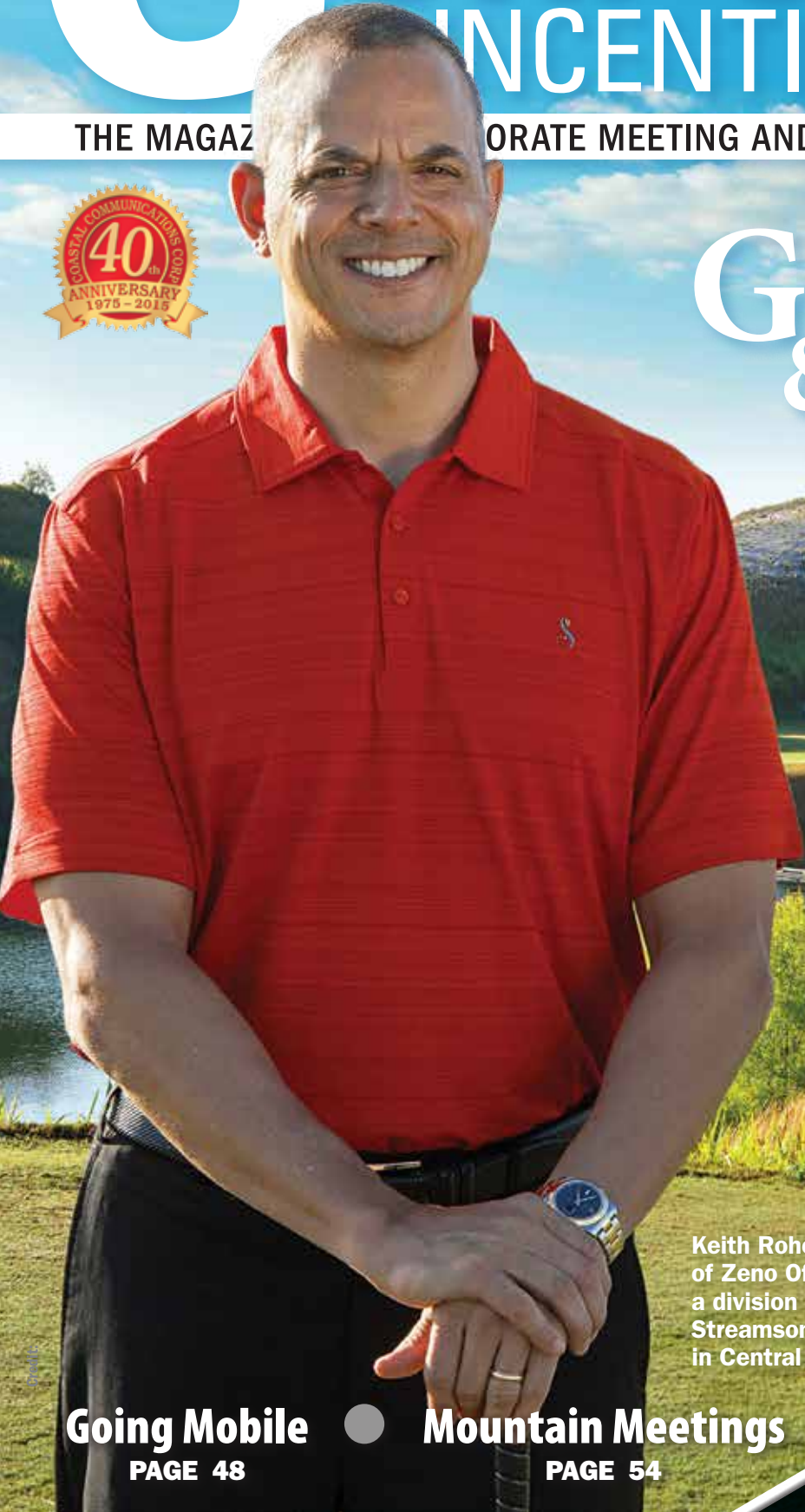


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# CORPORATE INCENTIVE TRAVEL

THE MAGAZINE FOR CORPORATE MEETING AND INCENTIVE TRAVEL PLANNERS



## Golf & Spa Resorts

Where Shared Experiences  
Are Good for Business  
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Meetings by  
the Beach  
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Keith Roher, president  
of Zeno Office Solutions,  
a division of Xerox, at  
Streamsong Resort  
in Central Florida.

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SPECIAL PULLOUT SECTION



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Credit: Little Palm Island Resort &amp; Spa

Accessible only by boat, a little piece of paradise awaits groups at Little Palm Island Resort & Spa in Little Torch Key. **PAGE 26**



Credit: The Broadmoor

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Credit: Big Lots-Debbie Stansberry

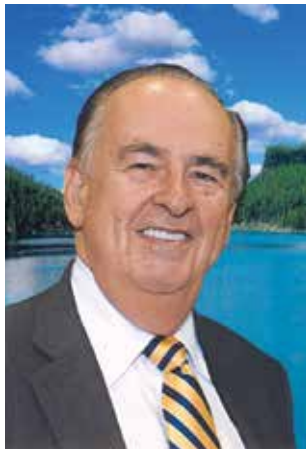
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# Publisher's Message

## Shared Experiences

Ever notice how things tend to come full circle? How everything old is new again but with a new and more sophisticated name? Way back when, an afternoon on the golf course was simply described as “having a great time” all the while we conducted business, developed and cemented relationships, and learned how to work together as a team. Nowadays, we call it “shared experiences,” or sometimes “experiential learning,” etc., etc. But, no matter how you define



it, the key message in our cover story “Golf & Spa Resorts — Where Shared Experiences Are Good for Business” (page 16) remains the same: A relaxing afternoon on the golf course or any other recreational teambuilding exercise often boosts productivity as attendees take the time to refresh and renew before they head back to the job at hand.

For example, Keith Roher, who is pictured on our cover this month on the golf course at Streamsong Resort, found out firsthand how well his sales force responded to Zenon Office Solutions' annual sales kickoff meeting held in February at the golf resort in Central Florida. Roher, the president of Zenon, a division of Xerox, wanted the reps “to drop their shoulders, relax and have fun.” He said the meeting at Streamsong was “a chance for attendees to get to know some of the other reps around the state that they don't see on an everyday basis.” Lo and behold, Roher said the reps got all “fired up,” and a significant ROI was achieved: “The message that we were trying to convey directly related to 2015 and our expectations from the sales side. And we had our biggest first quarter in probably three years.” This event was so well received and effective, Roher said he plans to start holding quarterly golf outings at Streamsong.

What if golf or spa doesn't fit with your group at this time? Check out the great success stories from your fellow planners in “Meetings by the Beach: From Tropical Paradises to Floating Venues — Reward Your Incentive Winners With the Ultimate Retreat” on page 26 and “Meeting in the Mountains: Now Is a Great Time to Find the Best Options and Values for Wintertime Events” on page 54.

As site selection is a recurring theme in this issue, be sure to also review all the fabulous locales in “Top Value Destinations: Great Places, Great People and More Bang for the Buck” on page 60. Lastly, look into “Going Mobile” on page 48 for all the compelling reasons you need a meeting app for your next event.

Harvey Grotzky  
Publisher

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# News & Notes

## AMResorts Breaks Ground on Now Onyx Punta Cana Resort in the Dominican Republic

PHILADELPHIA, PA — The President of the Dominican Republic Danilo Medina Sánchez and other government officials joined AMResorts and Apple Leisure Group executives for Now Onyx Punta Cana's symbolic groundbreaking ceremony June 3. Upon the resort's opening next year, AMResorts will have nine properties in the Dominican Republic under five of its brands.

"Year-after year, the Dominican Republic consistently continues to drive demand from the North American traveler," said Alex Zozaya, CEO of Apple Leisure Group. "AMResorts has the right formula to meet that desire with a portfolio of brands specifically designed to cater to the needs of this segment and the sustained track record in the destination."

Scheduled to open in November 2016, the 500-room resort will be located in the Uvero Alto region of Punta Cana. The property boasts outstanding views of the Caribbean Sea and access to a pristine white sand beach, next to sister property Breathless Punta Cana Resort & Spa.



*At the groundbreaking ceremony for Now Onyx Punta Cana are (l to r) José Ramón Peralta, administrative minister of the presidency; Jaime Lacadena, ambassador of Spain; Alejandro (Alex) Zozaya, CEO of Apple Leisure Group; Danilo Medina Sánchez, president of the Dominican Republic; Enrique Martínón García, president of Grupo Martínón; Alvaro Peña, president of CODELPA and Don Enrique Martínón.*

All Now properties feature AMResorts' Unlimited-Luxur concept, which includes: premium accommodations; multiple gourmet à la carte and specialty dining restaurants; 24-hour

room and concierge service; pool and beach wait service; world-class spa facilities; and unlimited international and domestic beverages and top-shelf spirits. [www.amresorts.com](http://www.amresorts.com)

## 2015 Site Classic Now Scheduled for The Paradisus Playa Del Carmen La Perla on the Riviera Maya

CHICAGO, IL — The SITE Foundation announced that the destination for the 2015 SITE Classic, September 27–30 has been relocated from Baha Mar, Nassau, Bahamas to the Paradisus Playa del Carmen La Perla on the Riviera Maya in Mexico. The Classic is the SITE Foundation's premier fundraising initiative, and this year's event is already sold out.

"With the completion of the resort going on through the summer, we mutually agreed with Baha Mar management that it would be best for Baha Mar to host this prestigious event next year," stated Kurt Paben, president, SITE Foundation and president, channel and employee loyalty for Aimia. "It is important to our sponsors and guests to stay with the original dates of September 27–30, so we made the deci-

sion to relocate the event. SITE appreciates and values our partnership with Baha Mar and supports their commitment to delivering an unprecedented luxury destination resort. We have already confirmed that the SITE Classic will take place at Baha Mar in 2016," Paben added.

Part of the luxury, all-inclusive Paradisus Resort brand by Meliá Hotels International, the Paradisus Playa del Carmen La Perla, an adult-only resort located on a stunning private bay, is recognized as one of the most luxurious hotels on the Riviera Maya. The resort provides a breathtaking Caribbean setting with world-class facilities, including YHI spa treatments, 11 world-class restaurants and modern, meeting spaces with state-of-the-art technology. [www.siteglobal.com](http://www.siteglobal.com)



## IRF's Incentive Invitational Marks Record Attendance

MIAMI, FL — The Incentive Research Foundation's (IRF) 22nd annual Incentive Invitational was held May 27–31 at the Trump National Doral Miami. The event marked a return to the Doral, the very first venue where the invitational was held. This year, guests enjoyed the luxurious results of a \$250 million restoration of the property — as well as outstanding keynote presenters and insights into three new research studies.

The 2015 Invitational featured the largest attendance to date, with more than 200 incentive travel buyers who represented more than 60,000 corporate meetings and incentive travel events among the 420 participants. IRF sponsorships sold out five weeks in advance for the

first time in the event's history. The Incentive Invitational is the IRF's most important annual fundraising activity for research surrounding motivation and incentives.

"This outpouring of enthusiastic participation has even exceeded our high expectations for the invitational," said Melissa Van Dyke, president, Incentive Research Foundation. "It provides a valuable opportunity for people to cultivate new relationships and solidify existing business contacts — as well as benefit from exciting new research and collaborations."

One of the key components of the Incentive Invitational is a slate of educational sessions that highlight recent IRF research and provide actionable, usable data on incentives and motivation.

Attendees also had the opportunity to relate the research to their own experiences and practices through roundtable discussions.

During the Education Day sessions, findings of three new research papers were previewed: "Insights into the Changing Role of DMCs," "Insights into the Changing Role of Procurement," and "Motivating Multiple Generations."

The keynote discussions were led by Mike Walsh, CEO of Tomorrow, a global consultancy on designing business for the 21st century; Daniel Leidl, PhD, director of organizational development and human capital at PRG; and John Bukaty, a popular American artist. The full papers are slated to be released to the public later this year.

[www.theirf.org](http://www.theirf.org)

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## News & Notes

### The Westin Denver International Airport to Open November 19

DENVER, CO — Denver International Airport (DIA) and The Westin announced that it will officially open The Westin Denver International Airport, Denver's newest world-class hotel and conference center, at 3 p.m. on November 19, 2015. The 433,000-sf, 14-story hotel, with 519 guest rooms, will serve travelers at the fifth busiest airport in the United States.

The hotel is part of Denver's new Hotel and Transit Center program. The floor-to-ceiling windows, which make up the entire wall of every one of the 519 guest rooms and 35 suites, offer expansive views.

The 37,000-sf conference center will feature a grand ballroom, junior ballroom and 15 additional meeting/boardrooms, for a total of 19 meeting rooms. The meeting space also boasts a 10,000-sf prefunction area that showcases a panoramic three-story, floor-to-ceiling glass wall. In addition to the hotel and conference center, there will be an 82,000-sf, open-air public plaza that will become Denver's newest venue for entertainment and relaxation, and will create a community connection between the airport and downtown Denver through special event programming. [www.starwoodhotels.com](http://www.starwoodhotels.com)



A rendering of the train hall at The Westin Denver International Airport.

### New Owners of DoubleTree by Hilton Orlando at Sea World Plan Renovations and Expanded Meeting Space

NEW YORK, NY — AWH Partners LLC in partnership with Building and Land Technology announced the off-market acquisition of the 1,004-room DoubleTree by Hilton Orlando at Sea World. The firms plan to add value through extensive renovations to guest rooms, meeting space, public areas and resort grounds, and will add approximately 30,000 sf of upgraded facilities and premier ballroom space to enhance the hotel's conference center. AWH Development will oversee the renovations, and Spire Hospitality will manage operations under a franchise agreement with Hilton Worldwide.

Currently featuring 60,000 sf of meeting and event space, the resort presents a myriad of choices for group business combined with leisure travel. DoubleTree by Hilton Orlando at Sea World has an in-house, top-of-the-line AV and IT service team. The partnership's planned addition of space at the resort's conference center will significantly expand capacity for meetings and events, featuring 30,000 sf in several large ballrooms, an outdoor event pavilion and prefunction spaces. [www.doubletreeorlandoseaworld.com](http://www.doubletreeorlandoseaworld.com)

### The Mayflower Hotel Will Join the Autograph Collection

WASHINGTON, DC — The Mayflower, one of DC's most storied properties and a Washington original since 1925, is declaring its independence as of July 1, 2015. Refreshed with a \$20 million room renovation, innovative culinary enhancements at Edgar Bar + Kitchen, and signature experiences, The Mayflower will join the Autograph Collection, Marriott International's exclusive portfolio of hotels recognized for celebrating individuality.

The Mayflower completed its final phase of a top-to-bottom renovation, with all 583 rooms and 74 suites undergoing a stylish makeover. The hotel also will offer increased bandwidth as well as "smart thermostats" with a chip embedded in the guest's key card, which communicates with the AC unit when the room is occupied in order to adjust accordingly. Edgar Bar + Kitchen will be introducing "Mayflower Mornings by Edgar," a quick and tasty grab-and-go breakfast option, including the hotel's famed banana bread. [www.themayflowerhotel.com](http://www.themayflowerhotel.com), [www.autographhotels.com](http://www.autographhotels.com)



# Snapshots



Credits: 1. Joint Meetings Industry Council; 2,3 DMAI; 4. Visit Orlando; 5. ibtm America; 6. IMEX Frankfurt

**1** More than 50 meetings industry leaders, academics, research organizations and related resources met May 14–15 in Paris under the auspices of the Joint Meetings Industry Council to review the current status of progress on documenting and communicating the value of meetings as drivers of economic, academic and professional development and to make strategic recommendations for advancing this in the future. The conference took place at the Palais des Congrès de Paris and included sessions that spoke to defining the need for better value measures, supplied case studies of work done to date and reviewed the kinds of data currently generated by meetings industry and global tourism and travel organizations. **2** President and CEO of Destination Marketing Association International (DMAI) Michael D. Gehrisch (*second from left*) and friends at the 2015 DMAI CEO Summit held at the InterContinental The Clement Monterey in California; and **3** Christine “Shimo” Shimosaki (*r*) and friends at the event. **4** Roger Dow, president and CEO, United States Travel Association, is interviewed at U.S. Travel’s 47th annual IPW held recently in Orlando where more than 6,500 delegates from 73 countries, including more than 1,300 international and domestic travel buyers and 500 media from the U.S. and abroad, attended. **5** A hosted buyer session at the 2015 ibtm America in Chicago. Next year’s event will be held June 15–17 in Nashville at the Gaylord Opryland Resort & Convention Center. **6** InitLive from Ottawa was named the winner of the Event Technology Startup Competition at IMEX Frankfurt. They developed an all-in-one software solution for event staff and volunteer management on mobile devices.

By Kate Patay, CPCE

## The Future of Event-space Design

**A**s meeting and event planners, it is our responsibility to stay current with trends, whether it's colors, themes, décor elements, culinary creations or technology. Right now, it's the constantly evolving technology that is most rapidly changing how we design events. We still consider designing for a physical space and location, but now we also design for unique spaces that social media provides, which aims toward a more personalized event experience — incorporating physical and virtual environments.

### Personalize Unique Spaces

Clients are choosing spaces that relate to their brand or identity. Why not hold a fundraiser for the local university on the school's football field or basketball court? Perhaps hold a gala for the local public library at the library. Clients are choos-

can choose their menu options with a “virtual waiter” at the touch of a button. Sensory projections lead to a more satisfying event experience.

### Use Interactive Décor

Interactive décor will play a key role for event spaces moving forward. Events are moving from “cocktail hour/sit-down, dinner/entertainment” to interactive, networking-focused environments. Floral centerpieces are being replaced with extravagant floral walls that serve as design elements, while creating space within a space. Lounge spaces include throw pillows that coordinate with table linens. Ambience is enhanced by the unexpected, such as suspending desserts from the ceiling or hanging appetizers on a wall, doubling as décor components. With guests having so many diet restrictions and food

“If you are not seeking out **what's happening at events everywhere** you are missing out.”

ing places such as historical and cultural sites, camps and retreats, stadiums, arenas, showrooms in hotels on their “dark nights,” to showcase their personal tastes. Authenticating or personalizing these spaces helps noninvasively brand the event and provides a social media-worthy experience. At The International School of Hospitality in Las Vegas, we constantly experiment to see what design elements work for such personalized experiences, using the school's new Special Events Design Lab, where we try new things with the latest in lighting and décor, and social media and other technology tools.

### Put Technology to Work

Technology is the future of events. With increased demand for technology, there is a corresponding decrease in cost. Expensive projectors can be replaced by digital projection mapping to create holograms. Remote performances by artists can be projected onto a screen without having the costs associated with bringing talent to the actual venue. Guests

allergies, food stations become interactive with do-it-yourself menus. Guests can pick and choose their own ingredients to customize food pairings to their personal palates.

### Continually Review & Refresh

Moving forward, how do we as event professionals keep up with trends, forecast what is coming and provide our clients unique experiences? It is our role to refresh annual events, and the key is to continually educate ourselves so we can provide our clients with innovative and successful parties. One way is to seek opportunities to collaborate and share ideas with others in the field. So, in that spirit of collaboration, I went to my friend, the incredibly talented, Lenny Talarico, CSEP, director of events for MGM Resorts Events Productions, who also oversees the seasonal design of The International School of Hospitality's Special Events Design Lab. Lenny is renowned for producing the most cutting-edge event experiences from year-to-year for his clients. Here's what I got from our conversation:





The brand new Special Events Design Lab at the International School of Hospitality in Las Vegas features the latest in event décor and lighting with roomscape donated by MGM Resorts International Event Productions, Chameleon Chair, Classic Party Rentals, kool.Party Rentals, Creative Coverings and Earth Water Sky.



laurels by doing the same event in another color. We are creating excitement and a buzz for attendees with a sense of anticipation, pushing them (and ourselves) out of the comfort zone. As Lenny would say, “If it isn’t broke, break it. You may be surprised by what evolves.”

### Keep Up With Trends & Experiences

As we evolve, so do our customers, the environments in which we work and the industries we rely on for support. The goal is to be at the forefront of what is emerging now to provide clients the best available. If you are not seeking out what’s happening at events everywhere you are missing out. If you are not attending trade shows and conventions, even those outside of your core business, you are missing out. According to Lenny, clients want to create event experiences that communicate their business mission, or replicate their lifestyle.

“To know what that experience is, you need to immerse yourself in their world, understand their goals and objectives and offer the most current solutions...or face failure,” he said. “You can’t do that unless you are out and engaged in the industry at all times. Make a habit of functioning with your antennas up at all times to catch the latest trends as they come.” **C&IT**

With the demanding schedules many of us face, and the unwelcomed trend of shorter planning windows, we might have a tendency to repeat what we just did. However, Lenny cautions that when we do the same old thing, the event experience for attendees suffers and we lose because we now lack innovation.

“What I like to stress upon planners and partners is to constantly review their event objectives and say, how do we still achieve those by going a different route?” he said. “Perhaps that traditional plated awards dinner can still achieve its goal by being on a flow, or in a nightclub or a venue that offers something totally unexpected.”

### If It Isn’t Broke, Break It

According to Lenny, reviewing, refreshing and changing direction serves us in multiple ways. We aren’t resting on our



### Kate Patay, CPCE

is the Executive Director of Sales and Marketing for Creative Coverings, a national linen rental and sales company. Patay helps represent Creative Coverings as the NACE National Secretary/Treasurer, a NACE National Business Partner and Social Media & Trend Expert. She is an active member of ISES, ICA, ACCP, ARA, EPA, and is on the advisory board of The Solace Tree. She also is a faculty member at The International School of Hospitality in Las Vegas. Patay has been a guest speaker at numerous conventions and organizational meetings around the country. She was recently awarded the 2015 Pacesetter Award from the Convention Industry Council.

By Christine 'Shimo' Shimasaki, CDME, CMP

## First-, Second- and Third-tier Cities: What Do the Designations Really Mean?

**W**hen thinking about meeting destinations, there is just about every type and size: from major convention hubs to smaller, boutique style cities. The key for meeting planners, is finding the right fit for their specific meeting. Oftentimes, you might hear a planner say that their annual meetings are only held in first-tier destinations. Or that a specific destination is a second-tier city. What specifications determine whether a city is a first-, second-, or third-tier destination?

Defining tiers in the meetings industry has been a topic often discussed, yet not a lot of substantial research has been conducted to help define and clarify them. We do know that tiers are descriptions, not designations, and descriptions are subject to perception. Unfortunately, some of the perceptions or assumptions planners make could keep them from a great destination find.

Whereas hotels have a rating system that awards three, four or five stars to properties based on their quality, size, services and amenities, no such system exists for rating meeting destinations. While there are some common tier realities, there is a lot of gray area when defining tiers. And in that gray area, there are many advantages planners can explore.

When looking at different destinations in which to hold your meeting, you should be able to ascertain the many distinct attributes of each tier as well as the advantages each tier offers, which may spur you on to consider a few destinations not previously on your radar.

Here's what we currently know about destination tiers:

- An official list with specific tier qualifications doesn't exist.
- There are general characteristics or attributes that apply to each tier.
- A first-tier destination to one planner may be a second-tier to another planner.
- Tiers do not denote quality or services.

Don't let tier designations define what destinations you consider. While second- and third-tier cities might be known for being more affordable, there are still plenty of affordable options in first-tier destinations, especially if you are flexible with dates. Additionally, second- and third-tier destinations, depending on the meeting size, can offer

just about everything a first-tier destination can. The key is keeping your own meeting objectives in mind first and then understanding how destinations, regardless of tier, will be the perfect complement.

*Convene* magazine recently conducted a survey of meeting planners, which is the source for the following material. One of the questions asked was, "What attributes must be present for you to consider a destination a first-, second- or third-tier meeting destination?" Based upon the responses, there are general attributes that can be applied to each tier.

### Essential Attributes of a First-tier Destination

First-tier destinations might be the easiest to define. They are typically the biggest convention cities in the country such as Chicago, Las Vegas, Orlando, etc. While each of these cities is very different in terms of size and location, there are certain characteristics they all have in common such as:

- Airport with ample nonstop national and international access (69 percent).
- Hotel inventory that includes major hotel brands (60 percent).
- Abundant dining, entertainment and attraction options for attendees (57 percent).
- 10,000 minimum committable sleeping rooms (47 percent).
- Convention center with a minimum of 500,000 gross sf of exhibit space (44 percent).
- Considered one of the top 25 destinations for group business (43 percent).
- Distinctive leisure-travel appeal (37 percent).

### Other measurable first-tier attributes include:

- Major metropolitan hub.
- Strong destination travel infrastructure in place (rail, public transportation, taxis).
- Reputation for world-class services and amenities.

### Essential Attributes of a Second-tier Destination

We know first-tier destinations are fairly easy to identify based upon certain measurable attributes (size, airport, air-lift, etc.). But how do you measure and/or perceive what is a second-tier or third-tier destination? This is where it gets a



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# Perspective

little more complicated. Often, a destination is categorized to be a second-tier destination simply because of its size, and thus may also be perceived as being more affordable.

- Affordable, better value (59 percent).
- Attracts a regional drive market (49 percent).
- Convention facilities with less than 500,000 gross sf (36 percent).
- Regional airport with less nonstop or direct airlift (36 percent).
- Largest convention venue generally a single hotel or conference center (32 percent).
- Productive local industries and business climate (32 percent).

While a second-tier destination may not have a lot of international airlift, 10,000 committable hotel rooms or large meeting/exhibit space, it doesn't mean that these destinations don't have world-class meeting facilities and amenities.

## Essential Attributes of a Third-tier Destination

The key is to not consider a third-tier destination as being third-class as it really is just based on the size of the city and its convention offerings, not quality or even cost. For example, some of the most luxurious resorts are located in destinations considered third-tier, simply because of the destination size.

Measurable attributes include:

- Regional airport with less nonstop or direct airlift (37 percent).
- Largest convention venue generally a single hotel or conference center (20 percent).
- Convention facilities less than 500,000 gross sf (16 percent).

- Attracts a regional drive market (13 percent).
- Distinctive leisure travel appeal.

Often, third-tier destinations are the choice for incentive travel and find themselves competing for the business along with first- and second-tier destinations.

## How Do You Find the Right Destination?

The key is understanding the strengths and attributes each tier represents. Do you want your medium-sized convention to feel like the "big fish" in a destination? If yes, go with a second- or third-tier destination. Or, what if you have a small meeting but need the convenience of a large international airlift? A first-tier destination might be the best fit. The key is to look at each destination with fresh eyes and determine how it can work for you.

Also, empowerMINT.com's Destination Finder is an invaluable tool, and empowerMINT.com helps planners search and compare meeting needs across multiple destinations.

Suppose your meeting requires the flexible travel options of a first-tier destination, but the accommodations of a second-tier destination? Or you are looking for a high-end meeting experience but in a smaller, more intimate destination? That's where the experts at the convention and visitors bureau (CVB) can help.

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“Don't let **tier designations** define what destinations you consider.”



### Christine 'Shimo' Shimasaki, CDME, CMP

is Managing Director of empowerMINT.com and E.I.C. Destination Marketing Association International (DMAI). She joined DMAI in 2009. Previously, Shimasaki served as E.V.P. and chief strategy officer for the San Diego Convention and Visitors Bureau. She has served the tourism industry as a board member of PCMA, co-chair of the Performance Measures Initiative for DMAI and chair to DMAI's Accreditation Board. Currently, she serves on the Convention Industry Council's APEX Standards Review Committee as chair of eRFP Efficiencies Workgroup and is authoring the Event Room Demand Study, quantifying for the first time the volume of rooms booked outside the contracted room block.



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# Golf & Spa Resorts

Where Shared Experiences Are Good for Business

By Patrick Simms

Some of the most successful corporate meetings mix business and pleasure in ways that are actually good for business, and great resorts enable planners to achieve that effect. When attendees partake of a resort's recreational amenities, they are not merely getting a break from business. They are refreshing themselves, which tends to improve attention and productivity at the next session. They are often socializing with other attendees, whether at the golf course, tennis court or spa, which can promote cohesiveness among coworkers. And they are building memories of a great overall meeting, which is exactly the impression planners want attendees to leave with.







Keith Roher, president of Zeno Office Solutions, plans to start holding quarterly golf outings for Zeno clients at Streamsong Resort.

### Luxury Meets Wild Kingdom

The recreational amenities of Streamsong Resort, located in the lush, natural environs surrounding the town of Bowling Green in Central Florida, made quite a first impression on the 60-plus sales representatives of Zeno Office Solutions when the company held its annual sales kick-off meeting at the resort in February. Keith Roher, president of Zeno, a division of Xerox, describes the luxury property as “the Ritz-Carlton meets Wild Kingdom” and notes that the hilly terrain, partly manmade from land recovered from a former phosphate mine, gives the Florida-based group a sense that they’re out of state. “Central Florida is pancake flat and all of a sudden at Streamsong Blue’s first hole you’re 150 feet in the air where

the tee box is. It gives you a really cool panoramic view in the direction of both sides of the state,” he describes.

Streamsong Red and Blue were ranked No. 1 and 3, respectively, as the “Best Public Golf Courses in Florida” by *Golf Digest* this year. In the fall of 2017, they will be complemented by Streamsong Black, designed by Gil Hanse, architect of The Olympic Golf Course in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, and co-designer of Castle Stuart Golf Links in Scotland. Yet Streamsong offers many other ways to enjoy its scenic location, including bass fishing, sporting clays, nature trails, tennis and an infinity pool. Inside, attendees can rejuvenate in AcquaPietra, the resort’s European-style spa, and choose from three restaurants, including a fine steak house,

sophisticated Italian restaurant and a casual American eatery.

The Lodge houses 216 guest rooms that Roher describes as “large, beautiful and modern,” together with an additional 12 guest rooms in the Clubhouse. The resort’s 24,600 sf of meeting space includes 14,000 sf in the main conference center, complemented by 40,000 sf of outdoor event space. Zeno held training sessions in the breakout rooms, and the group was quite pleased with the facilities. “We’re a tech company, and they said you don’t need to bring a thing” in terms of AV equipment, “and that usually worries me, but they had everything ready,” Roher relates. “Being that they built the resort in the last few years, it’s got the latest and greatest, so that made everything go very smoothly.”





Credits: Streamsong Resort

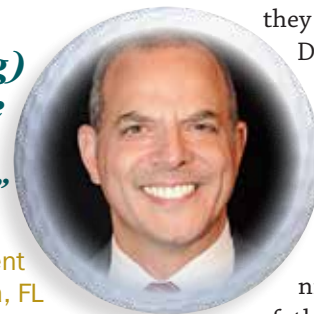
Streamsong's European-style AcquaPietra spa offers a full menu of services, such as post-golf massages and other therapeutic treatments — or soothing water treatments in a private, soaking pool or relaxing at this serene, lakeside infinity pool.

After that positive first experience with Streamsong and a kickoff that got all the reps “fired up,” Roher notes evidence that a significant ROI was achieved. “The message that we were trying to convey directly related to 2015 and our expectations from the sales side.

Corporation’s meeting at Kingsmill Resort, in Williamsburg, Virginia. More than 300 middle- and upper-level managers attended the Summit, which includes a variety of workshops and “a lot of movement,” says Eric Montalvo, project manager customer solutions at The

but they can change, so there are times when we are changing room dynamics on the fly. And they were very accommodating in that regard; they did a great job of giving us space that we weren’t allocating at one point for additional planning sessions. From a meeting perspective they were on the ball.” The AAA Four Diamond, 425-room resort offers a 16,000-sf conference center.

*“Being that they built (Streamsong) in the last few years, it’s got the latest and greatest, so that made everything go very smoothly.”*



**Keith Roher, President**  
Zeno Office Solutions, a Xerox Company, Tampa, FL

And we had our biggest first quarter in probably three years; traditionally the first quarter for us is soft.” Roher also plans to start holding quarterly golf outings at Streamsong with some of Zeno’s current and potential clients in Florida.

### On the Ball at Kingsmill

Meetings at golf and spa resorts can certainly be conducive to a strong business focus, and another fine example is Greene, New York-based Raymond

Raymond Corporation, a global provider of material handling solutions. “The meeting aspect of it is very important to us. We look at IACC-certified facilities for that very reason, to make sure the meeting space is adequate, that everything is ergonomically correct, that the AV is good, and so on.”

Kingsmill’s staff also was very adept at fulfilling the event’s logistical needs, Montalvo adds. “Many of our workshops are tailored to go in certain directions,

On the less formal side, business objectives also were achieved. “The second level of this (program) is the learning process continuing in the evening, and the Kingsmill has all of those nooks and crannies where people can network and talk about best practices. Of course the golf courses come into play there as well,” Montalvo explains. Kingsmill offers two public 18-hole courses, the River Course and Plantation Course, complemented by a new, million-dollar spa with views of the James River.

### On the Ocean Down East

Golf and spa are two amenities that often serve as touchstones for attendees:



Credit: Herb Vasquez/The Raymond Corporation



Credits: Kingsmill Resort

Attendees of The Raymond Corporation’s meeting at Kingsmill Resort in Williamsburg, Virginia, enjoyed not only the resort’s outdoor event space, two golf courses and new spa, but they also appreciated its IACC-certified meeting spaces for getting business done.



Credit: Samoset Resort



Clayton Homes' incentive program at Samoset Resort on Penobscot Bay in Rockport, Maine, included golf and spa, plus a lobster bake, schooner sailings and a winery event.

Even when groups venture to an unfamiliar destination or resort, they will get a sense of comfort from the presence of these well-known recreational options. Maryville, Tennessee-based Clayton Homes, for example, had almost always taken incentive groups to the Caribbean, but for their latest program, upper management decided to "look at unique domestic destinations that maybe their people haven't been to before," explains Erica White, account executive at Knoxville-based Liaisons Meetings & Incentives, who planned the program. The chosen destination was the coastal town of Rockport, Maine, home to Samoset Resort on Penobscot Bay.

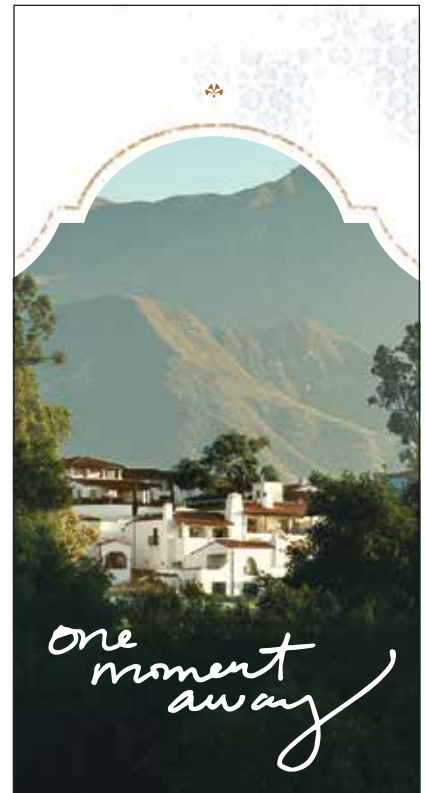
While an oceanfront property, the AAA Four Diamond resort is quite a departure from the Caribbean locales the group was accustomed to. Nonetheless, its golf and spa amenities gave attendees "the resort experience they were used to in the Caribbean," White says. The Samoset's golf course celebrated its centennial in 2002, and its spa is designed to reflect the coastal Maine environment. "We held tee times each morning attendees could sign up for, and those were always filled," she adds. The property houses 178 accommodations and more than 20,000 sf of function space, including the 6,000-sf Knox County Ballroom.

Activities for the 230 guests included a welcome reception with a lobster bake and yard games such as croquet, schooner sailings and a farewell evening at the Cellardoor Winery. "We set up dinner and dancing out in the huge lawn area between the winery building and the vineyard," White relates. "The only issue is that the winery has a 9 p.m. noise ordinance, so no music is allowed after 9 p.m.

"By the end of the program, every person came up to me and said how amazing the experience was and that this was an area of the United States that they would have never seen if it wasn't for this program," she says. "It has inspired Clayton Homes to look at more domestic locations in unique areas of the United States."

### The Ins and Outs of the Boulders

One part of the country that planners often look to for great golf and spa resorts is Arizona, whose dry climate and picturesque desert terrains lend themselves to these activities. Boulders Resort & Spa in Carefree worked as a fine retreat for sales representatives of Santa Clara, California-based Gigamon. "One of the reasons we chose the Boulders is its location; we want everyone to concentrate on our meeting and don't



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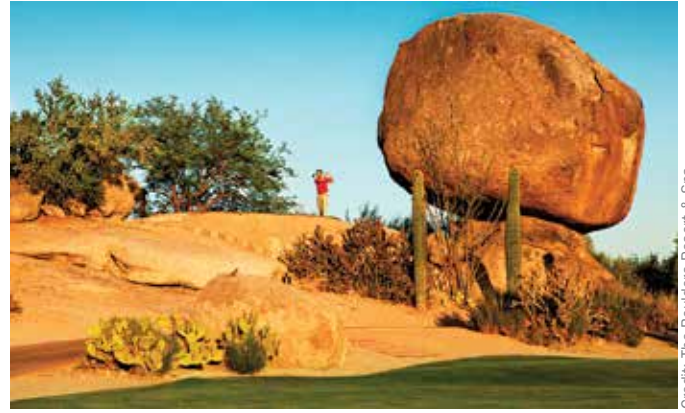


**OJAI VALLEY INN & SPA**

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Credit: The Boulders Resort & Spa

The inspiring natural surroundings at the Boulders Resort & Spa in Carefree, Arizona, enhance both golf and spa experiences.

want too much distraction,” comments Anna Moraleda, global event planner for the network visibility solutions developer. The site choice is a proven one, as Gigamon held its sales kickoff at the resort for the fourth time this January. The globally based attendees broke off into foursomes for a shotgun-start golf tournament at one of the Boulders’ two 18-hole courses, and competed for prizes in traditional events such as closest to the pin and longest drive. In addition, “many of the ladies in my group used the spa, including myself. I love that you can decompress at the spa after a stressful event,” Moraleda says.



***“By the end of the program, every person came up to me and said how amazing the experience was and that this was an area of the United States that they would have never seen if it wasn’t for this program.”***

**Erica White, Account Executive**  
Liaison Meetings & Incentives, Knoxville, TN

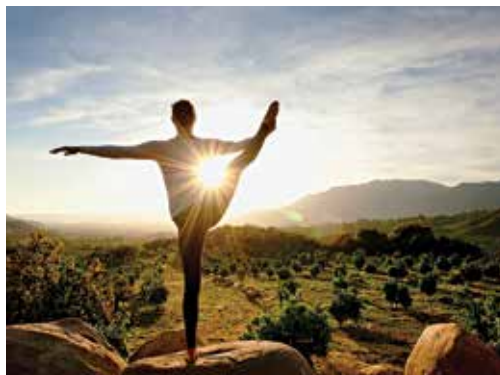
While the Spa at the Boulders is formidable at 33,000 sf, the resort also is well-stocked in indoor and outdoor function space. The 50,000 sf includes the 17,800-sf Tohono Conference Center, with flexible floor plans. “One of the things I love about the Boulders is their flexibility of meeting space, so we had several outdoor

staff also is very resourceful in terms of providing varied culinary experiences. “We did Argentinian food this year because we’re going there for the incentive trip, and then the year prior to that, we did a Great Gatsby theme, so they created dishes that were popular in the 1920s.”

### Ojai Valley Oasis

The Topa Topa mountain range forms a dramatic backdrop to the 308-room Ojai Valley Inn & Spa, a AAA Five Diamond property situated on 220 acres about 60 miles north of Los Angeles. The legendary inn features a George C. Thomas-designed golf course and a Spa Village, home to the 31,000-

sf Spa Ojai. The spa recently paved a new road to wellness with the introduction of cocoon-like Somadomes, personal meditation pods that use LED color therapy, binaural beat meditation and microcrystalline tiles to induce enhanced levels of relaxation. For attendees who prefer a more low-tech



Credits: Ojai Valley Inn & Spa

Ojai Valley Inn & Spa features a George C. Thomas-designed golf course and the Spa Village, home to the 31,000-sf Spa Ojai.





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Credits: Wigwam

The AAA Four Diamond Wigwam in Phoenix, which boasts three championship golf courses and an Elizabeth Arden Red Door Spa, provides 100,000 sf of total function space plus an Old West-inspired outdoor venue, Sunset Point.

approach to wellness, there's full moon yoga and personal mandala sessions.

Also new to the resort is an adults-only pool and lounge, with a spacious VIP cabana. A new signature Italian kitchen concept restaurant, Olivella and Vine, features a new culinary team and a new menu featuring seasonal ingredients sourced locally from the region and from the inn's own onsite vegetable garden.

The resort's renamed historic center, the 1923-era Wallace Neff Heritage Bar & Courtyard — formerly Neff Lounge — was refreshed, and its newly expanded

meetings at the Wigwam in Phoenix. But golf is still a prominent feature of the programs, given that out of 90 attendees, about 35 are golfers, notes Tina Hennessy, executive assistant to the CEO at Belden, a manufacturer of networking, connectivity and cable products. "My CEO is an avid golfer, so oftentimes when a property is selected, the determining factor would be their golf course," she explains. The Wigwam certainly delivers on this front with three 18-hole championship courses, the Gold, Patriot and Heritage. The first two courses, designed by the

Wigwam Bar. "I try to get the group outside for all their meals. Our meeting is in February, and my CEO and I are from the Midwest, so it's very nice to get out there and see the flowers and enjoy the outdoors," says Hennessy. Groups that really want to feel close to nature can gather at Sunset Point, an Old West-inspired outdoor venue with a panoramic desert backdrop, or an events lawn that accommodates up to 300 guests.

The resort has recently completed a \$15 million renovation that updated its interior design scheme with a Southwestern color palette and motifs, as well as historic photography and Arizona artifacts. Guest rooms also have been upgraded with new custom furnishings, state-of-the-art LCD televisions, granite-top vanities in the bathrooms and more. "The feedback we got from some of the attendees was that the property was a little dated," notes Hennessy, so the renovation is a welcome development. Red's Bar & Grill, celebrating its 85th anniversary, also debuted new décor and furniture in February,

***"The Kingsmill has all of those nooks and crannies where people can network and talk about best practices. Of course the golf courses come into play there as well."***

**Eric Montalvo, Project Manager, Customer Solutions  
The Raymond Corporation, Greene, New York**



courtyard boasts oversized fireplaces and cushy seating, making it a welcoming space for networking events. Ojai Valley Inn Spa offers a total of 35,000 sf of function space.

### **Beyond Golf at the Wigwam**

Arizona's resorts are known for many outdoor activities beyond golf, in particular hot-air ballooning, horseback riding and jeep tours. St. Louis, Missouri-based Belden Inc. offered the latter two activities during leadership

legendary Robert Trent Jones, Sr., are celebrating their 50th anniversary. In addition, the 331-casita resort boasts a 26,000-sf Elizabeth Arden Red Door Spa and four pools.

With 100,000 sf of total function space, including the 10,800-sf Wigwam Ballroom and 25 separate meeting rooms, the AAA Four Diamond Wigwam offered plenty of meeting options for the relatively small group. Eateries include Litchfield's, Red's Bar and Grill and al fresco dining at the

### **Entertaining Talking Stick**

Last November, Scottsdale's 496-room Talking Stick Resort, an enterprise of the Salt River Pima-Maricopa Indian Community, completed an expansion of its casino-level lounge, Palo Verde. The new venue's upper level features LED staircases, oversized



Credit: Talking Stick Resort



Talking Stick Resort Golf Club in Scottsdale features North and South courses designed by Ben Crenshaw and Bill Coore. The resort also offers a 14th-floor, open-air, spa.

couches, coral tables and seating for more than 100 guests. It also features a second full bar and deejay booth for live entertainment. The Talking Stick Resort Golf Club, adjacent to the resort, is one of Arizona's finest golf

clubs, with North and South courses designed by renowned architects Ben Crenshaw and Bill Coore. The Spa at Talking Stick, a 13,000-sf open-air venue on the 14th floor, highlights the use of products made with ingredients that

are culturally significant to the Pima-Maricopa Indians.

Talking Stick Resort's 100,000 sf of function space offers groups 21 meeting rooms available in a variety of room configurations; its 25,000-sf grand ballroom can be divided into eight separate rooms. Private dining for groups is available at Talking Stick's signature restaurant, Orange Sky. Located on the 15th floor with floor-to-ceiling windows, Orange Sky offers 360-degree views of the valley that attendees can "pair" with an award-winning wine list. One of the features that distinguishes Talking Stick is its robust live entertainment, including many classic rock acts such as Peter Frampton and Cheap Trick at its Summer Concert Series. The resort's 650-seat Showroom features cutting-edge sound and lighting, and The Pool is a new outdoor performance venue.

### Ocean Reef Retreat

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Credits: Ocean Reef Club



Ocean Reef Club in Key Largo, Florida, a private enclave on 2,500 acres, features a new 12,000-sf spa, 36-hole golf course and golf academy, and a range of group activities.

exclusive Ocean Reef Club, situated on 2,500 tropical acres in the upper-most of Florida's chain of islands south of Miami. The resort updated its 30,000 sf of meeting space with new carpet and wall finishings along with new in-ceiling AV. Newly added were a 12,000-sf spa, the new Beach Grill casual lunch spot on Buccaneer Island, and a golf academy with digital coaching software. The 36-hole golf course received some touch-ups including new Bermuda grass and an expanded chipping/putting practice area.

The Ocean Reef Club will debut new meeting and function space in early February 2016. The new meeting space will feature a state-of-the-art, 5,500-sf ballroom; five breakout rooms, all with natural light; a 3,000-sf interactive cooking school and related team-building programs; and wraparound outdoor decks with breathtaking views of the marina.

The private, full-service resort, which boasts its own private airstrip, has a range of accommodations that include 175 inn rooms, 100 spacious

one-, two- and three-bedroom villas, and private homes. The resort also offers a range of group activities beyond golf and spa: Angling aficionados can experience deep-sea, flats, reef or back-country fishing off the shores of the resort, which features a 175-slip marina. Other group activities can include chartered yacht dinners, beachside events,

tent, but as conversation-starters among attendees. The formality of a general session or training workshop seldom puts participants at ease to really get to know their colleagues, but sharing time on the golf course, refreshments by the pool, or an evening entertainment experience can foster a camaraderie that translates to a better working relationship.



*“My CEO is an avid golfer, so oftentimes when a property is selected, the determining factor would be their golf course.”*

**Tina Hennessy**, Executive Assistant to the CEO  
Belden Inc., St. Louis, MO

eco-tours and teambuilding programs such as golf cart scavenger hunts, cardboard boat regattas and beach olympics, to name a few.

### Shared Experiences

Even at resorts known primarily for their golf and spa amenities, there are typically many other recreational options, not to mention some of the country's best restaurants. A business-centric way to view these numerous amenities is not as distractions from meeting con-

Keith Roher, for example, perceives the meeting at Streamsong as “a chance for attendees to get to know some of the other reps around the state that they don't see on an everyday basis.” Why not optimize that opportunity with a setting that lets attendees bond over various experiences outside of the conference room? Apart from communicating sales goals and business direction for the coming year, “I wanted everyone to drop their shoulders, relax and have fun,” Roher asserts.

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# Meetings by the Beach

Credit: Little Palm Island Resort & Spa

Little Palm Island Resort & Spa, a five-acre island oasis, is located three miles offshore in the lower Florida Keys.

## From Tropical Paradises to Floating Venues — Reward Your Incentive Winners With the Ultimate Retreat

By Sara Churchville

For many meeting planners, the allure of an incentive trip by or, in some cases, on the sea is not only the obvious appeal of a tropical paradise for attendees, but also how surprisingly convenient some getaways are to reach.

“You almost felt like a celebrity,” says Jamie Morton, event planner for Tech Data Corporation, of her time at Little Palm Island Resort & Spa in Florida’s Little Torch Key. “One morning I had breakfast in the restaurant. I like my coffee a certain way, and the next day I had it exactly that way — from a different server,” she marvels.

Morton brought a group of 33 for a sales incentive meeting in September 2014. She chose the location because it was a “beautiful tropical paradise close by” — an easy flight from her compa-

ny’s headquarters in Clearwater, Florida and a 30-minute drive from Key West International Airport to Little Torch Key.

The resort, which is only accessible by boats that run every half-hour each way from morning to sunset, provides a front desk check-in station in Little Torch Key. “They give you a tropical drink before boarding to start your journey away from reality,” Morton remembers.

Once on the island, there are no TVs, phones or clocks, she says, although there is a small shop for last-minute sundries. Guests aren’t allowed to use their cell phones on the property — Wi-Fi is restricted to individual rooms. “It’s such a relaxing experience to be able to completely unplug,” Morton says. “You’re actually connecting with other people, engaging. It’s a freeing experience.”

The attendees had free time for fishing, snorkeling and receiving spa treatments, with group dinners each night and a brunch spread on the final day. The resort offers dining in the restaurant, by the pool or in the room, as well as the group dinner location on the beach. “It was private, just for us,” Morton says. “And they were still able with décor and linens to make it feel different each night.”

One special guest who strolled in during dinner was “Grandma,” a Key deer native to the area. “Almost the size of a Labrador and very friendly. Everyone thought that was the coolest thing,” Morton says.

“The attendees continue to rave about it and have fond memories of going there,” she says. Although she tried to book it

**Continued on page 43**



Continued from page 26



Credits: Jamie Morgan

The clever sign at Little Palm Island (below) and Grandma, the Key Deer checking out Tech Data's dinner.



again, the dates she needed weren't available. With 30 available suites, the space can quickly fill up.

She recommends that planners who are considering the resort make it clear to attendees just how unplugged they will be. She also counsels taking advantage of the resort's optional meal plan; à la carte can work out to be more expensive. Morton also notes that attendees who arrive with someone other than a romantic partner might find the accommodations a bit awkward — in some instances, she had to find rollout beds.

Morton notes that the planning process, from contract through execution, was seamless and the service "phenomenal. I was blown away by the staff, and the food was fantastic."

### Local Color

Melissa O'Connor, event manager

for PC Connection's sales support and marketing division, brought her incentive group of 45 to the 61-room Inn by the Sea in Crescent Beach, Cape Elizabeth, Maine, this past September. Like Morton, she was in part drawn to its proximity. "It's semi-local," she notes, only about three hours from the company's main headquarters in Merrimack, New Hampshire. She also was drawn to "the uniqueness of the inn, the setting right on the bay. It's a nice relaxing getaway for the weekend that's more beachy than any of the Portland venues."

O'Connor looks for the local touch for her events and this one was replete with it: kettle corn, a Maine specialty, made at the inn; a lobster ornament used as the do-not-disturb sign; and a trip on a "very old sailboat" from the Portland Schooner Company to Great Diamond Island for dinner at Diamond's Edge Restaurant & Marina, followed by a Portland Discovery Land & Sea Tours rented trolley for going out in Portland.

Attendees particularly liked the opening of the sails on the schooner, she says. The boat trip included drinks and appetizers, but in retrospect, O'Connor says she would have dispensed with the passed hors d'oeuvres. ("It's a little awkward since you have to sit, and the schooner is a little rocky," she notes.) Diamond's Edge has a private space for up to 55 people as well as its own dock. The attendees enjoyed



Jamie Morton, Event Planner  
Tech Data Corporation, Clearwater, FL

a lobster bake, chicken and filet mignon in a room with a wood stove fire — a welcome retreat after the admittedly bracing time on the water.

"Be cautious of time frames," O'Connor advises. "September is a little chilly, so July/August/early September is a good

time to go. If it's cold, the schooner might not be super enjoyable. Consider taking the schooner out and the ferry back."

Still, the rooms with views of the sea and the warmth of the reception more than made up for the weather. O'Connor singles out the innkeepers and front desk staff for their thoughtfulness, such as keeping the bar open late for the group.

"It was nice to come back to the fire at the bar to warm up with a few drinks before bed," she remembers. "It just makes you feel at home when you're at a place like that."

### A Mini Vacation at the Beach

Toyota Motor Sales has been having beach meetings at Portofino Hotel & Marina in Redondo Beach, California, for more than 30 years. "When you stay on a property right on the beach, it makes it easy for the planner because there are so many options for guests right in proximity; it's a mini vacation in the middle of a business trip," notes Jessica Hurley-Jones, associate services manager. "The location is ideal for us given the ocean views and proximity to our headquarters office in Torrance," she says.

Typically, Toyota puts people up at the resort, and any actual meetings take place at the company, since many meetings entail hands-on training in a company vehicle.

"It's not a boxy hotel; it's smaller, intimate — a real treat for people who don't live near the beach," she says. "Our guests from all over the country and

*"It's such a relaxing experience to be able to completely unplug. You're actually connecting with other people, engaging. It's a freeing experience."*

Japan are always pleased with the location; the intimate, quaint and upscale 'beachy' feel of the property; and the welcoming staff."

Attendees enjoy the onsite restaurant, BaleenKitchen, which boasts executive chef Richard Crispin, late of Jean-

Georges and Gordon Ramsay at the London Hotel. The site also offers a downstairs lounge with fire pits right on the marina, she notes.

“There are other properties at the beach, but with my 20 years, it’s always been a safe location to place people,” Hurley-Jones says. She recommends being mindful of the room type and size at contract since many of the rooms have single beds, and it’s not easy to switch to doubles after the ink has dried.

Her suggestion for successful beach meetings is: “Make sure to provide enough time for attendees to explore or relax on their own. With a relaxing location on the waterfront, events that are too overproduced don’t feel authentic.”

### Floating Venues

“Celebrating out on the water is sometimes frowned upon because planners feel that their guests are ‘trapped,’” says Kim Lefebvre, DMCP, account executive at 360 Destination Group in San Diego,

***“I think that a cruise is a great networking and celebration opportunity. As long as you do not make the cruise extra long, it gives everyone just enough time to eat, mingle and enjoy the surroundings.”***

California. “But I think a cruise is a great networking and celebration opportunity. As long as you do not make the cruise extra long, it gives everyone just enough time to eat, mingle and enjoy the surroundings.”

In November 2013, she took a group of 270 executives and top producers from a U.S. defense company on a corporate incentive trip to San Diego for five days. The group stayed at the San Diego Marriott Marquis & Marina, which features a spectacular waterfront setting in the heart of San Diego. Adjacent to



Flagship Cruises and Events vessel, The Spirit of San Diego, is the type of yacht Kim Lefebvre’s group enjoyed on a two-hour private cruise in San Diego Bay with narration and lunch.

Credits: Flagship Cruises and Events

the San Diego Convention Center, the San Diego Marriott offers 75,000 sf of flexible meeting space, a 466-slip marina and unlimited recreation. It’s just a short walk to the San Diego Harbor, where Lefebvre’s group embarked on a two-



**Kim Lefebvre, DMCP, Account Executive**  
360 Destination Group, San Diego, CA

hour private harbor cruise with narration and lunch on a Flagship Cruises and Events vessel. The tour encompassed the north and south harbor and Coronado Bridge, with lunch prepared on board and served en route.

Because the boat never leaves the protected harbor, “there are not the large waves or swells that cause seasickness,” Lefebvre notes. As a destination management company planner, she prioritizes providing a lasting experience of a destination above simply offering a pleasant day on the water. As such, this

cruise fit the bill perfectly. “The experience on the water is not only beautiful as you cruise down the harbor and view the skyline, but it is educational as you learn about the military aspect of San Diego” — particularly appropriate for this defense company.

“This program had the best feedback of any past event,” as well as significantly more participation from top execs, she says. “The guests loved the exclusiveness of the boat experience. There were other public tours, but to have their private tour was special.”

### City Boat Tours

Flagship Cruises and Events has a fleet of ships available in San Diego for various group

sizes, from a small boat for a dinner party for 30 to the largest that will fit about 600. Many other meeting-friendly destinations also offer tours suitable for attendees. In Oklahoma City, for

example, Bricktown Water Taxi offers an unusual teambuilding exercise in the form of a scavenger hunt with clues on the Bricktown Canal. The two-hour competition requires at least two boats, each of which holds a minimum of 15 and maximum of 40 attendees.

Elite Private Yachts, part of Entertainment Cruises, offers the two-deck Manhattan Elite for groups of 50 to 149 attendees and the three-deck Atlantica for groups of 125 to 400. Both yacht charters are exclusively for one group and provide a cruise around New York Harbor as well as the possibility of a buffet, plated meal or hors d’oeuvres; a full bar; and the opportunity to customize the experience at the planner’s discretion. The company offers similar private corporate tours in Baltimore, Boston, South Florida, Philadelphia, Chicago, Norfolk, Virginia, and Washington, DC.

In South Florida, Spirit Yacht Charters can accommodate up to 125 attend-





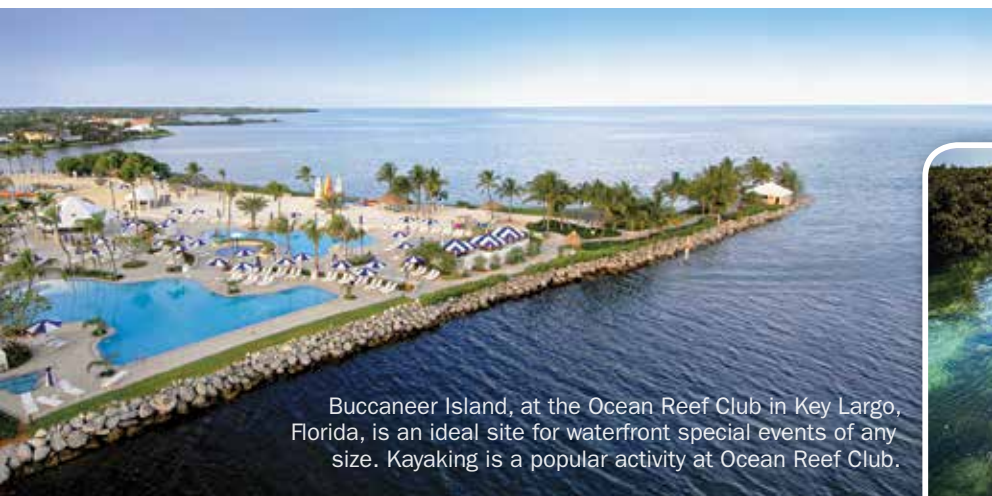
Credit: The Ritz-Carlton Naples

Caribbean cuisine shines at Gumbo Limbo, as the sun sets from The Sand Bar on the boardwalk at The Ritz-Carlton, Naples, on Florida's Paradise Coast.

ees for its private catamaran charter estate mansion tour of homes on the Palm Beach waterfront. The two-hour tour includes wine, champagne, beer and soda; cheese, crackers and fruit; and the ministrations of a captain and crew. The same-size catamaran can be hired for four hours from Fort Lauderdale to whisk groups away to a beach between the ocean and the Intracoastal Waterway, where they'll enjoy water sports and a barbecue or clambake.

Biscayne Lady Yacht Charters offers planners a way to customize a 380-passenger yacht charter from Miami with the theme and food of their specifications. For example, planners can organize custom décor for a product launch or teambuilding experience.

Chattanooga's 450-passenger Southern Belle Riverboat can be chartered for attendees to cruise along the Tennessee River; the enclosed decks can accommodate about 350 people for a buffet. For planners who prefer to skip the open water, the Pier 2 at the Landing can seat several hundred attendees for a dockside lunch or dinner.



Buccaneer Island, at the Ocean Reef Club in Key Largo, Florida, is an ideal site for waterfront special events of any size. Kayaking is a popular activity at Ocean Reef Club.

The Diplomat Resort & Spa Hollywood, Curio Collection by Hilton, features a yacht cruise along the Intracoastal Waterway.

The Paddlewheeler Creole Queen also can be chartered privately in New Orleans to cruise the Mississippi River as attendees enjoy a Creole buffet or one of various other options.

With its beachfront location and 209,000 sf of flexible function space, The Diplomat Resort & Spa Hollywood, Curio Collection by Hilton offers an ideal gathering place for a meeting. Guests can re-energize their team and inspire creativity by hosting a meeting on one of South Florida's finest yachts. Four hours cruising along the Intracoastal Waterway is an ideal way to foster new ideas.

Situated on over a mile



Credit: The Diplomat Resort & Spa Hollywood



*“When you stay on a property right on the beach, it makes it easy for the planner because there are so many options for guests right in proximity; it’s a mini vacation in the middle of a business trip.”*

**Jessica Hurley-Jones**, Associate Services Manager  
Toyota Motor Sales USA Inc., Torrance, CA

stretch of white sandy beaches, Diplomat Resort & Spa Hollywood offers indoor and outdoor function space including the 50,000-sf unobstructed Great Hall, four ballrooms and 39 breakout rooms. The resort offers a variety of on-site amenities and activities for groups from 10 to 8,000 and is located just a

short drive away from Hollywood's historic oceanfront Broadwalk, Aventura Mall and the Village at Gulfstream Park.

## Noteworthy Beach Meeting Spots

**Eden Roc Miami Beach's** 70,000 sf of meeting space includes 25,000 sf of outside space with ocean views. A number of the rooms also have ocean or Intracoastal Waterway views.

The 309-room **Eau Palm Beach** of-



Credits: The Ocean Reef Club



fers 3,000 sf of oceanfront terrace with a fire pit as part of 30,000 sf of meeting space, including a nearly 10,000-sf ballroom; poolside meeting cabanas; an Ocean Ballroom and the Eau Spa.

Key Largo's **Ocean Reef Club** sits on 2,500 acres and boasts its own private airport and private marina; two golf courses; tennis; croquet; and 30,000 sf of meeting space, including a ballroom that can hold 700 and a rooftop terrace for 175 with views of the marina.

**The Ritz-Carlton, Naples** features 42,000 sf of meeting space along with three miles of beach, from which attendees can enjoy parasailing, pedal boats and kayaks, and a 36-hole Greg Norman-designed golf course, a spa, four tennis courts and onsite tennis pros. Themed events are available such as Evening under the Gulf and Pirates of the Gulf, and the staff can set up beach Olympics and other outdoor teambuilding activities.

On the West Coast, California's **Montage Laguna Beach** boasts four outdoor event spaces, each about 5,000 sf, plus a beach terrace; the 2,000-sf Catalina, the hotel's newly renovated presidential suite, can be rented out for small meetings. Its 700-sf balcony looks out onto the Pacific Ocean, as do many of the venue's rooms.

**Paradise Point** in San Diego has more than 50,000 sf of indoor space overlooking Mission Bay. An additional 30,000 sf of outdoor space offers dis-



Credit: Paradise Point

Paradise Point in San Diego, California, boasts 30,000 sf of outdoor event space as well as 50,000 sf of indoor meeting space.

tinctive backdrops in the form of white beaches, gardens and bayfront lawns.

Sets of comfortable bungalow-style guest rooms are clustered throughout tranquil gardens, lagoons and beaches, allowing groups to foster team unity within their own section of accommodations.

**Terranea Resort**, located in Rancho Palos Verdes, California, is a land unto itself. Surrounded on three sides by the Pacific Ocean with Catalina Island just across the channel, Terranea's coastal setting embraces its Mediterranean heritage and incorporates it into every inch of architecture. From the resort lobby and outdoor gardens to the private terraces and inviting courtyards, Terranea is infused with classic California elegance.

**Wild Dunes Resort** has been ranked as the "Top-Ranked Southern Resort"

within the "Top Destination in the USA" by *Condé Nast Traveler*. This beachside setting along the South Carolina low country, minutes from Charleston, is sure to inspire incentive groups.

Charleston offers quintessential low country dining experiences including seafood straight from area waterways and foods from neighboring plantations, served up in unique locales such as sailboats along the Charleston Harbor, oceanfront resort venues, neighboring barrier islands, local favorites or piazza-side with Charleston celebrity foodies.

As a top-rated meeting and event destination, **Grand Lucayan Beach & Golf Resort** on Grand Bahama Island is renowned for its paradise setting, exceptional amenities and excellent venues. With 20 distinct meeting and event areas totaling 90,000 sf of both indoor and outdoor space, they can accommodate any function.

Grand Bahama Island boasts incredible snorkeling adventures and some of the world's finest collection of beaches such as the private Lucaya Beach or Fortune Beach, where treasure hunters recently found a \$2 million shipwreck. Attendees also can find complete, isolated privacy in Paradise Cove at Deadman's Reef or swing by Xanadu beach for an icy local Kalik beer and some spicy local barbecue. Or, they can explore Gold Rock Beach at Lucayan National Park, which is known to many as the most spectacular beach of all.

After all as the saying goes — what could be better than that? **C&IT**



Credits: Grand Lucayan Beach & Golf Resort

An aerial view of the Grand Lucayan Beach & Golf Resort on Grand Bahama Island. The oceanfront event lawn is ideal for all fresco events and receptions.





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# Going Mobile

By Patrick Simms



Photo illustration: TATSUNAWA/www.Shutterstock.com; QuickMobile, screenshot

## Compelling Reasons to Get on the Meeting App Bandwagon

The “view from the top” of corporate America looks very promising for the continued integration of mobile apps and meetings. One of the major providers in this space, QuickMobile, has seen a surge in adoption over the last few years by top-tier corporations, notes Craig Brennan, CEO.



"If I take about six customers that we have, companies such as KMPG, Oracle and Deloitte, in 2013 we did 105 meetings and events with them, last year about 280, and this year we think it's going to be over 600," Brennan says, adding that the growth in the use of mobile is taking place in two dimensions: size and type of meeting. QuickMobile's initial corporate accounts were large, customer-facing events, but now the event size ranges from about 50 to 50,000 attendees, and even smaller gatherings. Types of events extend well beyond client-facing meetings to sales kickoffs, trade shows, employee training, leadership summits, employee onboarding events and more, Brennan observes.

But it isn't just host companies and planners driving the use of mobile, it's the attendees themselves, particularly in the case of trade shows. As Jordan Schwartz, CEO of Pathable, notes, "The ubiquity of mobile phones, iPhones or Androids, has made it so there's an assumption on the attendees' part that they will have access to the agenda, maps and exhibitor listings so they'll be able to preschedule meetings. Whereas before I think a meeting planner could 'wow' their attendees by offering them those features on the mobile phone, now it's a given, and when it's not offered they're going to complain."

## Vanishing Ink

On the meeting host's side, mobile has certainly alleviated one source of complaint: the time and money expenditures of printing and distributing meeting materials. According to "Event Planning & Mobile Technology," a May 2014 survey of 298 event planners (26 percent corporate) by the IMEX Group and QuickMobile, "reducing/eliminating the use of paper" was the second most important reason for having a mobile app, behind "organizer-to-attendee communication and sharing."

"The biggest breakthrough was when you were able to stop producing hard-copy handouts of presentation slides because you assumed most people could follow along on a mobile device," recalls Rhonda King, CMP, registration manager with San Jose, California-based Align Technology Inc. King, who says she printed conference guides "the size of phone books" in the days before mobile, has shifted her focus away from "being an expert on print" and needing to know printer scheduling, costs and

so on. She now focuses on how to best provide the information through an app, specifically EventMobi.

Not only are printing costs saved, but the information also can be updated as needed. "We find that the accuracy of the data is the biggest benefit for using mobile event apps," she says. "You can make real-time changes to the presentation slides. And if session rooms change, you can get that information out quickly and accurately." In addition, King has been able to eliminate the pocket guides that fit behind name badges and reduce the amount of personal information on the badges themselves, making them more legible. "Currently we're still doing more signage and printed materials than I would like, but I hope that in the future (the app) will be so second nature to all attendees that we'll be out of the business of printing conference support materials."

Fort Collins, Colorado-based Schneider Electric, a client of QuickMobile,

QuickMobile offers meeting and event mobile app platforms for single or multiple events.



Credit: QuickMobile

# Know Your Audience

The meeting attendee without a smartphone is an anomaly these days, but that doesn't mean that all attendees will immediately see the value in using a meeting app, particularly a complex one that is laden with functionality. Depending on how inclined attendees are toward using mobile technology, event organizers may need to promote the use of the app, and roll out a tool that is user-friendly enough to invite adoption. As usual, knowing one's audience is key.

## The Right Degree of Functionality

Align Technology Inc. began using mobile for its client-facing events about four years ago and currently partners with EventMobi. Despite being in the tech sphere, the company is one of the later adopters of mobile for its events, and that has to do with the nature of its clients. "We are a tech company in Silicon Valley, but we're not doing developer conferences," explains Rhonda King, CMP, registration manager. "Our attendees are not necessarily a high-tech audience, they are dentists." The app needed to be a tool that is "really intuitive to a smartphone user but not too advanced for a consumer-type event. Some companies just have so many different features. If your event does not have sponsors or exhibi-

tors, for example, their toolset is too deep and the value just starts to diminish because you don't need to buy everything." EventMobi proved to be both an economical choice and to have the right degree of functionality for the audience.

## Keeping It Simple

The storeowners attending Chicago, Illinois-based True Value Company's spring and fall trade shows are, like doctors and dentists, not necessarily "techies." Thus, widespread adoption of an event app across the 8,000-11,000 attendees is not exactly a given. True Value has partnered with Core-apps to offer them a tool that is "pretty simple as far as our features at this point because we're really trying to get as many people using the app as possible," remarks Susan Katz, director of corporate events and travel. Currently offered features include a searchable education program, session scheduling, interactive exhibit floor map where vendors can be bookmarked, a vendor database that is searchable by product departments, shuttle bus and special event listings, and attendee profiles with a "friending" function. Still under consideration is the integration of the app with social media such as Instagram, as well as gamification.



has "basically eliminated all of our printed materials and pushed everything into the mobile experience, from speaker bios to agendas to build-your-own-schedules, tying into the Schneider focus on sustainability," notes Todd Moran, director of social enterprise. Granted, printed materials also can to some extent be avoided by loading content onto an event website. But there are definite advantages to going mobile instead. First, attendees will have access to the content where it is most convenient for them. "I don't have to browse on my device to a separate website. I have the app up 24/7, and so I'm a lot more likely to use it," Moran explains. Moreover, the content on an app

is "truly tailored to be either tablet- or handheld-friendly and displays the information in a much cleaner way, optimized for the small screen," King adds.

## Enhancing Engagement

Another big reason why meeting hosts and planners are behind the use of mobile is its capacity to support engagement with the event. That takes several forms, including networking with other attendees, participating in presentations via audience response, answering poll questions and posting comments about the event, and even playing event-related games through the app (gamification). The first kind of engagement is not just a priority at trade shows and large association meetings; corporate meetings also can benefit from app-based networking.

At a sales meeting, for example, companies often are looking for the sales team "to connect with each other beforehand, start conversations about the industry, ask questions and share



## App Coaches

“These are independent hardware stores that are mostly family-owned and operated, so we’re working with multiple generations, and some of them are much savvier with their smartphones than others,” Katz explains. “So our challenge is getting them to understand the value of downloading the app and using it to replace paper.” Toward that end, “we’ve brought in students from the local hospitality program to our event to give them an opportunity to see a large trade show, and they help us as app coaches because it’s second nature to them. They give a quick tutorial on how to use the app, and we ask them to intercept as many people as they can.” The students work varying shifts, with four or five of them on the exhibit floor at a time.

## Acclimatization

Katz and her team collect data on the number of attendees who have downloaded the app at each show, and track numerous other metrics, such as page views, file downloads, length of stay in certain areas and more. But increasing adoption is the overarching goal. “We’re just looking at keeping levels up at this point and seeing it grow, and hopefully at some point we can stop printing materials,” Katz says. Going into its fourth year of using the app, the company is adding features gradually, to make it easier for attendees to get acclimated with the tool. “You have to know your audience. If it’s a high-tech audience they’re going to soak this up so quickly, but I have people who are working in their stores all day helping their customers,” Katz says. “So they’re not necessarily working with mobile devices.” With the app’s gradual roll out, however, these attendees are becoming more “high tech” each year.

— PS



**Susan Katz**

Director, Corporate Events & Travel  
True Value Company  
Chicago, IL

*“We’re working with multiple generations. ...Our challenge is getting them to understand the value of downloading the app and using it to replace paper.”*

knowledge,” Schwartz says. But the virtual conversations should mainly be limited to pre and post event, he maintains. “During the event the app isn’t necessarily the means of communication but rather the tool for encouraging face-to-face communication,” for example, by allowing attendees to quickly search for and review one another’s profiles. “If



Credits: Erin Magee/Schneider Electric



Attendees connected, communicated and interacted with event information, games, sessions and each other using Schneider Electric’s Link 2015 conference app.

you have people at the event who are trying to network through the app itself, I think that's crazy and counterproductive to networking," Schwartz adds. The app is "a networking and planning tool before the event, a reference tool during, and a (virtual) community tool after." He observes that the latter is a function that attendees are less accustomed to, compared to agenda and map features. But companies are increasingly interested in integrating apps with online communities to effectively extend the life-cycle of the event.

Attendees also become more engaged when they can provide ongoing feedback on the event and its content. Schneider Electric found QuickMobile's Q&A feature "pretty intriguing," Moran says. "We used that to capture some real time, not survey specific, unstructured feedback throughout the user conference, and some of that actually ended up feeding the closing session." At that point, Schneider representatives addressed comments and questions gathered through the app over the last three

days. "It was a little scary for some of the execs who had to stand on-stage and (field the questions), but I think it was very powerful in terms of the attendee experience," Moran says.

The experience also becomes more fun with app-enabled gamification. Through QuickMobile, each attendee is given a QR code, and the codes are exchanged through the app when they make a connection; that data is tied-in to a leaderboard based on the number of connections they made at the event. "We also awarded 40 points for every check-in attendees did in the marketplace (using their QR code), which encouraged them to go look at the demo stations and immerse themselves in the technology," Moran explains. Certain behavior at the event is both encouraged and tracked in these ways, which can lead to onsite adjustments by the organizers. "Based on check-in activity we saw on Day One for the learning lounge we ended up doubling up on staffing for the second day," he notes. "That is something we would have typically done for the following year, had it not been for real-time feedback based on QR code check-in."

### Tracking and Analytics

Along with saving print costs and attendee engagement, the third advantage of mobile is the ability to gather analytics of the sort Moran describes. It's certainly a key feature: The IMEX Group/QuickMobile study identified "usage analytics" as the second most important "event app must-have," behind "a user friendly way for me to manage app content." Event hosts and planners can track numerous behaviors quantitatively, including the downloading of materials, viewing of specific content, connections made with others, participation in polls and so forth. "So all of a sudden where there used to be a black

*"We find that the accuracy of the data is the biggest benefit for using mobile event apps. You can make real-time changes."*

**Rhonda King, CMP**  
Registration Manager  
Align Technology Inc.  
San Jose, CA

hole with no data," says Brennan, "now we can start to measure the behaviors at these meetings and events and continue to improve on it."

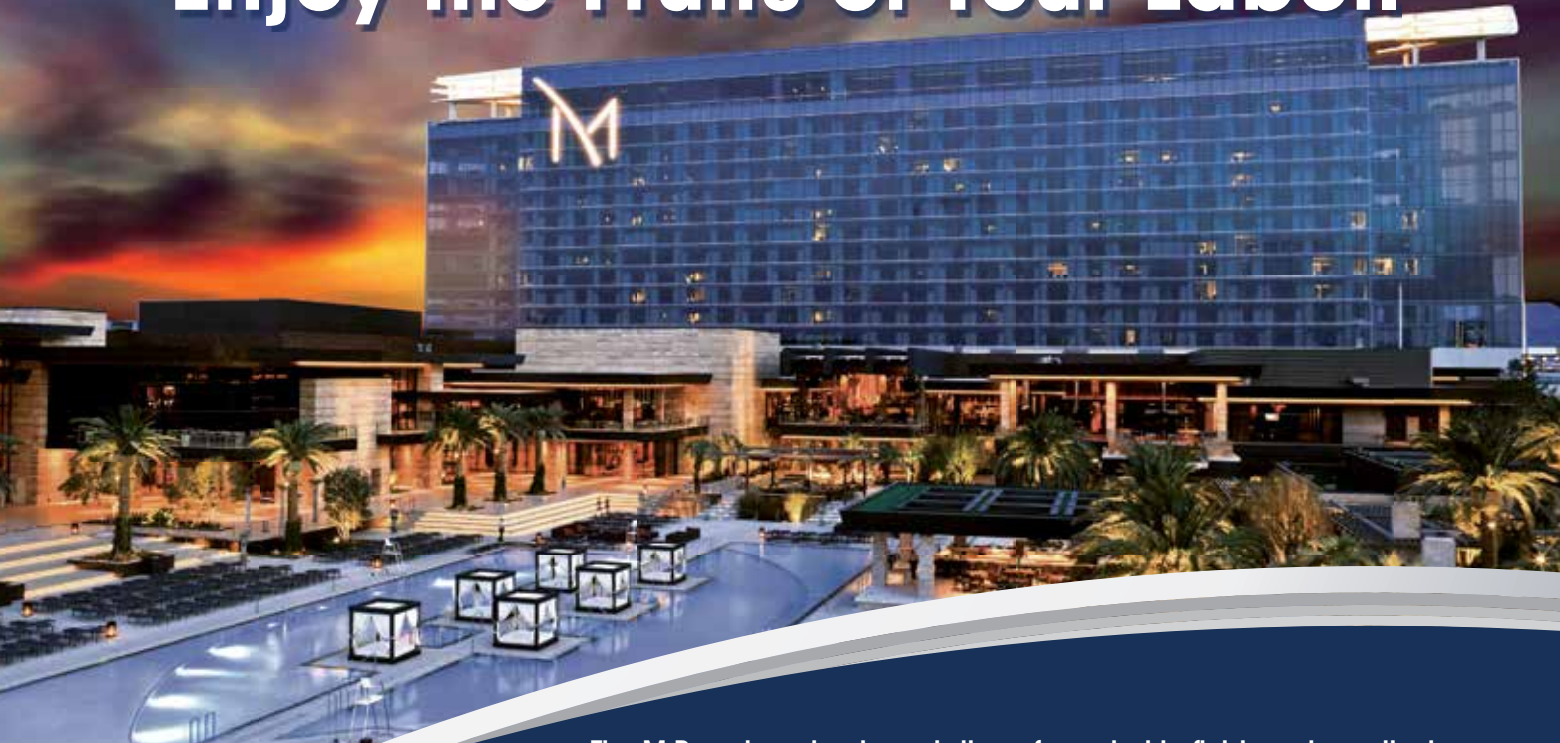
Brennan sees at least two major frontiers for mobile that will render it an even better tool for event planners. One is the integration of the apps with other enterprise systems, such as those in the areas of sales and marketing, customer service and learning management. "The more you can contextualize the attendee, and the more that you can capture data about the attendee and what's happening at that meeting, it creates more value for the enterprise and for the attendees themselves," he says. A second frontier is security. "Today's event planner definitely has to be aware of IT security on mobility units. All of our tier-one clients require a high degree of security, and it's a critical component of our platform," he stresses.

Indeed, event planners must be aware of the numerous features that mobile companies are touting on the market today in order to make an informed purchasing choice. Pairing apps with events is becoming part of the skillset of the modern meeting planner, although it wasn't 10 years ago when King received her CMP. "There used to be loads of information (in the curriculum) about printing meeting materials when I got the designation," she observes. Times have changed. **C&IT**





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# Site Selection

## Meeting in the Mountains

Credit: Resort at Squaw Creek

Resort at Squaw Creek, a Destination Hotel, is located in the heart of Olympic Valley, California, with direct lift service to Squaw Valley USA.

## Now Is a Great Time to Find the Best Options and Values for Wintertime Events

By Christine Loomis

**F**all and winter can be prime time for companies to meet, but that doesn't always mean booking a warm-weather destination. In fact, many towns in and near America's mountains make planners' short lists with good reason. These destinations not only provide excellent meeting facilities, they give attendees a chance to ski and ride at premier winter resorts.

### Aspen, Colorado

Aspen is not lacking in alluring attri-

butes. It has history, infrastructure, chef-driven dining, no small measure of glitz and glamour and some of the best skiing in North America. It's also a community used to high-profile executives and VIPs, making it ideal for C-suite retreats and high-end incentive programs. The town's uber upscale vibe is well-deserved thanks to accommodations such as The St. Regis Aspen Resort and Forbes Five Star, AAA Five Diamond Little Nell. But there are other options that make Aspen ideal for all kinds of meetings.

Robin Hammons, event coordinator for the Gulfport, Mississippi-based Domino's Franchisee Forum, says her group always books The Gant, a Destination Hotel. "Our group has been coming to Aspen for 15-plus years and has always stayed at The Gant," she says. "It is the most reasonably priced for the accommodations. Our group likes to bring family, and The Gant is one of the only places in Aspen with condo-type accommodations as well as meeting facilities."

It's a bonus, Hammons adds, that "it's



also within walking distance to town and provides shuttle service around town, and to and from the airport.”

The Domino’s group, which in March 2015 was comprised of about 95 attendees, always uses The Gant’s conference facilities for meetings, and has held small evening receptions there as well. Hammons calls the staff “accommodating, friendly and professional,” and says the room is always set up on time. “The food,” she adds, “is excellent.”

But Aspen itself is what makes this group return time after time. “The largest draw for our group always returning to Aspen is the town,” Hammons says. “Aspen is one of the best towns for food, entertainment and shopping for a ski destination. Our group typically comes to Aspen every other year or at least every two years.

“We’ve used the Community Ice Rink for a private party and hockey game,” she continues. “We also usually have a couple of nights when attendees are on their own and dine in local restaurants. The food is always good and there are many options to choose from.”

At times the group has received discounts on ski rentals, which helps lower costs for attendees. Hammons has few complaints about meeting in Aspen, though she wishes there were a few more dining and activity options for larger groups. And she points out that for skiers and riders who don’t want to tackle Aspen Mountain, bus transportation is required to Buttermilk and Snowmass, which better accommodate beginners and intermediates. That said, the town delivers.

“Aspen,” Hammons says, “is usually one of our highest-rated meetings.”

## Breckenridge, Colorado

Breckenridge is part of the Vail Resorts portfolio of ski areas and another Colorado town with colorful history. Vail Resorts has five lodging properties in town: The Village at Breckenridge, DoubleTree by Hilton Hotel Breckenridge, Mountain Thunder Lodge, One Ski Hill Place and Crystal Peak Lodge. Together the lodges encompass 560 rooms, 40,000 sf of meeting space and can accommo-

date groups of up to 500. The company can act as a single resource for planners, from lodging, event planning and on-mountain dining to lift tickets, equipment rental and transportation.

Annie Bolduc, sales enablement manager for Atlanta, Georgia-based Premier Global Services Inc. (PGi), which designs conferencing tools to better facilitate collaboration, brought 35 top incentive qualifiers to Breckenridge in December 2013 for PGi’s Sell Your Way to the Peak event. The group chose One Ski Hill Place for its host hotel.

“Of all the resorts in Breckenridge, I truly believe you cannot get a better location,” Bolduc says. “First, it’s right at the base of Peak 8, convenient for avid



“The actual event was truly a relaxing weekend getaway for all of our guests — including the planner. ...We look forward to visiting SML again and again.”

**Melissa O’Connor**, Event Manager, Sales Support and Marketing Division, PC Connection Inc., Merrimack, NH

skiers and close to downtown and transportation. Second, the amenities are plentiful and appealing to everyone. In Breckenridge, it’s hard to find a resort that will appeal to people who do not ski, and One Ski Hill achieves that perfectly. Third, there’s the staff. They made my work extremely easy, and the whole process was completely stress-free.”

The attendees agreed with Bolduc’s assessment. “For weeks after the event, I received emails from participants saying that the resort was outstanding. From the concierge staff and food to amazing accommodations, our participants could not stop raving about the experience. People loved the bowling alley, the fact that you could just step out of the hotel and start skiing immediately and how luxurious the accommodations were. In fact, many people came back, booking their personal vacation at One Ski Hill with their families since they had been so impressed and wanted more.”

Bolduc calls two staff members, Lisa Eastlund and Tobby Wojcik, “miracle

workers,” adding, “I have planned other events, and the staff at One Ski Hill was, by far, the most helpful I have ever encountered.”

One Ski Hill Place was also the venue for the group’s cocktail party. “The variety of food we had put together for everyone satisfied even the picky eaters, and the staff not only worked within our budget, they somehow managed to save us money.”

As for the town, Bolduc says, “Breckenridge was the perfect fit because it appealed to skiers and non-skiers. Our event was a sales incentive so we needed somewhere that would be rewarding for everyone. Since we do a beach trip for our Chairman’s Club, I wanted to plan an

event that wouldn’t feel like a Chairman’s Club trip but still be exciting for all participants, and Breckenridge met all these requirements. The resort accommodations are stunning, luxurious and it is conveniently located near everything the participants could possibly want.”

The group booked a dinner in town at Twist, which was a hit. “Everyone loved the comfort food feel, especially with how cold it was that week,” Bolduc says. “It was food they knew and loved but with a twist that elevated it. We’ve booked our dinner with Twist again for this year’s trip.”

In summing up the 2013 event, Bolduc has one word: “perfection.” She didn’t get a single complaint in the event’s follow-up survey. “We’re thinking this will become our annual incentive trip,” she says.

To her fellow planners considering Breckenridge, Bolduc suggests starting the planning process as early as possible. “This is a popular resort, and you want to make sure you have enough room for your event. Be open and upfront with the



Credit: Hal Williams

Aspen, Colorado, consistently rated as one of the world's top ski areas, is a year-round destination.

staff; let them know what your budget is, and they will do everything they can to stay within those limitations.”

## Keystone, Colorado

Nearby Keystone is another option for groups, especially those in need of a conference center. The Keystone Resort and Conference Center provides more than 60,000 sf of exhibit, function and meeting space, while the resort has another 40,000 sf to offer overall. There are three ballrooms and 50 flexible meeting rooms. The resort also has approximately 1,200 accommodations. The conference center offers wireless Internet access in all meeting rooms and public spaces and digitally controlled sound configurations.

A wide variety of meeting space throughout the resort includes a mountaintop venue, outdoor pavilion as well as spacious living rooms in luxury condos and townhomes.

Keystone offers more than 25 dining venues that range from easy grab-and-go meals to five-star dining.

Guests can take a gondola ride and enjoy high-altitude dining at the Bavarian-style Der Fondue Chessel or the AAA

Four Diamond Alpenglow Stube. Two unique and memorable options include a horse-drawn sleigh or wagon ride to a rustic homestead for a delicious home-cooked meal and entertainment or a dinner at the Ski Tip Lodge, a stagecoach stop turned upscale Mountain Inn.

## Vail and Beaver Creek, Colorado

Expansive Vail and compact Beaver Creek are popular with groups for different reasons. Few mountain towns boast the sheer number of restaurants, accommodations and activities as Vail, one of Colorado's best-known mountain resorts. But for some planners, intimate Beaver Creek is the ideal fit.

CCMP Capital Advisors LLC, a New York- and Houston-based global private equity firm specializing in buyout and growth equity investments in North America and Europe, brings a group to Park Hyatt Beaver Creek Resort & Spa each February. Tracie Walton, assistant to the chairman, plans the annual event of 30-plus attendees. “The Park Hyatt is a beautiful property with excellent staff,” she says. “The location is great, and the service is top-notch.”

She has high praise for the resort staff, particularly Andy Hoen, senior sales manager, and Christie Gregg, event planning manager. “Andy does an excellent job with our group each year. He works hard on providing the best rate possible and goes over the contract thoroughly with me. He's always available if I have questions, even after business hours. Andy knows our group needs and is always prepared when we speak.

“Christie goes above and beyond each year that I've worked with her,” Walton continues. “I really rely on Christie when we are at the property, and she's always available. Christie never leaves out any details, and I always feel confident working with her. After the event, she works with me on billing and explanation of services. She is cheerful and willing to help at any time.”

Walton says the attendees engage in a multitude of winter activities, including skiing. They also go out to eat and have enjoyed Mirabelle as well as

Beaver Creek's famed luxury on-mountain restaurant, Beano's Cabin. For 2015, the group has reserved the private Allie's Cabin, also on the mountain, for a function.

## Colorado Springs, Colorado

Not all of Colorado's winter destinations are in the mountains. With a relatively mild winter climate, more than 500,000 sf of meeting space and 14,000 guest rooms, Colorado Springs is an excellent choice for a late fall or winter meeting. Hotel choices include the Antlers Hilton Colorado Springs and Cheyenne Mountain Resort & Club, and there are settings for offsite functions at the Air Force Academy, Cheyenne Mountain Zoo and Cottonwood Center for the Arts. It's also worth noting that the majority of the area's attractions are open in winter, and the city is less than two hours from superb skiing.

Vickey Woodley, senior manager of meeting services for Jacksonville, Florida-based Medtronic Surgical Technologies, brought 140 attendees to another of the city's famed properties, The Broadmoor. The historic resort was an ideal choice for the November 2013 meeting for two reasons.

“It's close to the office that manages the equipment used for this meeting, equipment that is very expensive to ship due to its size and weight,” Woodley says. “Besides, The Broadmoor is breathtakingly beautiful, the service outstanding and everyone at the resort made us feel warm and welcome.”

Though the property is very spread out, Woodley says her group contained its meetings to one of the convention spaces, and used various dining venues for functions.

“The first evening we had a welcome reception in the Lake Terrace Dining Room at the hotel. It was a beautiful room and the food was amazing,” Woodley says. “We were able to use six of the Broadmoor's restaurants for dine-arounds on the second evening. It was nice that the hotel had this many venues to choose from, which saved us time and transportation charges. The attendees were able to enjoy their dinner with-



out being rushed to catch a shuttle back to the hotel.”

Though the city was chosen for its proximity to a Medtronic facility, Woodley calls The Broadmoor “a bonus we didn’t expect! This was our first visit there but probably won’t be our last.”

Her group didn’t have time to go into the city, but she suggests anyone planning a meeting in Colorado Springs build time into the schedule to do that. One other thought: “Plan your meeting in early December to enjoy the most beautiful holiday decorations ever!”

### Lake Tahoe, Nevada

Lake Tahoe is actually two distinct areas: Lively South Lake Tahoe, combining the assets of an expansive ski resort, gaming, nightlife, and the busier south shore of the lake, and more serene North Tahoe, imbued with the characteristics of an upscale mountain resort overlooking one of the most beautiful lakes in America.

South Lake Tahoe lodging properties with meeting space include the green-focused, moderately priced Lake Tahoe Resort Hotel with 400 suites, complimentary breakfast and 10,000-plus sf of meeting space. For groups wanting to combine a meeting with onsite gaming, there’s Harrah’s Lake Tahoe, the 18-story, 532-room hotel with 25,000 sf of meeting space and multiple excel-

“The Broadmoor is breathtakingly beautiful, the service outstanding and everyone at the resort made us feel warm and welcome.”

**Vickey Woodley**, Senior Manager, Meeting Services  
Medtronic Surgical Technologies, Jacksonville, FL



lent restaurants and a spa. It’s connected to sister property, Harvey’s Resort & Casino, with 740 rooms and more than 22,000 sf of meeting space. All three of these hotels provide easy access to the Heavenly ski area.

With properties such as the AAA Five Diamond Ritz-Carlton, Lake Tahoe, North Tahoe is well suited for incentive trips. The hotel has 170 guest rooms with fireplaces, a 17,000-sf spa and meeting space for up to 400 guests, including two ballrooms with floor-to-ceiling windows. The Ritz-Carlton sits at mid-mountain.

Northstar Village, base area for Northstar California ski resort, offers conference space for up to 200 attendees among its 200 lodging units and 35 shops and restaurants. The year-round venues feature hard-wired AV and complimentary Internet access.

A short distance from Northstar, set at the base of Squaw Valley ski area, is the Resort at Squaw Creek, a Destination Hotel. The AAA Four Diamond resort of-

fers 405 rooms and 33,000 sf of indoor meeting space, plus a long list of team-building and group activities that includes dog-sledding in winter.

### Park City, Utah

Located just 35 minutes from Salt Lake City International Airport, Park City makes it easy to stage a meeting at a top ski resort. Thirty area hotels have meeting facilities for a total of 125,000 sf. The variety and scope of activities, from skiing and riding to bobsledding, winter fly-fishing and hot-air balloon rides, make Park City an ideal incentive or meeting destination. Good choices for groups include the Park City Marriott, headquarters for the annual Sundance Film Festival, with 191 guest rooms and 10,000 sf of function space. The property unveiled a multimillion-dollar renovation in 2014. Montage Deer Valley features 154 guest rooms, 66 suites and residences, and more than 55,000 sf of indoor and outdoor meeting and event space. Waldorf Astoria Park City is the brand’s first luxury mountain lodge. It includes 201 accommodations, two boardrooms and a presidential suite accommodating up to 70 guests.

Vail Resorts Inc. received unanimous approval from the Park City Planning Commission to implement an impactful capital plan for the 2015–16 ski season. The plan will establish a connection between Park City Mountain Resort and Canyons Resort, creating the largest single ski area in the country with more than 7,300 acres of skiable terrain. Also, critical upgrades will be made to the infrastructure of both resorts.

Components of the \$50-million capital plan include:

- The Interconnect Gondola, an eight-passenger, high-speed, two-way



Credit: Visit Denver

Colorado’s Vail Village is great for shopping, strolling, dining, barhopping and more.



Credit: Stowe/Flake Mountain Resort & Spa

Vermont's Stowe/Flake Mountain Resort & Spa provides opportunities to incorporate personal well-being programs and nutritious menu options into events for attendees.

gondola from the base of the existing Silverlode Lift at Park City to the Flatiron Lift at Canyons. This will mark the first gondola at Park City Mountain Resort since "The Gondola" was dismantled in 1997.

- Upgrade of King Con and Motherlode Lifts at Park City. The King Con Lift will be upgraded from a four-person to a six-person, high-speed detachable chairlift, and the Motherlode Lift will be upgraded from a fixed-grip triple to a four-person, high-speed detachable chairlift. Both upgrades will reduce crowding, lift lines and improve the guest experience.
- The plan calls for building a completely new Snow Hut restaurant at the base of the Silverlode Lift and next to the Park City terminal for the Interconnect Gondola, with 500 indoor seats and a top-of-the-line kitchen and culinary experience. At Canyons, the Red Pine Restaurant will be renovated to accommodate an additional 250 indoor seats.
- The plan features additional snow-making on two trails in the Iron Mountain area of Canyons, which will become increasingly central ski terrain given its proximity to the Interconnect Gondola.

## Stowe, Vermont

The West doesn't have a lock on excellent winter-meeting venues. New England's mountain resorts and Norman Rockwell settings are every bit as enchanting and up to the challenge of facilitating business. Stowe Mountain Lodge is a superb example.

PC Connection Inc., based in Merrimack, New Hampshire, plans an incentive winter weekend every year. In February 2014, its Winter Wonderland Weekend was held at Stowe Mountain Lodge with 150 in attendance. It was the company's first year at the lodge, and Melissa O'Connor, event manager, sales support and marketing division, booked a return in 2015.

"Stowe Mountain Lodge provides the opportunity for our incentive winners to get away from the fast pace of the city and enter into an upscale rustic oasis. Some of our guests utilized the downhill and Nordic ski areas, some went ice climbing or snowmobiling and others were content staying on the resort, whether in the spa or just reading a book in front of the fireplace."

Participants also took advantage of local tours, including to nearby Ben & Jerry's and Cabot Creamery.

Functions were held in resort venues.

"We used the junior ballroom for our on-flow welcome reception on Friday night and the larger ballroom (across the hall) for our dinner and awards banquet on Saturday night. The space is perfect for our group size. Dinner service on Saturday was a little slow," O'Connor says, "but the food itself was great. Unique seasonal dinner options were very much appreciated by our guests. The staff was in tune to our every need, from the servers to the banquet manager, valet to the front desk."

Tracie Smith, who assisted O'Connor, notes, "It was nice that we were able to have something other than the standard tables and chairs for furnishings the night of our welcome reception. The couches and seating areas made the space feel cozy and comfortable."

Both O'Connor and Smith commend resort staff in all areas and from start to finish.

"Everything leading up to the event was great, communication and correspondence back and forth was a pleasure," O'Connor says. "The actual event was truly a relaxing weekend getaway for all of our guests — including the planner." Before O'Connor's next trip, they met with the sales manager and "brainstormed how to make every piece of the weekend flawless. We look forward to visiting SML again and again."

With the first event already in the books, O'Connor did learn a few things. "The vouchers for lift tickets, rentals, gondola and Nordic trails were slightly confusing during our check-in process. Now we know SML will lend us a staff member to take care of this piece, which is much better than having our company planners explain it to guests."

O'Connor calls the event a "remarkable weekend," thanks to staff willing to do whatever it took to accommodate her group's needs and to the lodge itself. "Although the resort is pricey, the quality and lasting impression/experience is 100 percent there."

It just goes to show that planners booking wintertime meetings shouldn't always look south. The snowy mountains of the north have much to offer. **C&IT**



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# Top Value Destinations

## Great Places, Great People and More Bang for the Buck

By John Buchanan

**A**lthough the meeting industry has returned to robust health and vitality, one lingering aftereffect of the Great Recession has been unprecedented and ongoing management scrutiny of budgets, while at the same time the proverbial pendulum has swung back to a seller's market that has caused costs to spike in many A-list destinations.

Thus, for many planners, finding real value is more important than ever before.

"There are still budget restrictions for many companies," says Darla Huckaby, CMP, global account executive at Conference Direct in Irving, Texas. "The economy is rebounding. But in the meeting and event industry, because of what we had to deal with a few years back, people are still being conservative and budgets are being reviewed very carefully. And companies also want to do more with less. So that is now a top consideration for a lot of companies."

A related factor is a continuation of the longstanding trend of many meetings being booked on very short notice, Huckaby says. That means many A-list destinations are not available, which forces planners to use a less well-known or second-tier destination. And that

translates to an opportunity to get value that cannot be matched in first-tier destinations. "So we're now looking more and more," Huckaby says, "to those alternative destinations simply based on lack of availability, on short notice, in major destinations."

And in turn, Huckaby notes, strong demand for top first-tier destinations — simply in terms of supply and demand — tends to drive up the cost of a meeting in a major destination, whereas in a second-tier destination, by definition, demand is less intense and the value proposition is reinforced.

"It really boils down to supply and demand," she says. "So based on that factor alone, to get the best value today, you have to start looking at these alternative destinations."

In fact, never before in her 20-year career as a planner has Huckaby seen market factors so strongly aligned in favor of seeking out superior value in less well-known destinations. "And that also opens you up as a planner to more creative thinking in terms of destination selection," she says. "It really does give you an opportunity to do more for less."

Like Huckaby, Turner Gravitt Jr., director, corporate events, member relations and government affairs at Richmond, Virginia-based agricultural supplier South States Cooperative, faces tight budgets and seeks solid value in his destination selection. Today, bottom-line bang for the buck plays more of a role in his destination selection than ever before.



***"It really boils down to supply and demand. So based on that factor alone, to get the best value today, you have to start looking at these alternative destinations."***

**DARLA HUCKABY, CMP, Global Account Executive, Conference Direct, Irving, TX**



"We've always been a conservative company," Gravitt says, "but especially since the recession we've tried to do an even better job of watching our budgets and analyzing our costs and the value we get from every dollar we spend."

Lisa Crouse, founder of independent meeting planning firm Fagan & Crouse in Marietta, Georgia, is another planner who is increasingly aware of the importance of value-oriented destinations.

"Many clients are concerned about their budgets these days," she says. "And a lot of them want the best possible quality in hotel rooms at the lowest possible price. So we always look for destinations that we think deliver real value."

(See related story on page 12.)

## Oklahoma City, Oklahoma



Although many smaller, less well-known destinations now tout their value proposition, few equal Oklahoma City, which Huckaby has used multiple times over the last few years.

"Oklahoma City was never even on my radar," she says. "It wasn't a destination I even thought about or knew anything about. But once I discovered Oklahoma City and realized the number of flights coming in and the accessibility and convenience it offers with its downtown area, I saw that it is a very attractive destination."

And like Dallas/Fort Worth, Oklahoma City is equidistant between the East and West coasts, which makes it a favorable choice in terms of logistics. It offers similar hotel product and dining and entertainment options, but at a significantly reduced cost, Huckaby says.

Oklahoma City represents substantial savings over doing the same meeting in Chicago or Dallas, Huckaby says. "And one reason for that is lower

airfares," she says. "And because the airport is very close to downtown, it's a very convenient destination and you save money on ground transportation. You also get good value in hotel rooms, food and beverage and meeting space. You get good value on everything."

But there's also an important related benefit that Huckaby and her clients like. "Oklahoma City really offers that kind of down-home hospitality that you don't find in many places anymore," she says. "And there are just great people in Oklahoma City. That's something that is becoming more and more important today in terms of the kind of support and service you're going to get. Good people enable a successful event. And Oklahoma City has great people. You get smiles and Southern hospitality. And your attendees get well taken care of."

Over and above that, Huckaby was surprised to discover how much there is to do in Oklahoma City. Popular with attendees is Bricktown (pictured), the former warehouse district on the Bricktown Canal, offering entertainment, shopping and dining. "There's a lot of nightlife downtown," she says. "There are a lot of fine-dining restaurants and a wide range of inexpensive restaurants." And she notes that the Boathouse District offers a range of outdoor adventures such as kayaking, paddleboarding, zip lining and bicycling. "I don't think most planners realize how much there is to do in Oklahoma City. And a lot of things are within walking distance of the hotels. The city also has great infrastructure."

In 2016, Oklahoma City's Boathouse District, home to the U.S. Olympic and Paralympic training site for Canoe/Kayak, will host the U.S. Olympic trials just before unveiling the new \$45.2 million whitewater rafting center that same year; one of only a few in the world. Also on the horizon is a new streetcar system, a 70-acre park in downtown Oklahoma City, a new 470,000-sf Downtown Convention Center and headquarters hotel as well as many other hotels in downtown and surrounding districts. The convention center is expected to open in 2019.

The new Embassy Suites Oklahoma City Downtown/Medical Center, located in the heart of the metropolis, marks the third Embassy Suites property in the Sooner State. The full-service hotel offers 195 two-room guest suites and more than 10,000 sf of meeting space. The new onsite restaurant, E.S. Founders, is led by executive chef Andrew Black.

DoubleTree by Hilton Oklahoma City Airport, recently opened as the brand's first property in the capital city. The 134-room, full-service hotel has commenced property-wide renovations.

## Columbus, Ohio



In his quest for value, Jeremy Ball, director of philanthropy and corporate events at retail store operator Big Lots, uses the company's hometown of Columbus, Ohio, for all of the half-dozen meetings and events he plans each year.

The reason for his fierce loyalty is simple, Ball says: Big Lots has never found a destination that provides better value than Columbus.

"We choose to do our meetings here because Columbus is a top value destination," he says. "We've considered other places, but we ended up making a decision that we want to host all our important meetings locally because we get great value here."

Value is a principle that is deeply embedded in the company's identity, Ball says. "It is our anthem," he says. "We're all about value in everything we do, whether it's what our customers look for in a store or it's something we do as an organization. And that also applies to where we do our meetings and events. And when it comes to value, Columbus has a very compelling story to tell. It provides excellent value, but

it also provides an excellent experience. And that is also important to us and our attendees.”

Another key factor in Ball’s loyalty to the destination is Experience Columbus, the local CVB. “I can’t speak highly enough of them,” he says. “And the way we work with them has become even more important as our company has grown. And growing as rapidly as we have in the last few years has challenged us when it comes to fitting more people into our meetings and events and providing an experience that will get them excited. And that has meant moving our events into bigger venues, and we have gotten a lot of help from Experience Columbus.”

Their biggest meetings now, for between 700 and 1,000 attendees from all over the U.S., are held at the Greater Columbus Convention Center (GCCC).

Ball also finds the perfect hotel product in Columbus. “We have working relationships with both the Hilton Columbus Downtown and the Hyatt Regency Columbus,” he says. “Those are our two most important venues and the ones we have built real relationships with. In terms of which one makes more sense at any given time, it just depends on the nature of the event.”

In addition to excellent hotels, Columbus also offers a thriving local food scene, Ball says. “The number of independent entrepreneurs who are opening restaurants is incredible,” he says. “So we now have a lot of great restaurants downtown, but also in some

of our other neighborhoods. I personally am a fan of our local mom-and-pop restaurants, and we have a lot of those that are wonderful. We also have some great local coffee houses and bakeries that are fun for meeting attendees. And now the local craft brewery scene is really taking off. From a value standpoint, we now have a lot of places where people can have a great experience, but from a cost point of view, we can also get a lot of bang for our buck.”

Beyond all those reasons to love Big Lots’ hometown, Ball says, “Columbus is just a cool city. And there are a lot of cool things going on here.”

#### **New & Noteworthy**

The renovations at The Westin Columbus are rolling out in carefully orchestrated phases. The lobby and public space is terrific. The more than 12,000 sf of meeting space has been upgraded, and connectivity has been greatly enhanced with high-speed Internet and convenient wireless capability throughout the public space. The boardroom’s new expansive conference table and 50-inch monitor make it an ideal location for smaller functions.

The GCCC is set to undergo a \$125 million renovation and expansion project from September 2015 through July 2017. The space will expand from 1.7 to 1.8 million sf and gain LEED certification. The 100,000-sf expansion will include 10,000 sf of two-level meeting space and 37,000 sf of exhibit space, and the meeting room inventory increases from 65 to 75 rooms.

The CBUS Circulator is a free bus that circulates through downtown. It operates seven days per week, every 10-15 minutes depending on time of day, and stops are easy to find throughout the city. Pickups happen regularly in front of the GCCC, making it easy for convention and meeting attendees to explore the city.

The Port Columbus International Airport, located a short drive from downtown, is currently undergoing a three-year, \$80 million renovation. Southwest has recently begun direct service to Dallas and Washington DC and will begin direct service to Boston and Oakland in August, allowing easier access from around the country.

### **Charlotte, North Carolina**



For Southern States Cooperative’s biggest and most important meeting of the year, a management meeting and product show that draws 2,000 attendees, Gravitt has used booming Southern metropolis Charlotte for the last five years. And based on the value the company gets there, Southern States is booked through 2019.

“One of the most basic ways Charlotte provides value for us is that it is centrally located for all of our attendees,” Gravitt says. “We also get good value on hotel rooms, food and beverage, meeting rooms and audio-visual services.”

The convenience of the downtown hotels to the Charlotte Convention Center is another factor in Gravitt’s value proposition, because most attendees can walk to the venue. “And that saves us quite a bit of money on transportation costs,” he says.



**“From a value standpoint, we now have a lot of places where people can have a great experience, but from a cost point of view, we can also get a lot of bang for our buck. Columbus is just a cool city. And there are a lot of cool things going on here.”**

**JEREMY BALL**, Director of Philanthropy and Corporate Events, Big Lots, Columbus, OH



The convention center features 280,000 sf of exhibit space, more than 90,000 sf of flexible meeting space, a 40,000-sf ballroom and a 35,000-sf ballroom.

For his 2,000-attendee meeting, Gravitt says, Charlotte Convention Center is perfectly sized and configured. "It has just the right number of breakout rooms that we need," he says.

Southern States also enjoys good food and beverage value in Charlotte. For the sake of convenience and overall budget control, Gravitt stages breakfast, lunch and dinner at the convention center each day. "We get excellent food and excellent service," he says. "And we also get very good value. That's one of the reasons we keep coming back year after year."

For the last two years, his headquarters hotel has been The Westin Charlotte, and it will serve in that role again this fall. "It's very convenient for us because it's right across the street from the convention center," Gravitt says.

Gravitt also places great importance on the support services he gets from the local CVB, Visit Charlotte. "They know the area, and they kind of serve as our 'mediator' with all our vendors," he says. "So we work as much as we can through them. We ask them a lot of questions, and then they come up with current information that we know we can rely on. We don't have to go digging for information or wonder whether the information we're being given is actually true."

And Visit Charlotte helped facilitate his superb relationships with the convention center and hotels, Gravitt says. And part of that facilitation has been to ensure that Southern States gets real value from every dollar it spends in town.

"But the main thing is that we just like the quality of the people we work with at Visit Charlotte," Gravitt says. "We feel like they bend over backwards to help us meet our goals and take good care of us. They treat us like we're important and that they care about us. And that is very, very important to us. And that's not just Visit Charlotte: It's the same with the people at the convention center and the hotels. So in Charlotte, we get people, the place and value."

***"The size and scope of the convention center is probably the biggest surprise to planners who have never been to Minneapolis before. They offset a large percentage of the cost of the facility through hotel room rebates."***

**MARLYS KNUTSON, External Relations Manager  
Polaris Industries Inc., Minneapolis, MN**



### Minneapolis, Minnesota



Another thriving and well-known metropolitan area that also happens to deliver exceptional value to meeting planners is Minneapolis.

Marlys Knutson, external relations manager at Minneapolis-based recreational equipment manufacturer Polaris Industries Inc., uses the company's hometown every five years for an important meeting that also commemorates a key anniversary for the company. Last year, she used Minneapolis for the company's 60th anniversary, and Polaris will be back in 2019 for its 65th anniversary.

The four-day, three-night celebration draws 5,000 attendees from the U.S. and more than 30 countries internationally.

Last year, Knutson used the Minneapolis Convention Center as her meeting venue, and Polaris will use it again in 2019. The facility, the largest convention center in the upper Midwest, features 475,000 sf of exhibit space, 87 individual meeting rooms, and food and beverage services from award-winning Kelber Catering.

"The Minneapolis Convention Center is awesome, and it's the perfect size for us," Knutson says. "We're one of a very few groups that use almost the entire facility. We also have a lot of hotel rooms in downtown Minneapolis that are great. We use 16 hotels for our meeting, and almost everyone can walk to the convention center, so our busing costs were minimal."

Hotel rooms costs are one of the primary factors that make Minneapolis a top value destination," Knutson says. "Hotel rooms in Minneapolis are quite a bit less expensive than they are in the other destinations that we use," she says. "The F&B catering we get in Minneapolis is also awesome. Not only do we get reasonable prices, but the food is great. And the staff we work with at the convention center is great."

Airlift and cost-effective airfares are another budgetary advantage that Minneapolis offers, Knutson says, because the city is a hub for Delta Airlines.

Planners who are unfamiliar with Minneapolis will find a number of pleasant surprises there, Knutson says. "I would say the size and scope of the convention center facility is probably the biggest surprise to planners who have never been to Minneapolis before," she says. "And along with that is the way they offset a large percentage of the cost of the facility through hotel room rebates and things like that. The formula they use really works well."

All of the 16 hotels Polaris used last year provided a nice rebate. "And

those rebates offset a large percentage of our cost for the convention center,” Knutson says.

And when it comes to such net cost savings on a convention center, only two destinations she knows of offer that perk, Knutson says. The other is Phoenix.

### **New & Noteworthy**

The Minneapolis-Saint Paul metropolitan area saw 30.9 million total visitors in 2014 — an all-time record for the area.

Craft Bar and Lounge is now open at the Minneapolis Convention Center. The venue was created to provide an alternative place for meeting planners and guests to connect and build relationships. It is located on the balcony of the new Visitor Information Center in the main lobby.

Super Bowl LII will be held February 2018 in the new Minnesota Stadium as will the NCAA Men’s Final Four in March/April 2019. The new Minnesota Stadium, currently under construction in downtown Minneapolis, will open in July 2016.

## **New Orleans, Louisiana**



Perhaps the best news of all for planners is that it’s not just less well known or second-tier destinations that offer exceptional value in today’s market.

One A-list, perennially popular destination that has built a formidable reputation for value is New Orleans.

“I love New Orleans because it not only delivers real value, but it’s also a destination that will attract attendees and make them want to come to the meeting, Crouse says. “It’s just a great destination, because everybody has heard of New Orleans and there are lots of things to do there.”



**“Many clients are concerned about their budgets these days. And a lot of them want the best possible quality in hotel rooms at the lowest possible price. So we always look for destinations that we think deliver real value.”**

**LISA CROUSE, Founder**  
Fagan & Crouse, Marietta, GA

Crouse has used New Orleans repeatedly for more than 25 years. And she gets excellent hotel rates there, she says, compared to similar major city destinations.

She and her clients also love the city’s world-famous culture, dining scene and unique venues, such as the World War II Museum.

Most of all, she says, she loves the New Orleans Convention & Visitors Bureau. “They just go above and beyond to make sure you have everything you need and that your meeting is successful,” Crouse says. “And a big part of that success is getting value for the money you spend.”

### **New & Noteworthy**

The New Orleans Ernest N. Morial Convention Center is embarking on an ambitious new venture that will revitalize the City’s riverfront. The Convention Center District Development Project, situated on 47 acres upriver from the center, calls for construction of a new headquarters hotel, a linear park (*pictured*) along Convention Center Boulevard, outdoor entertainment, arts and cultural venues and new retail and housing options.

Readers of *Condé Nast Traveler* voted New Orleans the No. 1 “U.S. City for Business Travelers” in the February issue of the magazine based on friendliness, value, walkability and its 1,400 restaurants.

In January 2015, *The New York Times* named New Orleans one of its “52 Places to Go in 2015,” which proposes untrav-

eled destinations as well as familiar cities offering travelers new reasons to visit this year.

Antoine’s Restaurant is celebrating 175 years of French Creole culinary traditions in 2015. In commemoration of this prestigious anniversary, the oldest continuously operating restaurant in America and birthplace of Oysters Rockefeller will host special events, present new menus and bring its celebrations beyond the French Quarter.

Emeril’s New Orleans, the original flagship of Chef Emeril Lagasse, is celebrating 25 years in the Crescent City in 2015.

Louis Armstrong International Airport has surpassed pre-Katrina passenger numbers. With 14 airlines providing service to 46 nonstop destinations, the airport is serving the most nonstop destinations in its history. Plans were announced to build a new, state-of-the-art airport terminal on the north side of the current airport property.

The Aloft New Orleans Downtown, HRI Lodging’s newest property, opened in New Orleans’ Central Business District in March 2015. The Aloft offers 188 guest rooms, 2,500 sf of meeting space, a bar and more. The hotel accompanies 192 apartments in the same building dubbed the Strand Apartments.

The Wyndham New Orleans-French Quarter has completed its multimillion-dollar renovation, which included 374 guest rooms as well as the building’s exterior and improvements to the parking garage.

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**Edd Karlan** was appointed director of sales and marketing for Hilton West Palm Beach, Florida, expected to open in spring 2016. He most recently led the sales team at the Hilton Atlanta.

The Lodge and Spa at Callaway Gardens in Pine Mountain, Georgia, has named **Gail Drouillard** as director of sales and marketing. She most recently served

as general manager at Destination Club Management in Seacrest Beach, Florida.

The Omni Berkshire Place in Manhattan has named **Kristin Hankins** as director of sales and marketing. She was vice president of sales for Sixty Hotels in New York.

Lansdowne Resort, a Destination

Hotel, located in Leesburg, Virginia, has appointed **Skip James** as director of sales and marketing. He was director of sales and marketing at Turnberry Isle Miami.

**Sarah Singer Gagnon** was appointed director of group sales for the New Orleans Marriott. She was director of sales and marketing for Wyndham New Orleans French Quarter. **C&IT**

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