events to generate excitement before (the event) and to make the information and agendas easily accessible to people while they’re onsite. It’s great for incentives, because they kind of want us to be hands off and be able to do their own thing when they’re on these trips. It’s a way to keep in touch with different rewards to motivate different generations.”

By Karen Brost

“The notion of a trip where everyone does the same thing has gone away. It’s now much more customized to the individual, and I think that’s a very big change.”

Kurt Paben, President, Channel & Employee Loyalty U.S. Aimia Inc., Plymouth, MN
“We offer golf, spa and local tours. We always seem to max out the things like the ATV tours, and the paddleboarding and ocean or river kayaking.”

Laura Miller, CME Firmwide Events & Sustainability Manager, McKenna Long & Aldridge, Atlanta, GA

with everyone and provide them with updated info so they’ll know what’s going on, be calling or emailing them all the time.”

She says that her company has always created personalized itineraries, but that in the past, creating them manually was a tedious process. “Using some of these technological tools that are available now makes it really easy from the planner’s point of view,” she describes. In the SITE study, 86 percent of those surveyed indicated that the use of smart/mobile technology is either important or very important in their program operations.

Finding Inspiration

Laura Miller, CME, holds the position of firmwide events and sustainability manager for McKenna Long & Aldridge LLP, a law firm headquartered in Atlanta. Her company has offices in 15 cities, and it is her responsibility to plan and coordinate all of their client retreats.

“A lot of law firms have their meetings in the same location three or four years in a row,” she states. “I would have a very hard time generating excitement for people to go if we went to the same place over and over again.” So, similar to many incentive programs, Miller uses only four- and five-star properties and moves the event to a new destination each year to keep the interest level high.

In addition to the partner meetings that are part of the retreat, Miller makes sure she builds time into the agenda for recreation. “We offer golf, spa and local tours,” she says, adding that her group is usually more interested in high adventure activities over spa treatments. “We always seem to max out the things like the ATV tours, and the paddleboarding and ocean or river kayaking.”

Another page she borrows from the incentive trip playbook is to present each attendee with a special welcome gift such as Maui Jim sunglasses when the group met at Terranea Resort in Southern California or a squash jacket when the retreat was held at the Hyatt Regency Chesapeake Bay Golf Resort, Spa and Marina in Maryland.

Making a Difference

The SITE survey also reported that Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) is becoming an increasingly important part of the meetings industry. According to the survey, there are so many different food trends that are out there. How you string all of that together is much different than it used to be. Destinations, whether it be through hotels or caterers, are able to make food and beverage an experience within that the trend that we see more and more.”

Since Twombly’s company is in the health care business, wellness is an important focus when she plans her programs. “It’s something we’ve been doing increasingly throughout my time here, having programs and food and beverage that support that. When I’m looking for a destination or hotels to partner with, that’s definitely something that I think about.”

Breathing Room

Another challenge that’s involved in designing a successful incentive program is finding the right balance between scheduling enough events and giving attendees some much appreciated free time. Paben believes that the days of jam-pack ing a program full of content are a thing of the past. “There’s definitely a blackout from 5 to 7 where they go on a hike to realize the importance of being together with the group and interacting with fellow winners and the executives, but they also want to experience the destination in the way they want to do it.

“In the past,” he continues, “you might have scheduled every single night and every single day. It’s not unusual for them to have a night on their own, a day on their own. You want people to be able to experience the destination in the way that they want to experience it. We’re also seeing people going to more off-the-beaten path types of activities to explore them in a more intimate kind of way. The other thing that we see are destinations like Dubai coming on very strong. People have a very big interest in traveling to these types of destinations, maybe in a more popular. It’s a great way to travel international and see multiple destinations without unpacking.”

Wining and Dining

Food and beverage choices also are be ing given greater attention. “I think food and beverage has really changed,” Paben comments. “A lot of our events have been an integrated part of programs now. There are so many different food trends that are out there. How you string all of that together is much different than it used to be. Destinations, whether it be through hotels or caterers, are able to make food and beverage an experience within that the trend that we see more and more.”

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More Ways to Motivate

Incentive trips also can be used to mot ivate employees who aren’t part of the salesforce. “Certainly, sales continues to be the No. 1 reason people do incentive programs,” Paben states, “but it’s not the only one. We definitely have clients who reward other employees. They may be the try to give them a lot of downtime, too, because it’s supposed to be a vacation. We want to try to keep their commitment to a minimum so they can enjoy time with their spouse or their guest. There’s a little bit of an awards component, so we’ll do a dinner one night. We also have some op tional things that they can participate in, for example, we’ll do a networking break one morning.”

Measuring Success

According to the SITE report, the re quirement for companies to measure return on investment (ROI) or return on opportunity (ROO) will continue. “One of the biggest changes in incentive pro grams is making sure you have a clear way to measure the success and the business value of it,” Paben elaborates. “I think that’s really important. We work with cus tomers to do that so that they can confi dently articulate the business value of the investment in incentive travel.”

“If the program was structured prop erly, you can normally tell whether it worked or not,” he continues. “I think when the incentive industry was probably unfairly attached several years ago, incentive programs were a tool to confi dently articulate the business value of what they were doing. Now, I think clients are in a much better position to say ‘we spent this amount of money on an incentive pro gram and for that amount of money, we got X amount of incremental sales, or we grew our customer satisfaction scores by X or we’ve been able to retain a higher percentage of the sales team.’ One of the biggest changes in incentive programs is making sure you have a clear way to measure the success and the business value of it.”

Kristin Twombly, Global Event Manager Zynx Health, Los Angeles, CA

“Corporate & Incentive Travel”

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Gaming Resorts
A Go-to Resource for Planners
By John Buchanan

Gam ing resorts, once shunned by some corporate meeting hosts and planners as taboo because of their negative association with gambling, have evolved as a go-to resource for many planners over the last few years, primarily because of the extraordinary value they offer and the simple fact that they offer an exceptional range of meeting space, including a globally acclaimed trio of chef restaurants, including Delmonico and Bouchon from Thomas Keller — currently defined “the best of Las Vegas.” The Venetian also offers a world-class spa for pampering attendees. MGM Resorts operates the city’s signature portfolio of gaming resorts, including a globally acclaimed trio of spectacular properties: Bellagio, MGM Grand and Mandalay Bay, which virtually define “the best of Las Vegas.”

The Venetian offers an array of celebrity chef restaurants, including Delmonico Steakhouse, Table 10 and Lagasse’s Stadium from Emeril Lagasse; modern American cuisine outpost Postrio and Cut steak house from Wolfgang Puck, and Bouchon from Thomas Keller — currently consensus holder of the “America’s Best Chef” title. Like its key competitors, the Venetian also offers a world-class spa for pampering attendees. MGM Resorts operates the city’s signature portfolio of gaming resorts, including a globally acclaimed trio of spectacular properties: Bellagio, MGM Grand and Mandalay Bay, which virtually define “the best of Las Vegas.”

The company’s long list of other properties, each of which offers a distinctive theme at a particular price point, include Aria and Vdara at the MGM Resorts-owned hotel-dining-experience-shopping complex City Center; Monte Carlo, New York, New York, Luxor, Excalibur and Circus-Circus. The most recent addition to the MGM Resorts collection is the Delano Las Vegas, sister property to the landmark Miami Beach hotel that helped create the South Beach phenomenon in the mid-1990s.

Rounding out the list of properties that help define the current hotel inventory in Las Vegas is the Forbes Four Star, 390-room M Resort Spa Casino, which features eight restaurants, including the flagship Anthony’s Prime Steak & Seafood; seven bars and lounges; a 23,000-sf spa; 92,000-sf casino; and more than 90,000 sf of meeting space. For budget-conscious planners and attendees, Studio Buffet has been the best buffet in Las Vegas over the last few years by the Las Vegas Review-Journal.

Golden Nugget Las Vegas transformed their 20,000 sf Convention Center into a modern business space. The project included new flooring, enhanced lighting, new wall coverings, upgraded technology and a state-of-the-art digital signage system throughout the existing space. The center now houses 13 break-out rooms, which can then be customized for individual group needs, as well as the 5,000 of Bell Air Room that includes a pre-function foyers.

Additional convention space at the Golden Nugget Las Vegas includes the 12,000 sf Grand Event Center located on the casino floor. The Golden Nugget Las Vegas, the most luxurious resort on the Fremont Street Experience, offers more than 2,400 deluxe guest rooms and suites; a casino, world-class restaurants such as Grotto Italian Ristorante and Vic & Anthony’s Steakhouse; a luxury spa and salon; and The Tank, a year-round outdoor swimming pool complete with a live shark aquarium and the new H2O poolside lounge.

A Planner’s Perspective
When Jim Emme, president of Bloomingdale, Illinois-based Now Foods, a manufacturer and wholesale distributor of natural foods and nutritional supplements, was looking for a venue for the company’s August 2014 Western Retailer Conference, for the first time ever, he chose a gaming resort — the AAA Four Diamond Peppermill Resort Spa Casino in Reno, Nevada.

Why? “To give them a gaming resort — one of the company’s most important properties,” Emme says. “At that facility is often clunky. And that was very important to the success of his meeting, primarily because its retailer attendees are the backbone of his growing business.”

Many of Now Foods’ retail stores are small mom-and-pop operations. “They are the mainstay of our business,” Emme says. “So one of the things we do with our meet-
10 restaurants, 16 bars and lounges, Spa 70,000 sf of meeting space. Within the Gordon Ramsay Pub & Grill; a full-service wanted to do.”

“Not all of his attendees actually gam- but all of them found the range of bled. But all of them found the fact entertainment and leisure options, such of every element of the meeting.

“And that makes it easier for us in terms that they liked the fact that everything they wanted was of planning the meeting,” Emme says. “It under one roof. They liked the fact they had so many other choices, like the bars and lounges and entertainment. There was something for everybody.”

In fact, attendees liked Peppermill so much — and Emme felt he got such practical value for his money — that New Foods will likely go back next year.

Peppermill Resort Spa Casino features 10 restaurants, 16 bars and lounges, Spa Toscana, casino, a 4,000 sf boardroom, and 106,000 sf of meeting and conven- tion space in the resort’s Tuscany Tower.

East Coast Options

Although Las Vegas and Atlantic City have been widely appreciated as gam- ing destinations for more than a half- century, casinos owned and operated by Native American tribes have become a popular new niche for meeting planners over the past decade.

The AAA Four Diamond Talking Stick Resort in Scottsdale, Arizona, features 497 guest rooms and suites, upscale and casual dining options that include the flagship Orange Sky Restaurant for aged beef and fresh seafood and Blue Coyote Cafe for distinctive American cuisine, the Spa at Talking Stick, and more than 50,000 sf of meeting and event space that includes a 25,000-sf Salt River Grand Ballroom and 22 indi- vidual meeting rooms. The resort also features 50,000 sf of outdoor meeting space that takes advantage of the sen- sational Southwestern landscape. Also located in the Talking Stick Cultural and Entertainment Destination on the Salt River-Pima Maricopa Indian Reservation is Casino Arizona.

Located in the Pacific Northwest, in Marysville, Washington, the 370-room Tulalip Resort Casino ranks as one of the most popular Native American gaming resorts in the U.S. for meetings and events. It offers five restaurants, includ- ing the signature Tulalip Bay; a full-ser- vice spa; and 30,000 sf of meeting space. Connecticut features two state-of-the-art Native American casino resorts, Mohegan Sun and Foxwoods. Mohegan Sun, which currently has 1,200 guest rooms, will open a second, 400-room hotel, called Earth Hotel, in fall 2016. Mohegan Sun features 40 res- taurants, bars and lounges; a 20,000-sf Elemis spa; three entertainment and event venues, including a 10,000-seat arena, a 400-seat cabaret theatre and 350-seat Wolf Den; three casinos; and more than 100,000 sf of meeting space. The resort also includes a 17,500 sf outdoor terrace and a 130,000-sf retail shopping complex.

Located in Mashantucket, Connecti- cut, the Foxwoods Resort Casino fea- tures four individual hotels, including the AAA Four Diamond Grand Pequot Tower, Great Cedar Hotel, Two Trees Inn and Fix Tower, as well as the inti- mate 23-suite The Villas. Signature res- taurants include the AAA Four Diamond Paragon for fresh seasonal fare, as well as Italian eateries Al Dente and Alta Strada, David Burke Prime steak house and Cedars for beef and poultry. The Foxwoods complex includes 150,000 sf of meeting space.

The Southeast

The 100-acre, 481-room Seminole Hard Rock Hotel & Casino in South Florida, is another of the country’s top- ranked Native American gaming resorts. It features 17 restaurants, including the flagship Council Oak Steaks & Seafood, 11 nightclubs, a 22,000 sf European spa and 20,000 sf of meeting space.

Also in the Southeast, the AAA Four Diamond, 1,740-room Beau Rivage, lo- cated in Biloxi, Mississippi, and oper- ated by MGM Resorts, ranks among the most unique and popular gaming resorts outside Las Vegas and Atlantic City. It features five restaurants, including the flagship BR Prime steak house and Jia for innovative pan-Asian cuisine. The res- ort also features The Spa at Beau Rivage, the Fallen Oak Golf Course and 50,000 sf of meeting space.

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**Traveler Beware**

**Safety and Security Concerns Have Never Been Greater**

The threat of terrorism reaches beyond the Middle East with attacks like the one on the offices of the French satirical magazine Charlie Hebdo and a Jewish deli in Paris.

By Patrick Simms

"Kenya right now is really burning as far as trying to draw groups because it is close to some of the (Ebola-affected) countries.”

Adam Lawhorne, CITE, CIS
CEO Meeting Incentive Experts
Oakbrook Terrace, IL

For economic reasons, some companies do not hire security professionals as part of their full-time staff, but rather outsource that function for specific meetings and events. Kevin Mellott, president of Dallas, Texas-based Erase Enterprises and former assistant chief in the Department of Public Safety for the city of Pittsburgh, has some advice for companies interested in hiring a third party:

- **Insurance.** “To operate in Texas, where we’re based, it only takes a couple hundred dollars of liability insurance. But that does not even cover the lawyers’ fees, so I tell planners to look for a company with at least $1 million—$2 million in coverage.”
- **Field experience.** “There are professionals with a variety of designations, but many of them don’t have any field experience, and that’s where the big difference is. So make sure whoever you hire has actual emergency service experience.”

**Using Independent Security Firms**

Even when a country, region or city is deemed to be generally safe, the operative word is “generally.” “Maybe a country or city as a whole doesn’t have a problem, but there are some pockets that do,” notes Lawhorne, who last year contributed to the SITE Foundation study “Incentives Move Business: Risk Assessment/Management for Meeting and Incentive Professionals.” “There are certain places in Chicago I wouldn’t go to, for example, but that doesn’t mean I wouldn’t do a program on Michigan Avenue.”

**Assigning Levels of Risk**

Depth of investigation into a locale is key, but so is addressing the breadth of potential problems. Anne Daniel, senior manager of travel, meetings and events with Newport News, Virginia-based Ferguson Enterprises, notes that “Political unrest, economic instability and crime rate are all taken into consideration when selecting an international destination.” That adds to health threats such as Ebola, Zika, swine flu, etc., extreme

Airport staff check for fever in travelers arriving from West African countries affected by the Ebola outbreak.

- **Breadth of resources.** “The company should have access to a variety of resources, such as private jets, full-size cargo jets, satellite systems, generators, extra personnel and so on, as well as connections on the ground in the destination to obtain these resources.”
- **Risk Management.** Mellott, a member of the Overseas Security Advisory Council for the Department of State, put his resources to good use during an incident faced by an American-based incentive group in Africa last year. “All of a sudden the transportation broke down at nighttime, when predatory animals are out. So I needed to get transportation out in the African bush for 75 people. We had two backup systems. I had already put together a deal with two helicopter pilots where if I needed them, I could bring them out 24/7, and they were on standby. I also had a group of small motorcoaches, and that’s what we used. And at about 11 p.m. I was able to get 14 coaches to come out in the middle of nowhere to get us.” — PS

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**Risk Management**

The threat of terrorism reaches beyond the Middle East with attacks like the one on the offices of the French satirical magazine Charlie Hebdo and a Jewish deli in Paris.
“People don’t realize how much it costs to do a removal of an injured person in a faraway place in the middle of nowhere. If you don’t have any EMS in the area, we need extra equipment, vehicles and medics.”

Kevin Mellott
President
Erase Enterprises
Frisco, TX

risk, look at methods to reduce the risk of the activity, if possible, and implement controls to minimize the chance for it to occur. For high risk, consider methods to reduce the risk or, if that is not possible, consider eliminating the activity from the program. If eliminating is not possible, tell the client and participants about the risk, in writing, and implement significant controls to minimize it.”

Incentive Travel Risks

Medium- to high-risk scenarios are perhaps more prevalent in incentive travel today due to the adventurousness of many groups, who sometimes heighten the risk of a crisis — particularly medical emergencies — with activities designed to create an “out of the box” experience.

“We have younger, more energetic, more adventure-seeking clients now that perhaps more prevalent in incentive travel today due to the adventurousness of many groups, who sometimes heighten the risk of a crisis — particularly medical emergencies — with activities designed to create an “out of the box” experience.”

Kevin Mellott, president of Dallas, Texas-based Erase Enterprises, a safety and security provider that works with corporate clients. “Our job is to give them the best information possible so they can make a good decision on the risk.”

As Hooker suggests, groups that are considering medium- or high-risk destinations or activities should be aware of the controls they will need to have in place to minimize risk. “Every solution has a different financial commitment,” says Mellott. For those extreme physical activities in remote areas, “We make sure that our travelers have top-quality travel insurance, where we’ve got at least $1 million to extract them with. People don’t realize how much it costs to do a removal of an injured person in a faraway place in the middle of nowhere. If you don’t have any EMS in the area, we need extra equipment, vehicles and medics.”

Once the planner is made aware of the risk level and costs involved in the contingency plan, there are “three possibilities,” he explains. “The client says, ‘Forget it, we’re not doing that.’ Or they say, ‘OK, we’ll do that but we’re telling our employ- ees and our attendees it’s not an officially sponsored event, you’re on your own.’ The third version is that they sponsor it and pay to bring in the additional personnel or whatever we need to be able to properly cover a crisis that could occur.”

When the Show Must Go On

If the potential crisis entails the complete disruption of the meeting, the overall value of the meeting to the host organization must be considered. If “the show must go on” due to the value of the event, then a higher budget for contingency planning is often justified. “If the meeting doesn’t take place, if they have to evacuate the area or cancel, or if the area loses power, what’s the financial damage to them?” Mellott asks.

“For example, one of my clients does an annual meeting that has to go on because after the meeting they have a spike in the hundreds of millions of dollars in sales for the next couple of months. So because that meeting is so critical, there is a large budget for hiring companies like ours, or buying generators to have on standby and fly in from another city. But if the meeting is not that critical, let’s say it’s an incentive trip, then if something had happened, we can reschedule a trip for 50 people. So it may not be worth spending all that money to have resources ready for a ‘what if?’

“Meetings with very high, proven ROI can thus be considered part of a company’s assets that must be protected. Its human capital is another kind of asset that can be put at risk during meetings-related travel, and not only by safety/security threats at the destination. “I have some clients who do risk management for flights,” says Lawhorne, “so only one certain number of people from the company can be on each flight.”

Information Security

A third kind of capital is information, and while companies have become more savvy about information security, Mellott has seen an employer sometimes getting better at data protection during offsite meetings.

According to a study conducted a few years ago by the Ponemon Institute, 78 percent of the 709 IT and IT security professionals surveyed indicated that their organizations have experienced a data breach as a result of negligent or malicious employees or other insiders. The study identified losing laptops and mobile devices as being among the root causes of data breaches.

“Everybody today wants to click a button and make it happen right now, and if security takes an extra step, they think it’s inconvenient. We try to make it as convenient as possible,” Mellott says. “For example, at a social event after a presentation, we’ll have a room with our security personnel, they take the laptop bag. Our guys can check in and hold it while they’re at the social event, so it’s not sitting on the floor in a bag where someone can drop off the bag and leave, and it’s not sitting on the floor in a bag where someone can drop off the bag and leave.”

And if attendees do not have contact information for all local authorities that can assist during a crisis, then they may lose the opportunity to be easily reached by event support staff who do have those contacts.

Daniel notes that Ferguson Enterprises is currently training on risks and contingency plans: “The onsite staff receives a full country briefing from our Security and Risk Management group, along with contact information for various organizations, such as law enforcement, fire, police and local embassies.” That briefing may turn out to be the most important pre-convention meeting of all.

CRIT
At the Walt Disney World Resort, keynote speaker Bobby Flay explored the design decisions made in the cooking process while preparing delicious dishes on stage at Learning 2014.

F&B Trends

The Pleasure Principle

This year’s annual F&B trend report — The Pleasure Principle: “I Want What I Want When I Want It” Year In Food, Beverage and Hospitality, was developed by Andrew Freeman and his team.

Here are a few trends to watch:

Taco Mania. We’ve seen modern Mexican food sweep the nation, and now chefs are honing in on traditional tacos.

Scrambled Soft. First it was poached then deviled, now the new “it” egg is scrambled. And we’re talking way beyond the traditional egg-in-a-hole for dinner.

The Candy Man Can. Retro, artisanal and newfangled, candy is coming on strong.

Muy Caliente. Tapas and tapas-style menus have become the standard for our new sharing culture, and we’re having a love affair with the cuisine of Spain.

Pucker Up. From pickles to vinegar shrub-based cocktails, we’re into sour flavors. It’s an easy way to add dimension to dishes and by refreshing the taste buds, it literally makes your mouth water.

Flipping Out. With the addition of savory pancakes to dinner menus, chefs are proving batter is a versatile canvas for a variety of flavors.

The Original Hybrid. It doesn’t get much better than butty toasted rye, melty cheese and a juicy beef patty.

That’s the beauty of a patty melt — part grilled cheese, part cheesburger, the whole is greater than the sum of its parts.

For the complete report, go to: www.afandco.com/whats-trending/trendreport

— CL
IPA from Firestone Walker Brewery and a 2009 Herman Story Tomboy Southern Rhone White Blend from Santa Barbara County, California. During the 2014 IBM Insight Conference at Mandalay Bay in Las Vegas, Nevada, conference manager Martha Moreau used the pairing event as a new way to create an audience experience the expo and to connect attendees with sponsors and partners. “We had tasting stations set up throughout the exhibit hall,” she says. “Attendees could enjoy one food item with a beer and a wine (chosen by the certified cicerone and sommelier) and had all three on a station. We had one large station in the center of the exhibit hall with all of the food and drink pairings, and the cicerone and sommelier were walking around talking to attendees and telling them why each beer or wine worked with their food.”

“Stations were placed near sponsors so sponsors could take advantage of the attendees being close to their booths, giving them the opportunity to meet new prospects and continue conversations with existing clients. The reception-style food and atmosphere allowed for the attendees to be more relaxed and to walk around and talk to people throughout the event. The food and drink pairings provided an instant talking point.”

Moreau says the event was successful on all levels. “We strive to deliver an exceptional attendee experience. We know this fun, hands-on activity helped us deliver exactly that.”

After a packed day of general sessions, keynote sessions, breakouts and meetings, Moreau says attendees want the opportunity to continue networking albeit in a more relaxed and entertaining atmosphere. “We love the pairing event provides. ‘By the end of the evening,’ she adds, ‘there was a nice vibe in the Expo, and we heard from several partners that they were pleased with the turnout.’”

Moreau sees the experience as one that demonstrates IBM’s commitment to both its attendees and sponsors. “We know the No. 1 reason people attend Insight is to take advantage of networking opportunities. The pairings event allowed us to capitalize on that in a different and fun way. The experience allowed new relationships to be forged in a way that may not have happened otherwise.”

The event was so successful it’s already on the schedule for Insight 2015. “We will absolutely do the beer vs. wine pairing again,” she says. “The experience helped us deliver an exceptional attendee experience in a fun, low-pressure atmosphere while ensuring our partners and sponsors saw strong booth traffic.”

Although some groups actually vote for beer or wine, Moreau says her group didn’t take a formal vote. “In my mind,” she says, “both options were winners.” And regardless of favorites, everyone learned something during the event. It was win-win.

Stay Well Meetings

Like Radisson Blu, MGM Resorts also has developed a program focusing on healthy eating as part of its overall Stay Well Meetings initiative, which was launched at the MGM Grand in Las Vegas in August with the help of Dr. Deepak Chopra, world-renowned health and wellness expert. MGM Resorts is responding to what it sees as a comprehensive trend in the industry and work environments in a significant way.

The program includes everything from air purification and new cleaning protocols to lighting, acoustics, ergonomics and aromatherapy. More attention to hydration for attendees and healthy menu options is important components. The menus, which have the designated Go! Healthy seal from nutritionists at Cleveland Clinic’s Wellness Institute, are available for all meals and snack breaks.

The break menu includes such options as honey-chia museli bars; a farmer’s basket with raw, roasted and pickled vegetable dips and spreads; baked and dehydrated fruit and vegetable chips; and nuts as well as infused waters and tropical-fruit nectar.

Sharing the Joy of Food

At Walt Disney World Resort in Orlando, food impacts meetings in a variety of creative ways, including teambuilding programs and events. “We’ve put a lot of emphasis and energy behind coming up with these unique event concepts,” says Robert Gilbert, executive chef with catering operations at the resort. “Regardless of the size of the group, it’s all about creating a sense of camaraderie between guests,” he says. “Nothing does that like learning about and sharing the joy of food.”

The newest culinary experience, available at Disneyland Resort in California and Walt Disney World Resort in Florida, is a Create Your Own Lunch program in which participants cook together and enjoy the fruits of their labors. “The event is small teams to create a four-course meal. The program is perfect for all group sizes, even up to 1,000 attendees, thanks to the use of satellite kitchens.”

Elliott Masie, chair and CEO of the Learning Conference, sees F&B as an increasingly important aspect of meetings on levels. “One conference was held at Walt Disney World Resort, and food played an important role during the event. ‘I believe food is the new interactive experience,’ says Masie of The Masie Center in Saratoga Springs, New York. “When we go to a restaurant, we’re not only interested in what’s on the plate, we’re interested in what went into the food and how it was cooked.”

“I thrive on going to restaurants when I can sit at a chef’s table and see the food being prepared. Whether it’s a fun, low-pressure atmosphere that may not have happened otherwise.”

Masie adds, “There’s a nice vibe in the Expo, and we heard from several partners that they were pleased with the turnout.”

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Although Orlando has been among the country’s top 10 meeting destinations for years, in 2013 it achieved the lofty status of being named the No. 1 destination in the U.S. by Cvent.

That distinction comes as no surprise to the many loyal corporate meeting planners who have considered the Magic City a go-to choice for about as long as they can remember.

“First of all, it offers sunshine in February,” says Judy Smith, CEM, director of dealer markets at Memphis, Tennessee-based Orgill, Inc., a wholesale hardware supplier to the U.S., Canada and 62 other countries. For the last eight years, Smith has used Orlando for the company’s citywide Spring Dealer Market, which uses 1 million sf of total space at the Orange County Convention Center and draws 28,000 attendees from across the country and the world. The event is booked in Orlando for every year except two through 2026.

“It also offers attendees the opportunity to both work and play well,” Smith says. “And with the variety of hotels to choose from at every price point and the theme parks, Orlando continues to be the best destination for our show.”

Airlift

In addition to excitement, Orlando also offers formidable airlift and what is arguably one of the nicest and easiest to navigate major airports in the world — Orlando International Airport.

Airlift is particularly important to Smith for her citywide meeting that draws attendees from all over the world.

“The airlift is important, because the people that attend our meeting are busy businesspeople,” Hill says. “And they want to be out of the office for the shortest amount of time possible. Because Orlando has great airlift from around the country, that means that many of our attendees can catch a flight after their office hours and still get to the meeting.”

By John Buchanan

At Universal Orlando Resort, travel between the two different lands of The Wizarding World of Harry Potter via the Hogwarts Express.
The airport is easy to get into and out of, and it’s easy to get flights to and from,” he says. “We have attendees from all over the country, as well as internationally, and all of our attendees can either get direct flights or get there with just one connecting flight.”

**Hotel Inventory**

It comes as a big surprise to many meeting planners who visit Orlando for the first time that the city offers 450 hotels and a whopping 118,600 rooms, Scaletta says. And as the destination continues to evolve and increase in sophistication, its hotel product is leading the way, she says.

Most recently, Orlando has benefitted from the conversion of the landmark Peabody Orlando, perennially cited as one of the top meeting hotels in the country, to a Hyatt Regency. And its importance is enhanced by its location in the center of International Drive. The Hyatt Regency Orlando is connected to the Orange County Convention Center and offers 315,000 sq ft of flexible meeting space. Just up the street is the AAA Four Diamond Hilton Orlando, another major property connected to the convention center.

The new Four Seasons Resort Orlando at Walt Disney World Resort, which opened last August, further burnishes Orlando’s growing reputation, Scaletta says, especially for high-end meetings and incentive groups. “Four Seasons is a luxury hotel brand,” she says. “And they have really outdone themselves in Orlando. And because it’s an ‘at Walt Disney World Resort’ property, you also get all of those incredible benefits, such as the venues within the Disney complex.”

Smith likes the city’s hotel inventory because of the wide range of options and price points it offers. “All of our attendees pay their own way, and a lot of them are non-and-pop hardware dealers, even though we also have large dealer attendees,” she says. “But we treat them all the same, whether they’re a $3 million a year dealer or a small one. So one thing we like about Orlando is that you can find a hotel room anywhere from luxury to economy.”

Her hotel room roster includes the Hilton Orlando and Hyatt Regency Orlando, as well as more properties conveniently located near the convention center.

For the more than 1,000 internal employees who attend the meeting, Smith uses the Marriott Village Orlando in Lake Buena Vista. This campus of hotels can accommodate her entire team and also offers good value. “We also like the fact it is convenient for people because it’s centrally located to things like dining and shopping,” Smith says.

Hill has remained loyal to the Marriott Village Orlando since 2000, primarily because of the quality of its staff and the relationship she has developed with them. “You can find rooms and meeting space anywhere,” she says. “But you can’t always find a good partner. And we have a great partnership with Marriott World Center, and one that truly values the fact that we keep coming back every other year. We are in the food business, so the food and beverage we get at a hotel is a very important part of the expectations of our attendees. And again, Marriott World Center does a great job for us every time.”

The ever-growing roster of good restaurants also is a major factor in Smith’s ongoing annual use of the destination. “The dining options and the food in Orlando are amazing,” he says, especially now that hotels have regained their pricing power as a seller’s market, the other key benefit he gets with Universal is a strong value proposition. “They have been our true partners, especially ever since the recession,” he says. “They work with us to make sure that we have a package to offer attendees that is affordable to their companies. And that means it has to work on every level, from the room rate to the F&B and all the other costs associated with people being there. And Universal does a great job on every aspect of all that.”

**Dining Scene**

Yet another factor in Orlando’s popularity as a meeting destination is its diverse and constantly evolving dining scene, which features everything from restaurants operated by top celebrity chefs to budget options and everything in between.

“The dining options and the food in Orlando are amazing,” Sutton says. “It really does offer something for every taste and budget, from upscale gourmet restaurants to budget choices. My attendees and I like the fact that it has such as range of options from high-end to low-cost, as well as midmarket options. That’s very important to us, because we have quite a few attendees that are on a strict per-diem budget from their companies, and in a budget-conscious, post-recession marketplace, they’re particularly interested in getting good deals.”

But we also have attendees that are looking for high-end dining options like celebrity chef restaurants you hear about on the food channels, and others that are looking for chain restaurants where they can eat inexpensively. The ever-growing roster of good restaurants also is a major factor in Smith’s ongoing annual use of the destination. “It’s been unbelievable how the dining scene in Orlando has evolved over the last few years,” she says. “It’s the best thing that has ever happened, as far as we’re concerned. And as we continue to expand our dealer markets and enhance the experiences of our attendees, we give them a lot of information about the local restaurants before the show.”

She and her attendees are particularly fond of “Restaurant Row,” which is centrally and conveniently located along bustling Sand Lake Road. “You have a lot of dining choices, and they’re all good,” Smith says. “And it’s easy to get there inexpensively by taxi.”

Even though Sand Lake Road and the spectacular CityWalk dining and entertainment complex at Universal Orlando continue to reign as the most popular restaurant locations of choice for meeting planners and attendees, International Drive and the area formerly known as Downtown Disney — now transitioning to Disney Springs — are coming on strong, Scaletta says.

For example, International Drive offers Orlando, a dining and entertainment complex near the convention center that offers an array of popular venues including a Capital
Universal Orlando® Resort is transforming the way meetings and events are held in Orlando. Over the next several months we’re completing an unprecedented resort-wide expansion and remodeling of our on-site hotel properties. By 2016 we’ll have five spectacular on-site hotels featuring a combined 360,000 square feet of meeting space. Each hotel is new or recently renovated, and features Loews Hotels & Resorts’ renowned service. Plus, all five hotels are within walking distance of Universal Orlando’s theme parks and the Universal CityWalk® dining and entertainment complex.

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By Fall 2015 the hotel’s meeting space will expand to over 141,000 sq. ft., including 15 meeting rooms and 64,000 sq. ft. of outdoor meeting space. This exotic, South Seas themed hotel features 1,000 guest rooms and suites, which will all be renovated by mid-2016.

**HARD ROCK HOTEL®**
**NEWLY REVITALIZED**
The stylish California mission-themed Hard Rock Hotel® features meeting space renovated in 2014, along with renovations to the lobby and all 650 guest rooms and suites which will be complete by early 2015.

**LOEWS PORTOFINO BAY HOTEL**
**RECENTLY REMODELED**
Universal Orlando’s premier luxury hotel, themed to the Italian Riviera, offers 750 guest rooms and suites all newly renovated in 2014. The hotel also offers elegant ballrooms, meeting rooms, breathtaking outdoor function areas and more.

**UNIVERSAL’S CABANA BAY BEACH RESORT**
**NEW IN 2014**
The resort’s largest hotel recently opened its doors with 1,800 guest rooms and suites. Attendees will enjoy the resort’s colorful 1950’s & 60’s beach hotel theme.
Grille steak house, B.B. King’s Blues Club and Cuba Libre Restaurant and Rum Bar.

Meanwhile, a number of new restaurants have debuted at Universal’s CityWalk, including Vivo Italian Kitchen, Hot Dog Hall of Fame and Antojitos Authentic Mexican Food.

“We recently did an event at Antojitos and it was fantastic,” Scelta says, adding that the new Disney Springs will feature an upscale restaurant from Food Network’s Iron Chef Masaharu Morimoto.

Convention Center

For larger meetings, the Orange County Convention Center, which now ranks as the second largest in the country, with 2.1 million sf of exhibit space plus meeting rooms and breakout spaces, continues to play a major role in Orlando’s success. To remain competitive, the facility has launched the next phase of a five-year capital improvements plan with the renovation of West Halls E & F and meeting rooms. Hall WF will be converted into a 50,000 sf ballroom and four boardrooms. Meeting rooms in W340 will become signature rooms with wood flooring, bamboo ceilings and a scenic outdoor mezzanine deck for entertaining. The latest phase of the facility’s makeover will be completed in 2017.

Smith, as a major user of the convention center, gives it high marks. “First and foremost for us is the quality of the people we work with,” she says. “They know us. We’ve built a good relationship that is now a real partnership. They’re there for us, no matter what we need. But in addition to that, in terms of cleanliness and service, Orange County Convention Center is just an excellent facility.”

The exceptional quality of the facility’s technology is also very important to her.

“They have made some major changes with regard to wireless technology that really help us, because everybody has a wireless device or tablet now,” she says. “And our show is a buying show, so technology is very important to the success of the meeting.”

Reunion Resort, home of Akimia Academy, also boasts three Signature golf courses designed by legends Palmer, Nicklaus and Watson.

A Top-notch CVB

The final factor in the city’s phenomenal recent success is its CVB, Visit Orlando, with former Disney senior executive George Aguel as its passionate and visionary chairman.

“They are at the top of the top CVBs I’ve ever worked with,” Smith says. “In fact, I would rate them No. 1. The people I work with are the best I’ve ever worked with. They know us, and they work with us very well because they know the things we need, and they deliver those things. They stay on top of everything, and they keep me posted on things like new hotels or restaurants. We source our own rooms and negotiate our own deals, but they find me and manage the temp service we use for registration.”

Smith also has high praise for Visit Orlando, with whom she has worked since 2008. “One key reason we continue to come back to Orlando is that we have a great relationship with the CVB,” she says. “But the other reason is that Orlando is the most visited family travel destination in the world. And our excellent relationship with the CVB makes it easy for us to keep coming back.”

In her experience, Orlando is second to none as a destination, Hill says. “The most important thing for us and our attendees is that in Orlando, we have a destination where our staff and attendees get to work hard and then, when the conference is over, they can bring their families in and enjoy the city,” she says. “That’s why Orlando works so well for us.”

Smith agrees that Orlando lacks nothing as a meeting destination. "It has great hotels, great restaurants and it's easy to get to," she says. "It also has everything you need right around the convention center, and it's a 'walking' city. And it has great shopping. So for a meeting of our size, it's everything you could ever ask for in a destination."
The Shreveport-Bossier Convention and Tourist Bureau in Louisiana has named **David Bradley** as vice president of sales and services. He most recently served as director of convention sales for the Valley Forge Convention and Visitors Bureau in Pennsylvania.

The Outrigger Konotta Maldives Resort, located in the Gaafu Dhaalu Atoll and scheduled to open in the third quarter of 2015, has named **Apple Woo** as director of sales and marketing, based in the Outrigger Asia Pacific office in Phuket, Thailand. She previously served as Jumeirah group director of global sales for Southeast Asia and Hong Kong.

Scottsdale Resort & Conference Center, Scottsdale, Arizona, has named **Patrick Connors** as director of sales and marketing. He most recently served as director of sales and marketing at The Wigwam in Phoenix, Arizona.

The Philadelphia Convention and Visitors Bureau has named **Tim Haggerty** as vice president of sales. He most recently was director of sales and marketing for the Philadelphia Marriott Downtown.

**Bradley Douglas Doell** was named director of sales and marketing for Turtle Bay Resort located on Oahu’s North Shore. He was most recently director of sales and marketing for the Hilton Orange County in Costa Mesa, California.

The Philadelphia Convention and Visitors Bureau has named **Randall Rovelto** as corporate sales manager. He was market sales manager at Marriott Courtyard and Residence Inn in Worcester, Massachusetts.

Discover The Palm Beaches has named **Dori Jensen** as senior director of meetings and convention sales for the mid-Atlantic region. She formerly served as manager of meeting and convention sales at Tourism Vancouver in Vancouver, British Columbia.

Omni Bedford Springs Resort, Bedford Springs, Pennsylvania, has named **Pamela Wolff** as director of sales and marketing. She most recently served as regional director of sales and marketing for Prospera Hospitality.

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