The Trump Organization.

(L to r) Executive Vice President Donald Trump Jr., Chairman and President Donald J. Trump, Executive Vice President Ivanka Trump and Executive Vice President Eric Trump.
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Branding Lessons

No matter what your opinion is of Donald J. Trump, he is no doubt a masterful marketer. There has been so much written about the successful branding techniques and strategies employed by the Trump Organization, I wanted to explore how these Trump-style “branding lessons” may impact the meetings and hospitality industries.

According to a widely circulated report in Skift, branding was one of the hottest topics among a gathering of hospitality CEOs in early June at the NYU International Hospitality Industry Investment Conference in New York City. For example, Geoff Ballotti, CEO of the Wyndham Hotel Group, said, “Brands have never mattered more.” And David Kong, CEO of Best Western Hotels & Resorts, said, “Why do a lot of people like Coca-Cola? Why do people go out of their way to buy it? That’s the value of a brand. People go out of their way to get it.”

Gray Shealy, executive director for Georgetown’s Hospitality Management master’s program, describes in the Skift article why branding is important: “This is where the future of hospitality is headed. Branding is where it all comes together. The challenge for hospitality companies is in maintaining the value of their brands and establishing this engagement, this emotional connection to their customers.”

In our cover story on page 10, “Donald Trump and the Art of Branding: Bold (& Brash) Lessons for the Meetings and Hotel Industries From the Boss of Bravado,” Robert A. Gilbert, CHIME, CHBA, president and CEO of HSMAI, advises, “Branding is important when hotel customers of any type — leisure, corporate or meetings — are searching for a purpose-appropriate hotel type. Branding helps align product type, price tier and service scope within a reasonable range of expectations.”

Eric Danziger, CEO, Trump Hotels, suggests attention to detail “is what makes a meeting planner or hotel brand great, rather than just good.”

And, finally, in Trump’s own words from his 1987 best-selling book Trump: The Art of the Deal comes this caveat: “You can’t con people, at least not for long. You can throw in a little hyperbole. But if you don’t deliver the goods, people won’t buy it. That’s the value of a brand. People go out of their way to buy it.”
MPI Introduces Three Different Levels of Membership

DAKAS, TX — MPI restructured its membership model to offer three different levels for both planners and suppliers. “We have been working to grow and evolve our association over the past few years in order to better serve the global community, and this new membership model is a significant component of our overall transformation,” said Paul Van Deventer, president and CEO of MPI.

Essential Membership provides access to MPI’s online tools and resources, including free education webinars, recorded event sessions, membership directory, job board, MPI’s Online Community, industry research, member discounts, e-newsletters, the magazine and more. Preferred Membership includes all of the Essential Membership benefits plus chapter affiliation, special member rates to chapter events and CMP application assistance. Premier Membership is designed for highly active members and provides all of the benefits offered with the Essential and Preferred memberships as well as direct marketing lists, VIP passes to MPI global signature events, advanced previews of MPI’s Meetings Outlook quarterly research report, one-on-one career and academic coaching, and the Concierge Line, which provides immediate access to MPI Member Services.

Through July 31, MPI is offering new members the opportunity to receive a complimentary membership upgrade. For more information on MPI’s new membership levels and pricing and to join, visit www.mpiweb.org/join.

Hard Rock Hotel New York to Break Ground This Year

NEW YORK, NY — Hard Rock Hotel New York is slated to open in late spring 2019. The new build, 445-room Hard Rock Hotel New York will soon rise on 48th street between 7th Ave. and Avenue of the Americas in Manhattan.

Bringing a reinvented, music-focused hotel experience to New York, the upcoming Hard Rock Hotel will honor the city’s musical and cultural heritage with live music events and artist-inspired design elements. With Hard Rock International’s standing as curators of the world’s largest and most priceless music memorabilia collection, the hotel’s design will feature museum-like displays adorning the walls.

In addition to musical experiences at every turn, Hard Rock Hotel New York will feature ballroom space, a vibrant welcoming lobby, complete with signature restaurant and lounge, as well as lobby bar. The upcoming Hard Rock Hotel New York’s rooftop oasis soon will be a local hotspot, as guests soak up the sun or dance the night away while enjoying views of Times Square’s bright lights. Programming for the hotel’s rooftop also calls for day and evening activities, ranging from artist sessions and DJ sets, to events featuring some of the most influential artists and celebrities. Plans for Hard Rock Hotel New York call for a stylish and upscale underground speak-easy that will capture the essence of New York City’s music subculture. www.hardrockhotels.com

Atlantic City’s Claridge Hotel to Open New Conference Space

ATLANTIC CITY, NJ — Atlantic City’s historic Claridge Hotel launches the summer season with the new Conference Center at The Claridge, adding 15,000 sf of new conference space to meet the growing demand for meeting venues in the seaside resort. The opening of the new Conference Center in July will bring the hotel’s meeting space to 100,000 sf, including a 6,400 sf room ideal for general sessions or small trade shows, and four smaller conference and boardrooms.

In addition to the new space, The Claridge boasts an elegantly renovated ballroom, and 480 recently refurbished rooms. The Atlantic City Convention Center is just four blocks away. The hotel is opening two new leisure venues — Atlantic City’s only rooftop bar and a charming new Beer and Wine Garden in Brighton Park at The Claridge. www.claridge.com

MPI Celebrates 2016 RISE Awards

Recipients at World Education Congress

DAKAS, TX — Meeting Professionals International (MPI) honored the recipients of this year’s RISE (Recognizing Industry Success & Excellence) Awards at the annual MPI RISE Awards Presentation and Luncheon during the 2016 World Education Congress (WEC) in Atlantic City.

“Congratulations to the 2016 RISE Awards recipients,” said Paul Van Deventer, president and CEO of MPI. “We salute each of these leaders who were nominated by their peers for outstanding contributions and performance. Their achievements will be recognized within our global community for years to come.”

The RISE Award for Young Professional was presented to Lydia Blanchard of the MPI Ottawa Chapter, and to Carol Norfleet, MBA, CMP, DMCP, of the MPI Tennessee Chapter. executive vice president and CEO of Destination Nashville, has served as co-host for the CMP Boot Camp/Master Class at WEC since 2004 and has consistently given back to the profession through multiple leadership roles and continued involvement with the CMP Program.

For more details and a complete list of RISE award recipients, visit www.mpiweb.org/RISE.
Meeting Professionals International’s 2016 World Education Congress was deemed an overwhelming success. Held in Atlantic City for the first time ever at the new Harrah’s Atlantic City Waterfront Conference Center, more than 2,000 registered attendees enjoyed fabulous New Jersey shore weather and all the iconic resort city has to offer meeting groups. WEC 2017 will be held in Las Vegas, July 9–12, marking the fourth time Las Vegas has hosted the annual conference.
Donald Trump and the Art of Branding

Bold (& Brash) Lessons for the Meetings and Hotel Industries From the Boss of Bravado

By Cynthia Dial

Premier hotelier, popular reality star, new-to-the-stage political contender and now the presumptive Republican nominee who could possibly become the next president of the United States. Is there any doubt to whom I refer? No guesswork required. The answer is Donald J. Trump.

Though certainly not perceived as a behind-the-scenes kind of guy, it is not by happenstance that Trump's visibility is now and for years has been high. It's called branding and in the art of this discipline, The Donald (as he has been affectionately dubbed) is a maestro.

“You can have the most wonderful product in the world, but if people don’t know about it, it’s not going to be worth much. You need to generate interest, and you need to create excitement,” says the business magnate in his 1987 book, Trump: The Art of the Deal. The best-selling book, co-written with journalist Tony Schwartz, is described as a business advice book and memoir.

Whether promoting his personal persona or one of his many Trump-branded products with his moniker always appearing in gold — from hotels and real estate to restaurants and beauty pages — marketing the Donald Trump brand is a strategic science.

Branding Lessons

An article appearing in Fortune Marketing Company's blog entitled “3 Surprising Branding Lessons We Can Learn from Donald Trump” simplifies the titan’s trifecta approach:

• Connect emotionally with your audience.
• Be genuine.
• Toot your own horn.

Further embellishment of these “Branding Lessons” underscores the importance of identifying and targeting a precise populace. “Do you know exactly who and what you are, and do you stick to that with every customer, sale, project, tweet, post and ad? Or do you waver to try to please everyone and get every penny of business that’s offered? Knowing who you are as a business — and owning it — creates an invincible brand.”

As opposed to tooting one’s own horn, the Fortune Marketing Company article addresses business owners who are uncomfortable promoting their successes. “While extremes on either side may not be effective, learning how to promote your benefits and success stories is a must for building a brand.”

Not shy about self-promotion, Trump is the boss of bravado. “I play to peoples’ fantasies. People may not always think big themselves, but they can still get very excited by those who do. That’s why a little hyperbole never hurts,” he shares in Art of the Deal. “People want to believe that something is the biggest and the greatest and the most spectacular. I call it truthful hyperbole. It’s an innocent form of exaggeration — and a very effective form of promotion.”

However, within the marketing maverick’s book are words of caution: “You can’t con people, at least not for long. You can create excitement, you can do wonderful promotion and get all kinds of press, and you can throw in a little hyperbole. But if you don’t deliver the goods, people will eventually catch on.”

Marketer of the Year?
Former P&G brand manager and contestant on "The Apprentice" (2006), Surya Yalamanchili, begins his Advertising Age article, “An Actual Marketing Lesson from Donald Trump’s Success,” with this declaration: “I hereby nominate Donald Trump for 2016 Ad Age Marketer of the Year.” The author’s reasons are many, not the least of which is the link he observes between the famed businessman and globally recognized provocateur & gambler. “I was surprised that a number of his keys to success were straight out of the playbook I learned as a brand manager at P&G.”

Elaborating, Yalamanchili cites the principle that short-term promotions shouldn’t come at the expense of long-term success. Of Trump’s branding basics, “The Apprentice” participant says, “Instead of torturing himself to comply with marketing paradigms, as almost all marketers do, Trump intuitively knows when to break from script.”

A part of Trump’s success is discernment. “If I were to put Trump on every thing that came my way — from potato chips to paper clips — the power of my name would be diluted. I’m very demanding and selective about where that name goes,” says the businessman in his book.

Online entrepreneur Richard Bravo and author of Brand Marketing Like Donald Trump: 7 Steps to Kick Ass Branding states, “The Trump brand is aggressive and all about kicking ass in the market-place. The word Trump has become synonymous with success, luxury and being fearless. Bravo’s assessment is confirmed by Trump himself: “I like thinking big. I always have. To me it’s very simple: if you’re going to be thinking anyway, you might as well think big.”

Be Bold

Robert A. Gilbert, CHME, CHBA, president and CEO of Hospitality Sales & Marketing Association International in McLean, Virginia, considers the significance of branding within the meetings and hospitality industries. “Branding is important when hotel customers of any type — leisure, corporate or meetings — are searching for a purpose-appropriate hotel type. Branding helps align product type, price tier and service scope within a reasonable range of expectations.”

Though Gilbert has no firsthand experience with Trump Hotels, he describes the mogul’s branding fundamentals when promoting his portfolio of properties (14 hotels, plus two manors within its Estate Collection) in a trio of terms: luxury, international gateway and leisure destinations.

With specificity to the meetings market, Gilbert encourages the industries to borrow a basic from the power broker’s playbook — be bold. In dissec-
Branding Lessons from Donald Trump. With emphasis on the “b” word — borrowing — the author offers modern-day insight: “The internet and the smartphone have reduced the average person’s attention span to about that of a goldfish,” says James. “Under these circumstances the cardinal sin of branding is boring people. Say what you will about Trump, he’s never boring.”

Eric Danziger
CEO
Trump Hotels
New York, NY

This attention to detail is what makes a meeting planner or hotel brand great, rather than just good.

The Team at Work
Going inside the Trump operation, Eric Danziger, CEO, Trump Hotels, says the Trump family is involved in every aspect of its namesake properties. Citing architecture and décor as key elements of the hotel brand, he elaborates, “Each hotel and resort has a distinct design that is culturally relevant, with iconic architecture that is at home in its locations, contextual and relevant to the destination.” The term “design,” however, is not limited to a Trump Hotel’s physical properties — it extends to the quality of its guests’ on-property experiences, experiences that receive hands-on attention from the family. “Ivanka Trump personally oversees the design and creative vision for all Trump Hotel properties; they are developed, working extensively alongside the most talented designers in the world to ensure the Trump family’s exacting standards are appreciable in every detail,” says Danziger.

What can the meetings industry learn from Mr. Trump’s personal branding? Trump Hotels’ CEO answers that it’s the importance of not overlooking details. “This attention to detail is what makes a meeting planner or hotel brand great, rather than just good.”

Trump Attaché Service
In the spirit of adhering to every detail, Danziger mentions the hotels’ signature Trump Attaché service. His description: “More than a concierge or butler, Trump Attaché delivers personalized attention without intrusion so guests experience an unprecedented level of VIP treatment upon request or sometimes before. Trump Attaché meticulously keeps track of individual preferences.”

Brian Honan, director of sales and marketing, Trump SoHo New York, attributes a major component of Trump SoHo’s success to a simple stat: More than half of the hotel’s line staff has been employed since the property’s 2010 opening. “There is an enormous amount of pride our associates carry with this name. They feel a vested ownership in the product and the customers whom they serve.”

Customization in the Market
Following the “know your market, cater to your market” edit is the addition of a 13,200-sf, column-free Presidential Ballroom incorporated in Trump International Hotel, Washington, DC — it will be the capital city’s largest luxury ballroom. The hotel’s red, white and blue décor will reflect its location, and its exceptionally high ratio of 38,000 sf of event space to its 228 guest rooms is expected to attract the meeting planner. Along the same line of thought are Trump Vancouver’s one-of-a-kind entertainment venue, Drai’s, the city’s first pool bar and nightclub; a Champagne Bar serving up the finest bubbly vintages; and the latest incarnation of the Michelin-starred, modern Hong Kong-style restaurant, Mott 32.

One of the SoHo hotel’s exceptional attractions for the corporate and incentive market is its 45th-floor balcony, with three walls of glass showcasing an over-the-city view of Manhattan from the East River to the Hudson River and beyond.

Patricia Tang, director of sales and marketing, Trump International Hotel, Washington, DC, says that branding is especially important to Trump Hotels because it is a family-owned business. “The Trump name is synonymous with luxury, quality, outstanding hotel location and service that is consistent with today’s guests’ expectations.” With respect to the meetings and hospitality industries, she adds: “Branding is a means of giving a sense of what can be expected at a property.”

Whether it’s Trump’s open-in-the-fall Washington, DC, hotel (located in the city’s historic Old Post Office building on Pennsylvania Avenue) or late summer’s to-be-debuted sleek, modern Vancouver property (the city’s first luxury hotel to open in the past six years), you can bet promotion began at conception. In his “Kick Ass” article, author Bravo explains: “Trump doesn’t wait for something to be finished to start promoting it. Marketing continues while the project is under construction.”

A Family Affair
General Manager Philipp Posch, Trump International Hotel & Tower Vancouver, details his recent experience with the Vancouver hotel and the family’s dedication to the Trump brand’s perfection. It is a viewpoint from which all can learn. It is: “Whatever you do, do it better than anyone else. Never settle.”

CR&T
The media like to mention when well-known corporations take employees to high-end resorts. What the stories don’t include is how critical to a company’s bottom line these gatherings are, and how teambuilding programs, rewards and incentive trips boost productivity, bond team members, increase employee retention and significantly decrease costs associated with having to constantly train new workers. Meeting-friendly resorts with excellent golf courses and enviable spas are the sweet spot for reward and incentive programs, and for meetings that strategically combine achieving corporate business goals with time for employees (and perhaps spouses and families) to play and relax.

The Value of Meetings

The Broadmoor in Colorado Springs, Colorado, understands the value of meetings. It offers a resort campus that meets the needs of employers and employees on every level, and is less than 30 minutes from the city’s airport. All of that made it the right choice for Amanda Polewski, marketing coordinator for Plano, Texas-based Montgomery Coscia Greilich LLP, a firm that offers strategy and management consulting in addition to traditional accounting services. Polewski was tasked with remotely planning the company’s May 2016 client appreciation trip, which meant she had to trust and depend on her contacts at the resort. The process was a success.

Without the benefit of site visits, Polewski went with recommendations from within the firm for potential resorts. “The Broadmoor was one of the resorts recommended by a partner in our firm who has done multiple similar trips. The trip needed to be short — two days maximum — and because of that, we couldn’t afford to lose much time in transit from the airport. Other factors during the RFP/proposal process were cost, weather and hours of daylight.”

When all was said and done, Polewski found that The Broadmoor, a five-diamond, five-star resort, provided the most competitive rates. “The Broadmoor definitely gave us the best rates for rooms and golf, and were additionally situated perfectly for a May golf trip,” she points out. “The other recommended resorts were on the coasts, and in addition to being higher in cost they were also looking like they would be much more crowded and hot due to location and time of year.”

Even when there were problems, Polewski says the resort knew what to do. “Jeff Overgaard was my main point of contact and handled all of the Broadmoor-side planning for us. He handled all of my questions with patience and set up everything we needed. Communication is obviously limited when you’re planning remotely, so that can be a challenge the bigger the group and the more requirements,” she adds. “When we ran into problems with the group being separated and possibly missing the first tee time, it was frustrating trying to redirect everything remotely from all involved parties. But The Broadmoor was responsive as soon as I let Jeff know the situation, rescheduling everything for the day as needed. For our group’s purposes, I would say that planning remotely was as effective as meeting with key Broadmoor representatives beforehand and planning with the benefit of onsite tours would have been.”

Because the focus of this event was golf and dining, the golf experience was important. “The Broadmoor definitely gave us the best rates for rooms and golf, and were additionally situated perfectly for a May golf trip.”

Amanda Polewski
Marketing Coordinator
Montgomery Coscia Greilich LLP
Plano, TX

Site Selection

Meeting-Friendly Golf & Spa Resorts

The Sweet Spot for Reward and Incentive Programs

By Christine Loomis

Coscia Greilich LLP, a firm that offers strategy and management consulting in addition to traditional accounting services. The firm has done multiple similar trips. The trip needed to be short — two days maximum — and because of that, we couldn’t afford to lose much time in transit. Other factors during the RFP/proposal process were cost, weather, and hours of daylight.

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All the Ways You Never Thought to Include Golf in a Meeting

Golf doesn’t have to mean a full-on 18-hole tournament, and golf isn’t only just for diehard players. In fact, golf lends itself to all kinds of formats that can be easily included at a meeting or convention and that can facilitate teambuilding, fun and challenges to motivate employees.

The golf team at Hyatt Regency Hill Country Resort and Spa in San Antonio, Texas, has found many creative ways to integrate golf into meetings and inspire groups. Here are just a few of them:

• **Set up an executive course.** Play either 18 short holes for about 2.5 hours or nine short holes for less than an hour and a half. The golf staff can do this easily even if there is no actual executive course on property.

• **Speed golf.** In this format, players walk, run or jog the course with four clubs to see who can complete the course the fastest. It’s just nine holes and players are timed, with starts at five-minute increments.

• **All-sport golf.** No golf club required for this one. Instead, the golf bag includes a football, soccer ball, lacrosse stick and ball, Nurf Vortex, tennis racket and ball, baseball bat and ball, Frisbee, hockey stick and golf ball. Players tee off with whichever piece of equipment they want, then move to the landing spot and choose the next piece of equipment. When they reach the green, they use the hockey stick — or something else if they want — to put the golf ball in the cup.

• **Glow-in-the-dark.** For both golfers and non-golfers, this putting activity includes glow-in-the-dark props and golf balls, as well as glow-in-the-dark necklaces for all participants. The players put through the course, keeping track of their score to see who finishes with the least number of putts. It’s a great icebreaker or teambuilding activity.

• **Glow-in-the-dark.** No, it’s not traditional disc golf. The target in play here is a circled zone on each green. Groups can play one to nine holes, and each team works to score a hole on the green by landing in the circled zone. The team with the least number of throws wins. The resort also has paired this activity with a cigar-rolling station so attendees can learn to roll their own cigars. It’s about creating fun and memorable experiences, not actually forming golf skills.

• **5K fun run.** No golf necessary. This is a way to use the course and get attendees out into a beautiful setting, running along the golf course. Many golf courses, including Hill Country Golf Club, are designated as Certified Audubon Cooperative Sanctuaries, offering both nature and golf-course landscaping for a 5K run.

Rick Eisenman
President and CEO
Eisenman & Associates Inc.
Richmond, VA

The 15-inch golf activity at Hyatt Regency Hill Country Resort and Spa.

The most serious problem was related to missed flights on the way out, which was beyond anyone’s control. The Broadmoor would have done anything differently. They made things pretty easy on us.”

“Streamsong is about an authentic golf experience,” Hanse says. “Everything a group needs on its extensive meeting and function space. The Greenbrier not only has a lot of space but it has a lot of unique space, from bright, colorful and ornate ballrooms to the rustic atmosphere at Kate’s Mountain Lodge and Howard’s Creek Lodge.”

Eisenman says groups should plan some outside events so that attendees can “experience the beauty of the area,” not the least of which is the surrounding Allegheny Mountains.

In spite of its away-from-it-all feel, The Greenbrier offers surprising ease of access. “Most of my clients are from the mid-Atlantic area so most drove in,” Eisenman says. “Those that had to fly had no trouble getting into the Lewisburg airport. And the Greenbrier has a shuttle so you don’t need to rent a car.” There were many highlights of the event, and dinner
“Hilton Sandestin offers the key components to support a successful conference.”

Cynthia P. Baxter
Executive Assistant
Newk’s Eatery
Jackson, MS

At Prime 44 West, the resort’s upscale steakhouse, was definitely one of them. “The meal was sensational, and the wine selection was amazing. Also, one of my clients winning at the casino was pretty cool as well,” Eiseman says.

If he were to do one thing differently the next time, it would be to extend the time at the resort. “I wish I would have made the event a half or full day longer. There is so much to see and do that two days really wasn’t enough, especially when you are playing golf each day.”

He advises planners considering The Greenbrier to be flexible. “If you can come during a shoulder season or an off pattern (we did a Sunday to Tuesday) it will not only save you some money but the
outs and recreation amenities won’t be as crowded.”

Easy Access to Complete Resort Complex

Florida’s Panhandle is in many ways unlike the rest of the state. In terms of geography, weather and vibe, it’s closer to its neighbors to the north and west than to southern Florida. No wonder it’s a favorite destination for companies in the South. Newk’s Eatery, headquartered in Jackson, Mississippi, and comprised of more than 100 restaurants to date, welcomed 325 of its franchise owners, operations, general managers, marketing, catering and support center staff to Hilton Sandestin Beach Golf Resort & Spa for the company’s annual convention in April 2016. Located within the Sandestin Golf and Beach Resort in Miramar Beach, Florida, the Hilton is tucked in-between the Gulf of Mexico and Choctawhatchee Bay. “Hilton Sandestin offers the key components to support a successful conference: layout and ample meeting space, up-to-date audio-visual technology, comfortable guest rooms and plenty of onsite activities,” says Cynthia P. Baxter, executive assistant with Newk’s Eatery and a corporate conference planner with more than 12 years of experience. And it’s easy to get to. “The drive is not complicated coming from Central Mississippi or neighboring states to Florida,” she says, “If flying, there are three airports within a 35-70 minute drive time.”

Baxter has high praise for the hotel’s event and banquet managers. “They were part of our team. They knew every aspect of our agenda. Also, the meeting space layout was very convenient. Even though we used multiple conference rooms, all of our meetings were in one central location.”

Baxter notes that “efficiency is the key to daily setup,” and the space the group used was perfect. “The Coastal Foyer offers a registration desk with a closet and a separate storage room. It’s the perfect setup for registration, storing and moving material to the daily sessions.”

The staff, too, was efficient enough to handle the group’s busy schedule and the need to shift gears for each event. “The third day was our busiest,” Baxter says. “We started out with a general session, rotating round tables, lunch with a guest speaker and an afternoon training session. That evening we hosted a reception, awards dinner and closed the evening with a band. The resort was able to flip the meeting space for a seamless transition from each session and event.”

Sandestin Resort’s golf facilities, close to the Hilton, were also part of the meeting. “On Monday afternoon, we offered a golf tourney at the Raven. The teams enjoyed the beautiful course and the challenge.”

While attendees were in meetings, some spouses accessed the resort’s other amenities, including the spa. In fact, the Hilton Sandestin and surrounding resort area offer so much, Baxter says the thing she would do differently next time is to add to the event. “I would include up to a three-day pre- or post-conference rate to reward attendees before or after the conference,” she says.

And she’d make another change as well. “I would have a post-conference meeting with the resort staff. It’s important to receive feedback when it’s fresh on everyone’s mind.”

For other planners, Baxter has these words of advice: “Communicate the group’s vision and expectations in order to pull off a successful conference. Always ask questions and never assume the property knows what’s important to you.”

Inspiring Setting and Intriguing Activities

Out in Carefree, 27 miles north of Scottsdale, Arizona, Boulders Resort & Spa provides planners with an inspiring setting and a slew of intriguing activities to bond or motivate attendees. The resort has more than 50,000 sq. ft of indoor and outdoor function space and can accommodate 10 to 400 corporate guests.

Golf and an opulent spa await attendees, horseback riding, exploring the desert via Hummer or ATV and stargazing with a professional astronomer.

The resort has a variety of options specifically for meeting guests, including a spiritual and uplifting shamanic experience, milodoy classes during which attendees craft their own cocktails and a cowboy-for-a-day adventure.

At the spa, attendees can choose their preferred scent at the Aroma Blend Bar and take away a body product with that specific scent.

Another Scottsdale area resort of note is Talking Stick Resort, which at 15 stories high is the tallest building in Scottsdale and provides spectacular views of the city and the surrounding mountains from guest rooms and the top floor Orange Sky Restaurant.

California-based Lynette Owens & Associates’s Vice President of Sales Debbie Grassi recently booked a client at the property and says Talking Stick Resort offers great rooms, meeting facilities, and golf and spa amenities for many of our clients, plus it offers a casino that is as nice as any casino hotel in Las Vegas. The meeting space at Talking Stick is centralized and easy to get to, and outside function space and their Degree 270 venue offer great views of the Scottsdale Valley and beautiful sunset views of the Arizona mountains. Golf is on property, which makes easy coordination for tournaments and other golf events.”

The Talking Stick Golf Club, adjacent to the resort, offers two professional courses managed by Troon Golf. The North course is a Scottish links-style course with deep bunkers, while the more traditional South course has tree-lined fairways and four holes with water hazards.

The 496 room resort offers nightly entertainment, excellent dining venues, spa services, a popular casino, and cultural displays of the Pima and Maricopa tribes.

Resorts across the country offer groups and planners many activities to choose from. Golf and spa options are always at the top of the list. But planners working with amenity-rich resorts will find more engaging activities and programs to incorporate into their meetings than they can possibly use — not a bad situation to be in.

In the end, though, it’s all about boosting business, and these resorts help planners do exactly that.

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Doing Good While Supporting the Company’s Business Goals

By Patrick Simms

Corporate Social Responsibility

ffite meetings can be opportu-
nities for attendees to do good in local communities, and the main motivation for extending corporate social responsibility (CSR) into the meetings sphere is (or should be) moral: It’s simply the right thing to do for companies who have the means.

But satisfying an ethical duty doesn’t preclude other benefits that can result from CSR activities at meetings. The programs also can support a company’s business goals, such as creating a more cohesive and engaged work force. Participants can bond over the activity, get to know each other better and learn to work as a team. And assuming they value community service, they also will become more engaged with the company that staged the program and demonstrates it shares that value.

Victoria Johnson, CMP, CMM, global manager, strategic meetings management at Northbrook, Illinois-based UIL LLC, has been a champion of sorts when it comes to integrating CSR with the safety science company’s SMMF. Doing so is good business strategy, since CSR programs “over two of the three reasons you have a meeting, which are networking, motivation and learning,” Johnson explains. “There is the teambuilding/networking component, and attendees also become motivated in their work for the company. They think better about the company and its mission.”

Walking the Talk

And especially for high-profile meet-
ings and events, that perception extends beyond the company’s employees: CSR “is part of who we are as a company; let’s have our meetings and events reflect that as well,” says Johnson. “It’s a very prominent marketing activity when all can see that you’re ‘walking the talk.’” As part of the SMMF protocols, Johnson sends post-meeting CSR/sustainability reports back to UIL’s CSR office so they can report the activities to the company’s board members. They also can feed the information to customer service because some of our customers are now asking about our CSR initiatives,” she adds. “More and more customers want to do business with responsible companies. And the other side of it is to attract and retain employees who want to work for companies that are socially responsible.”

Teradata, a Dayton, Ohio-based data analytics company, also has integrated CSR into its meetings in a systematic way, via Teradata Cares. “The company does try to have a Teradata Cares presence in most of our large meetings (including the external events Partners and Universe), but it seems it’s really becoming prominent in a lot of our meetings. It is increasing,” observes Sherri Morgan, director of community relations, Teradata Cares. “I joined the company in 2012 and we already had a Teradata Cares presence at our Partner and at Universe conferences, and we are now at sales meetings and even smaller events like training sessions, where sometimes they’ll do a Cares activity.”

The general trend reflected by UIL and Teradata is a rise in CSR activities at meet-
ings. As Bonnie Boisner, vice president of event management for marketing and loyalty analytics company Aimia, notes: “We work with many of our clients to incorporate CSR activities into their meetings and events. It continues to grow year over year. According to the 2015 SITE Index, over two-thirds of both buyers (67 percent) and sellers (71 percent) incorporate one or more activities in their travel programs to help reflect corporate social responsibility.”

Incentive Program Component

This survey result by the Society for Incentive Travel Excellence highlights the integration of CSR with incentive programs, which may be a bit surprising. After all, incentive programs are generally supposed to be about diversion for top performers, as their “reward.” But clearly, community service at the destination can be quite rewarding.

“I have evidence based on our post-event surveys that (CSR) is the most valuable experience from people attending incentive trips,” notes Thais Toro, MBA, corporate event planner for Atlanta, Georgia-based Cox Automotive. The com-
pany partners with local organizations that are in need in destinations such as the Caribbean, Puerto Rico and Mexico.

This year, a 210-participant incentive group visited Aruba, where Cox provided a senior center “not just a monetary donation but improvement of the organization. We painted the whole facility inside and out in four hours,” Toro relates. In order to ensure the paint job was feasible in that time, Cox hired a contractor to prep the walls and surfaces. Incentive qualifiers also took to improving the garden at the center, treated the seniors and staff to lunch, and gifted them bags of personal items.

“We were having as well as the DMC so impressed that an interna-
tional company was giving back to their community, which (they noted) never happens with the people who are actually from the island. They got inspired, and the DMC provided us complimentary transporta-
tion, while the hotel provided complimentary water and some side food items for lunch. So we were able to save that money and invest it back into the senior cen-
ter,” Toro adds.

Teambuilding and Competition

Apart from being an inspiring activ-
ity for attendees and local partners, the paint project was organized so as to pro-
tome teambuilding. “We assigned them to groups and we made it competitive,” says Toro. “Each group of 10 or 20 wore a bandana of a different color, and painted a different part of the wall.” Similarly, a CSR activity at a meeting in Wisconsin

Cox Automotive’s 2016 Presidents Club incentive trip to Aruba included volunteering at a senior center doing gardening, painting and other services.

Attendees of last year’s Teradata Partners conference assembled wheelchairs and donated them to a local organization in Anaheim, California.

“CSR activities are truly a unique way to break down barriers and allow attendees of all generations, demographics, interests and abilities to work together to accomplish something great.”

Bonnie Boisner, U&P Event Management

Aimia, Minneapolis, MN

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Victoria Johnson, CMP, CMM, global manager, strategic meetings management, at UL LLC, notes, “There are also national companies and also local companies. They’re not blocking the company, they’re just saying you have to do it prior to the onsite experience.”

Boisner also says saving time by combining CSR with a dinner or reception one of the evenings. “As an example, one of our automotive clients had artist Erik Wal do a few different paintings. Then they did a silent auction for the paintings. The money was donated to the boys and girls club.”

This year, Cox Automotive combined CSR with the registration period for a 2,000-attendees Sales Summit in Phoenix. “When we reached out to the attendees, they provided us with a wish list,” says Johnson. “They asked us to go to their community and do something. We worked with the attendees to incorporate it into the registration process.”

The company, which does events for a variety of causes, has been doing this for seven years. “We’ve worked with clients to incorporate small activities including filling backpacks with school supplies for children in the local communities,” says Boisner. “This could be a time-effective CSR activity as much of the activity (buying the supplies, packing the backpacks) can be done prior to the onsite experience.”

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In-house Community Relations

“We have partnered with hotels directly, as they often have unique experiences right on the property,” says Boisner.

In-house Community Relations

“We have a community relations team in our company, and we go through them first,” says Thais Toro, corporate event planner, Cox Automotive. “Based on the meeting location, we provide them with a list of organizations that have a need and that will work for us, given the size of our group.”

With Attendees

Most if not all attendees will be moved by a community service mission, which has a universal appeal. “Meetings and events bring together a diverse group of attendees, but one thing remains constant—people want to make a difference,” says Boisner. “CSR activities are truly a unique way to bring people together.”

A bike-building program held by UL at its leadership conference in Phoenix, Arizona, elicited these thank-yous from young beneficiaries.

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“More and more customers want to do business with responsible companies. And the other side of it is to attract and retain employees who want to work for companies that are socially responsible.”

Victoria Johnson, CMP, CMM, Global Manager, SMM Global Meetings & Events, UL LLC, Northbrook, IL
Site Selection

It’s Better at the Beach
Where Seaside Events Rise to the Occasion

By Diana Lambdin Meyer

One of the many benefits of having meetings and special events at a beach location is the considerable savings on decorations. Mother Nature has taken care of that in the form of palm trees, sunsets and peaceful vistas complemented by refreshing breezes and the occasional wispy clouds passing by.

Décor by Mother Nature

“That’s one reason I really like coordinating beach events because the décor is naturally taken care of and no one ever complains about the view,” says Michelle, who has managed corporate events from coast to coast for a major financial institution for more than 10 years.

“In fact, I can’t remember ever receiving a complaint about a beach event because everyone is always so relaxed and in good spirits when outdoors and so close to the water,” she says.

The Sanctuary at Kiawah Island Resort, located on the pristine beaches of Kiawah Island, a 10-mile-long barrier island about 25 miles southwest of Charleston, South Carolina, has been the setting for dozens of the meetings Michelle coordinates for her employer. The property has two focal points, starting with the Kiawah Island Golf Resort, which has more than 22,000 sf of meeting space and 90 holes of championship golf. The Sanctuary at Kiawah Island Resort features six outdoor spaces ranging from an intimate 650-sf veranda to the massive Mingo Point, which can accommodate from 50 to 800 people.

Michelle has used all of these spaces for various events, but always gets the most positive feedback from events at Mingo Point, which she describes as “a massive picnic area with shade trees, casual seating spaces and fabulous views.”

“I like that there is a built-in outdoor kitchen, so you save in catering and setup costs,” she says. “We’ve had oyster roasts with steel drum bands and it’s just the perfect setting to bring a group together.”

Over the years, Michelle has learned to check on three things before planning a beach meeting or event:

• The tidal charts. Low tide makes for a good excursion to have a pedicure before this business outing. Or, pedicures on the beach could be an event in itself. Think about it.

• The turtle nesting season. Low tide makes for various events, but always gets the most positive feedback from events at Mingo Point, which she describes as “a

Sea Turtles Welcome

Another consideration on Mother Nature’s schedule that may impact events on a number of our nation’s beaches is the nesting season for endangered loggerhead and green sea turtles. Florida, Hawaii and the Caribbean fall into this category.

“On the 26 miles of sand on South Walton Beach on Florida’s Gulf Coast, the turtle nesting season is from May until late September. Each morning during this period, volunteers with South Walton Turtle Watch patrol the beaches and if evidence of a nest is found, orange netting is placed around the area and signs notify humans to keep away.

Local ordinance prevents leaving tents, tables or other setups on the beach overnight, and if a turtle comes ashore and lays eggs in the middle of an event space, well, you’ll just have to work around it.”

Donita Jacobs with Torchmark Travel in Dallas has been coordinating events for corporate clients for years on South Walton beaches and has rarely encountered a complication because of sea turtles. In fact, the times it has occurred, her attendees have been delighted to witness this wonder of nature and learn more about the protection of wildlife and endangered species in this area.

“Sea turtles are always welcomed guests at any of our events,” says Jacobs. “We move our event a few feet down the beach and everyone goes on with business.”

Numerous times over the years, some of these beaches in South Walton Beach have been named the most pristine and

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Numerous times over the years, some of these beaches in South Walton Beach have been named the most pristine and...
environmentally protected pieces of coastal property in Florida, which is one of the attractions to this area, as well as the sugar-white sand and the turquoise reflection it creates combined with the clarity of the water here. South Walton Beach includes 16 unique and charming beachside communities that are known for artists’ galleries, festivals and independent restaurants all connected by more than 200 miles of hiking and hiking trails. Sandestin is one of those 16 beach communities and home to the Hilton Sandestin Beach Golf Resort & Spa, the largest full-service beach resort on Florida’s Northwest coast. The more than 60,000 sf of indoor and outdoor event space is one of the many reasons Jacobs at Torchmark has used the resort for meetings with her clients. These gatherings usually range from 100–150 people.

“A number of the indoor meeting spaces have great windows and views of the Gulf for when we have to be indoors, but the variety of outdoor spaces for receptions and meals always provides a fresh option,” Jacobs says.

She utilizes the outdoor venues as an opportunity for “walking meetings” when possible. With small groups of 20 or fewer, the conversation continues while moving along the beach or pathways, thus making better use of time but also providing more exposure to the natural environment, which is the premiere attraction of this region. “It can be a little cool in winter and early spring, but the Hilton Sandestin is equipped with a number of outdoor space heaters that allow us to be outside but still comfortable,” she says.

Florida’s ‘Magical’ Southwest Coast
A lot of people don’t realize just how beautiful the Florida Gulf Coast is,” says Bryan, a meeting planner for a major lifestyle recreation company who is coordinating a major event at the Marco Island Marriott Beach Resort, Golf Club & Spa in Southwest Florida. “The beach business is our business and these options have great windows and views of the ocean views, but nothing beats the Florida Gulf Coast. It’s also providing more exposure to the natural environment, which is the premiere attraction of this region.”

Several of the indoor meeting spaces have great windows and views of the Gulf for when we have to be indoors, but the variety of outdoor spaces for receptions and meals always provides a fresh option,” Bryan says. She utilizes the outdoor venues as an opportunity for “walking meetings” when possible. With small groups of 20 or fewer, the conversation continues while moving along the beach or pathways, thus making better use of time but also providing more exposure to the natural environment, which is the premiere attraction of this region. “It can be a little cool in winter and early spring, but the Hilton Sandestin is equipped with a number of outdoor space heaters that allow us to be outside but still comfortable,” she says.

Bryan is also excited about Marco Island Marriott’s rebranding to JW Marriott, which will take place on January 1, 2017. This is a part of major renovation that has been underway for almost two years and includes the addition of another tower of guest rooms and meeting space. When complete, the newly expanded JW Marriott Marco Island Resort will have 810 guest rooms. Noteworthy Beach Meeting Spots
The Ocean Reef Club on the northmost tip of Key Largo in the Florida Keys has in its backyard the only living coral reef, a great attraction for conference attendees who snorkel or dive. The hotel has 275 guest rooms, more than 30,000 sf of indoor and outdoor meeting space, two 18-hole championship golf courses, a marina and 20 tennis courts, all about an hour from Miami International Airport.

The iconic Sawgrass Marriott Golf Resort & Spa in Ponte Vedra Beach, Florida, has recently completed a $25 million, resort-wide renovation that includes 515 guest rooms, pool area, spa and 61,000 sf of meeting space. Located on 65 acres of beachfront property, the Sawgrass Marriott includes 99 holes of championship golf.

Sawgrass Marriott Golf Resort & Spa

South Seas Island Resort

A teambuilding boat regatta adds an element of fun competition to the meeting agenda at South Seas Island Resort on Captiva Island, Florida.

The Grand Floridian yacht, docked at the Diplomat Resort, offers group cruises.

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The 2½-mile white sand beach is ideal for group activities that include sandcastle building contests, beach Olympics and cardboard sailboat regattas. With 471 guest rooms, the South Seas Island Resort also includes four lawn settings, two beach venues and a marina event space, which is exceptionally popular because of the manatees and dolphins that enjoy the company at the marina.

At Eau Palm Beach Resort & Spa on Southeast Florida’s Atlantic Coast on the south end of Palm Beach island, the 30,000 sf of meeting space includes an oceanfront courtyard and ballroom terrace, event lawn and pool terrace for events. Overnight accommodations in a business cabana provide private access to the business lounge and pools as well as space for up to five guests per cabana. The oceanfront Grand Pavilion at Wild Dunes Resort near Charleston, South Carolina, can host up to 600 people.

An action station is set up for a South Seas island-style event at The Westin Maui Resort & Spa, Ka‘anapali.
It’s no accident that Orlando — the No. 1 family vacation destination in the world — also rules the roost as the top U.S. meeting destination, again named to that lofty position for 2015 by Cvent. The city broke an all-time record with 66 million visitors in 2015, the most of any other U.S. destination.

Orlando offers formidable airlift, with one of the most passenger-friendly major airports in the country, and a long and ever-expanding list of exceptional meeting hotels ranging from high-end luxury to high-value economy.

But the factor that truly sets Orlando apart in the minds of many meeting planners and attendees is its extraordinary range of things to do. And that range stretches from a world-class dining scene, to nightlife and entertainment, to unique offsite venues and the spectacular theme parks that make Orlando the singular place that it is.

“The great thing about Orlando is that the list of things to do during a meeting is always being updated,” says Stephanie Green, director of product development at destination management company Hello! Florida. “And that’s important since we have groups that repeat Orlando as their destination year after year. But we’re still able to find new and exciting things for them to do, because there is always something new and exciting to do in Orlando, whether that’s at a theme park or an airboat tour or some other kind of activity that gets them outdoors in the sunshine.”

Adds Fred Shea, senior vice president, sales and services, for Visit Orlando: “Everything you hear now about what’s going on with meetings is that it’s really all about the larger experience attendees can have in the destination. Everything you read now says attendees are looking for an experience they will remember, a meeting they can look back on in the future and say was a great event. So the message we want to get out is that when you come to Orlando, and you use venues such as CityWalk or Disney Springs or the new I-Drive 360 or the Harry Potter venue at Universal or the IllumiNations fireworks show at Epcot at Disney World, your attendees are going to have experiences that they cannot get anywhere else. And they’re going to remember those experiences for a very long time and tie them back to your meeting.”
Orlando
A Dining Mecca

O
f all the ways in which Orlando has evolved as a des-
tination over the last few years, none has been more
significant than the improvement of its dining scene.

The most important thing to understand about Orlando as
a meeting destination is that the city’s dining scene has grown
dramatically over the last few years,” says Visit Orlando’s Fred
Shea. “And that’s especially true of dining opportunities for
meeting groups.”

As current examples of an ongoing evolution that brings ever-increas-
ing quality and sophis-
tication to Orlando’s
restaurant scene, Shea
cites Pointe Orlando, a
dining, shopping and
entertainment district
across the street from
the Orange County Con-
vention Center, and the
new I-Drive 360 com-
plices located a short dis-
tance up the street.

At the same time,
Shea says, Orlando’s
culinary innovation also is centered on the well-established
“Restaurant Row,” located along Sand Lake Road, and the
new and expanded Disney Springs complex that is now being
completed on the massive site of the old Downtown Disney in
Lake Buena Vista.

“The opening this year of the ful-
ly completed Disney Springs is go-
ing to be a huge factor in the expan-
sion of our local dining scene,” Shea
says. “But at the same time, we’re
seeing new restaurants at City-
Walk at Universal Orlando. And, of
course, ‘Restaurant Row’ is still a
thriving dining area, especially for
meetings and events.”

A newly invigorated and much
improved inventory of local res-

taurants is vital to the continued
growth of Orlando as one of the
largest and most prominent meet-
ing destinations in the U.S., notes
Jennifer Targhetta, an account ex-
cutive at destination management
company 360 Destination Group.

“One of the misconceptions
about Orlando has been that we
only have chain restaurants,” Targhetta says. “And that is defi-
nitely not the case. Over the last few years, the dining scene in
Orlando has really developed and evolved. So today, I’d say
we’re one of the better dining destinations in the entire coun-
try. And we have fine dining restaurants located all over the
city at this point.”

Orlando also can boast a list of restaurants operated by
James Beard Award winners and nominees, as well as celebrity
toddl English to Emeril Lagasse to Iron Chef Ma-

saharu Morimoto, who debuted a new and already acclaimed
Morimoto Asia at Disney Springs last year.

“We’ve also seen the number of new restaurants being
opened increased even further over the last couple of years,”
Targhetta says. “And that is very important to our continuing
growth as a meeting destination, because of course planners
and attendees want a good selection of really great restaurants
when they come to town. And Orlando has that now.”

Although Targhetta has an area-wide list of restaurants she
favors for clients, she is particularly fond of Restaurant Row, located along Sand
Lake Road. She fre-
quently works with
planners to create
dine-around eve-
nings that are logis-
tically convenient.

“We use Restaurant Row so of-
ten because it’s very convenient for
groups,” Targhetta says. “You have
so many good restaurants right
there. You can find any kind of food
you want. And there are always new
places opening.”

Among her favorite establish-
ments is Vines, a locally owned
restaurant that serves steaks and
seafood, as well as small tapas-style
plates. The restaurant also works
with the Orange County Convention Center to create unforgettable dining experiences.

The annu...
Orlando A Dining Mecca

with planners to create customized, one-of-a-kind menus, “It’s a relatively new place that’s only been open a few years,” Targhetta says. “But it has become very popular with meeting groups because they do a really great job.”

Another dining venue she likes is Eddie V’s, a chop house. “It has a great location,” Targhetta says, “because the back side of the restaurant overlooks Sand Lake. So it offers a really nice environment, with great views.”

Another go-to Restaurant Row option for Targhetta is Roy’s. “We do a lot of groups there, because it’s a very unique place that serves South Pacific-style seafood that is very influenced by Hawaiian cuisine,” Targhetta says. “They also have a very good sushi bar.”

Targhetta also favors Pointe Orlando because of its location and roster of dining options under one roof. “We use Cuba Libre a lot,” she says. “One obvious reason it’s so popular is that Cuban cuisine and Cuban culture are such a part of Florida. Another great thing about Cuba Libre is that they provide great service for groups. And they’re always helpful in trying to help planners create the best event they possibly can.”

Within the Pointe, Targhetta also likes the new Lafayette’s, which serves New Orleans-style Cajun and Creole cuisine in a Big Easy-themed, fun environment. It also features live music. “It has great décor that really plays up the New Orleans theme,” Targhetta says. “And again, it just offers something different. It also offers good value and good service, both of which are very important to planners.”

In Disney Springs, in addition to the new Morimoto Asia, Targhetta recommends — and uses — the House of Blues and The Boathouse, a spectacular waterfront venue that features amphibious cars and classic Italian wooden boats that can accommodate small groups for scenic boat rides within the sprawling Disney Springs complex.

Orlando also is home to a pair of world-class new steak-houses. Del Frisco’s is located in the convention center district, across the street from Pointe Orlando. The second is the Orlando outpost of critically acclaimed STK, which opened last month in Disney Springs, and features rooftop and private dining.

The new STK, which opened last month in Disney Springs, offers full restaurant buyouts and a private dining room. The House of Blues bar and restaurant, serving traditional Southern cooking, also features a live music club.

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Just as Orlando’s dining scene has evolved to become more sophisticated, so has its entertainment and nightlife scene. “For example, Blue Martini has been a popular entertainment venue for years,” says Jennifer Targhetta of 360 Destination Group. “But now it has moved over to the Pointe and is even more fantastic. It’s just a great venue for groups. And Cuba Libre has done a great job of making the transition each night from a restaurant to a nightlife venue. And it has that great Latin energy.”

New on the Orlando nightlife scene is a local outpost of Mango’s, the world-famous Latin club that features Las Vegas-style live entertainment backed up with a tasty menu and formidable array of creative and colorful cocktails, including an amazing array of Cuban mojitos. “And Mango’s has an amazing energy,” Targhetta says. The venue can host groups of up to 2,000 attendees.

Other live entertainment venues recommended by Shea include the new Cowgirls Rock bar in the I-Drive 360 complex, as well as more established local favorites Howl at the Moon and Tin Roof, both of which feature live music in a fun, energetic environment. Tin Roof also is among Targhetta’s favorite entertainment venues.

Among Visit Orlando S.V.P. Fred Shea’s favorite places for live music is Urban 40 American Brasserie & Lounge, a stylish dining and entertainment venue on Restaurant Row. “They feature live music like jazz and American standards, so it’s a wonderful venue for meeting groups that want something different. It’s a throwback to the 1940s.” Another restaurant that morphs into an after-dinner live entertainment venue and is recommended by Shea is Rocco’s Tacos & Tequila Bar, which serves 225 different tequilas. “It’s a lot of fun, and because of that it’s become a sort of nightclub, in addition to serving great Mexican food,” Shea says.

And for planners and attendees looking for something a little more grandiose, there are the long-running La Nouba by Cirque du Soleil at Disney Springs and Blue Man Group at Universal CityWalk. Coming in 2017 to International Drive is a more casual/fun entertainment option: Topgolf, a state-of-the-art golf range facility. The three-level location will be 65,000 sf and offer 102 climate-controlled hitting bays for up to six players each. The venue also will offer teambuilding options and up to 3,000 sf of private event space. For those who want to experience the outdoor version, Orlando offers more than 175 golf courses to choose from.

Another fun venue, Shea says, is the bowling-dining-entertainment complex Splitsville, located in Disney Springs, a bowling-dining-entertainment complex. “Bowling has become popular again, especially for groups,” Shea says. “And Splitsville is just something that is very unique and a lot of fun.”

La Nouba by Cirque du Soleil is in residence at Le Théâtre in Disney Springs.

A new bridge to Disney Springs makes for easy access for guests of the Hilton Orlando Lake Buena Vista.

A new place for good old-fashioned fun is Splitsville, a bowling, dining and entertainment venue in Disney Springs.
Orlando also offers some extraordinary offsite venues, with most of them — such as CityWalk at Universal or Epcot at Walt Disney World — located within the city’s fabled theme parks.

And then, of course, there are the three major theme parks themselves — Disney World, Universal and SeaWorld — which take the term “offsite venue” into an entirely new dimension.

CityWalk at Universal, which has recently completed an expansion that included the addition of a number of new dining and entertainment options, is “a fantastic location for doing a block party for large groups,” 360 Destination Group’s Jennifer Targhetta says. “And you can do a buyout that offers a lot of individual options for dining and entertainment. For smaller groups, you can also do individual buyouts of venues like Jimmy Buffet’s Margaritaville or Hard Rock Cafe and Hard Rock Live.”

Hard Rock Live at Universal Orlando ranks as one of Targhetta’s favorite venues. “We’ve done all sorts of things at Hard Rock Live,” she says. “We’ve done awards dinners. We’ve done receptions that include a live entertainment show. We have a small group coming up in the fall that is going to use the (John) Lennon Room for a special meet-and-greet. It’s just a really cool venue that offers a number of options in terms of how you use it.”

Onsite catering is provided by the adjacent Hard Rock Cafe, which is also available for buyouts.

Another offsite venue unique to Orlando is Fantasy of Flight, a private facility, open only to groups, that features museum-quality exhibits about the history of aviation. “We’ve used it for receptions,” Targhetta says. “We’ve used it for dinners. We’ve used it for corporate functions as well.”

Hard Rock Live Orlando at Universal Orlando Resort hosts corporate functions catered by Hard Rock Cafe.

When it comes to fun, few attractions in Orlando can match the new Orlando Eye, a giant and stylishly modern “Ferris wheel” that features enclosed compartments. It delivers dramatic, panoramic views of the Orlando area, especially at night. “It’s a great venue for groups, because you can do events outdoors or indoors right beside it,” Shea says. “You can also bring in live entertainment. And it’s part of the I-Drive 360 complex that also includes new venues such as Madame Tussaud’s wax museum, so for large groups, the Orlando Eye can serve as anchor attraction for a multi-faceted evening.”

Stephanie Green, director of product development at destination management company Hello! Florida, points out that another activity popular with groups is airboat excursions along the St. John’s River or the waterways in nearby Kissimmee that skirt the northern edge of The Everglades. “An airboat tour gives attendees a chance to see the natural side of Florida,” Green says. “And for a lot of people, seeing the alligators and the many varieties of birds and other wildlife you see, it’s just another aspect of the area that is special. It’s exciting. And memorable.”
The Theme Park Capital

Of course, no matter how many activities there might be to choose from in Orlando, none can rival the major theme parks for attention and enthusiasm. “Orlando is the theme park capital of the world,” says Visit Orlando’s Fred Shea. “The theme parks are the number one reason why we are the No. 1 family vacation destination in the world. And they’ve played a major role in the growth of our meeting industry. For so many groups, the existence of the theme parks and the unique appeal and opportunities they offer are among the main reasons they select Orlando as their destination.”

For many meeting planners, the first time they come to Orlando for a site inspection, they are surprised by what the theme parks offer for adult groups, Shea says. “They’re actually quite surprised by what the theme parks can do for a meeting and the production capabilities they have. They’re also surprised by the flexibility the parks have and the fact that they can accommodate any kind of group, from a relatively small group to a major citywide convention. And in terms of what they can do, they can do virtually anything a planner wants done. And all of it can be tied to your corporate identity or meeting theme.”

But the real benefit of the theme parks, he says, is the extraordinary production capabilities that are included in the price. “And in addition to having all that included in the price of the event, that also means the main reasons they select Orlando as their destination.”

Stephanie Green of Hello! Florida adds that one of the reasons why the theme parks are so popular with groups is that they give planners and attendees the chance to do an event that is truly exclusive. “For example, groups can get exclusive use of Epcot at Disney World or the Harry Potter venue at Universal,” she says. “And to be able to be given exclusive access to a particular part of a theme park on a particular night is just something very special. There’s no other way to do it than to be part of a group. And that’s very special. That’s the appeal, because it’s something they’ll remember forever.”

At the same time, however, none of the theme parks rest on their laurels. Each of them is always planning something new and even more spectacular. Walt Disney World Resort, for example, is now working on a new Star Wars-themed land covering 14 acres — the largest single-themed land expansion ever for the resort. Universal is completing the “Skull Island: Reign of Kong” attraction that will debut this summer, paying homage to the monumental King Kong of movie fame; and Volcano Bay, a full-blown water theme park, is coming to Universal in 2017. SeaWorld opens the new “Mako” shark-themed, 200-foot-high roller coaster on June 10 — billed as Orlando’s tallest, fastest and longest roller coaster.

Meanwhile, ever-popular with groups is the nightly Illuminations: Reflections of Earth firework exhibit at Disney’s Epcot; and the Wizarding World of Harry Potter’s Hogsmeade and Diagon Alley parks, which are even more enchanting at night.

With all the fantasy and thrills Orlando has to offer, it’s no surprise that the city set an all-time record for overall visitation, with 66 million fun-seekers arriving in 2015, more than any other U.S. destination. As such, meeting planners can be confident that meetings in Orlando will draw enthusiastic support from attendees and stakeholders alike.

Imagine your next meeting in a place where unforgettable surroundings inspire creativity. Newly designed guest rooms and state-of-the-art facilities provide the perfect backdrop for meetings from 15 to 15,000. With over two decades of service expertise backed by award-winning accommodations and dining, this is the world you’ll experience at the Walt Disney World Swan and Dolphin Resort.

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Florida

Exceptional Hotels & Resorts and Superb Customer Service Draw Groups Back Year After Year

By John Buchanan

There are two simple, overarching reasons why Florida ranks perennially as the undisputed king of statewide meeting destinations. One is the quality of the Sunshine State’s unparalleled hotel and resort product. The other is the fortuitous coincidence. Because Minneapolis is cold in the winter,” Hanson says, not for the first time in January, when she arranged a five-day, nine-meeting that her timely discovery of Streamsong was a matter of the Ritz-Carlton, Amelia Island, located on the Atlantic coast near Jacksonville. Tschirn uses the hotel every other year for a 45-50 attendee, three-day CME meeting of colon and rectal surgeons. “My attendees and I cannot say enough good things about The Ritz-Carlton, Amelia Island,” Tschirn says. “It’s wonderful for that particular meeting, because a lot of the physicians like to bring their families. And there is just so much to do there, including shopping and all things for kids to do. Amelia Island itself is beautiful. But The Ritz-Carlton itself is fabulous. And they do a phenomenal job for meetings. They just make everyone feel welcome and at home. And the property itself is just gorgeous. And it’s beautifully maintained.”

The 446-room hotel, with more than 48,000 sf of meeting space, also is perfectly sized for Tschirn’s meetings. “It’s big enough to accommodate a range of group sizes or multiple meetings at the same time,” she says. “But it’s small enough that you don’t get lost, like you do in a really big hotel. It’s just the perfect size for most meetings. And the amenities—the beach, the pool, the spa, the golf course—everything is just great.”

She and her attendees also love the nearby small town of Fernandina Beach, a timeless throwback to unspoiled old Florida. “It’s just so quaint and wonderful. All of our attendees love it because they can walk up and down those old cobblestone streets.”

Among Floridians in the know and well-informed meeting planners, Amelia Island and Fernandina Beach rank high on “Favorite place to go” lists. Last year, Visit Florida, the Official Florida Tourism Industry Association, held its annual Florida Encounter, a hosted buyer show for meeting planners from across the country, at Omni Amelia Island Plantation Resort. The hotel and the destination earned a
chord of accolades. Florida Encounter has built a reputation as one of the premier hosted buyer programs in the meeting industry. As a result, it selects each year’s destination and hotel with great care. And for 2015, Omni Amelia Island did an outstanding job for attendees, including a representative from Corporate & Incentive Travel as a media member. Florida Encounter will partner with Experience Kissimmee and Omni Orlando Resort at ChampionsGate next year. The event is set for November 29–December 2, at the Omni property.

Located on 1,350 acres of unspoiled property on a barrier reef just off the northeast coast, Omni Amelia Island features 404 guest rooms and 80,000 sf of indoor and outdoor meeting and event space. One of its most unique venues is the largest multitiered pool deck in northeast Florida.

Amenities include nine restaurants, including Bob’s Steak & Chop House, and Verandah, which serves fresh seafood and Southern-inspired cuisine. Other key amenities include a trio of 18-hole golf courses designed by legendary golf architects Pete Dye, Bobby Weed and Tom Fazio; and a world-class spa. It also features 40,000 sf of newly redesigned indoor event space including the all-new 7,500-sf Coastal Ballroom and 20,000 sf of outdoor space.

Located just 18 miles south of Jacksonville is another of Tschirn’s go-to properties, the charming AAA Five Diamond Ponte Vedra Lodge & Club. Built in 1928, the resort is another one with markedly modern amenities and service.

“Ponte Vedra Inn is just such a neat property,” says Tschirn, who is going back later this year. “It’s very unique. And like Fernandina Beach, it’s that ‘old Florida’ that you don’t see anymore. But there’s also just so much to do. And you can be in Jacksonville in a matter of minutes if you want more options. I just love Ponte Vedra Beach. And like The Ritz-Carlton, Amelia Island, Ponte Vedra Inn has great amenities, like great beach, great tennis courts, the great TPC Sawgrass golf course. And a lot of my doctors love golf and tennis.” The resort offers 25,000 sf of meeting and banquet space.

Earlier this year, Tschirn discovered a new Florida property that quickly earned a spot on her favorite hotels list when she used it for the first time in her notation for the meeting that goes to Amelia Island and Ponte Vedra Beach — the 602-room Hilton Sandestin Beach Golf Resort & Spa. Located in South Walton, near Destin on Florida’s Emerald Coast on the Gulf of Mexico, the Hilton Sandestin features what is arguably the best, unspoiled white sand beach in Florida — and one of the best in the world. The Hilton Sandestin also is Northwest Florida’s largest, full-service beachfront resort hotel.

Like other planners who experience it for the first time, Tschirn and her attendees were enthralled by the unique beauty of the Emerald Coast.

“The Emerald Coast of Florida is just somewhere that everybody wants to see and experience,” she says. “It has soft, white sand beaches that are some of the best in the world. The water is clear. It’s just unlike any other place I’ve seen in Florida, and I’ve been to a lot of the state’s resorts. And Hilton Sandestin, by far, has the best beach I’ve ever seen.”

The room product at Hilton Sandestin also is excellent, Tschirn says. The rooms are especially suited to her group, because many of the doctors bring their families. “The rooms are huge,” Tschirn says. “And you’re getting a very large room without paying a premium rate. I brought my family to the meeting and there was plenty of room for my two kids. The rooms are not just large — they’re fantastic.”

Tschirn also was surprised by how much there is to do. The Hilton Sandestin, part of a sprawling resort complex, features six restaurants, three bars, a one-mile stretch of beach, three swimming pools, four championship golf courses and a world-class Serenity by the Sea spa. It also features 40,000 sf of newly redesigned indoor event space including the all-new 7,500-sf Coastal Ballroom and 20,000 sf of outdoor space.

Nearby offsite attractions include the charming Village of Baytowne Wharf, Topsail Hill Preserve State Park, Big Kahuna’s Water and Adventure Park, Gulfarium Marine Adventure Park and the Silver Sands Premium Outlet shopping center.

A Newly Discovered Gem

At Eau Palm Beach Resort & Spa, we’ll never interfere with your business agenda, but we can assure you that a meeting at Eau Palm Beach will be anything but boring. We are in the business of pleasure, adept at creating engaging events that motivate and inspire. Whether it’s organizing a fishing tournament, arranging a group spa day at the Forbes Five-Star Eau Spa, or coordinating dinner arrangements, you’ll be amazed how productive everyone can be when they can relax and just be themselves.

GREAT PLACE FOR MEETINGS, REGARDLESS OF THE AGENDA.

A newly refreshed deluxe ocean suite at Ponte Vedra Lodge & Club in northeast Florida near Jacksonville.
Despite such onsite and offsite amenities, Tschirn — like virtually all planners — values service above all other factors. And based on her experience as a first-time client, she hailsthe service at Hilton Sandestin as some of the best she has ever received.

“I’ve done a lot of meetings,” Tschirn says. “And the thing that really struck me about Hilton Sandestin is the service. And one of the people responsible for the service we got was our onsite event concierge. I never had to ask for anything. He was there, he knew about what we needed before we even knew we needed it. And any time there just might have been any kind of problem, he knew about it before I did and took care of it. He never missed a beat. The service at the hotel is just outstanding.”

The Magic of Marco Island and Sanibel Island

Kristin Tschirn, Director, Continuing Medical Education
Ochsner Health System, New Orleans, LA

The Marco Island Marriott Beach Resort.

“Complimentary one hour cocktail reception.
Complimentary internet in meeting rooms.
Complimentary meeting space.
10 percent off F&B.

The resort boasts that it is the only destination on the Florida Gulf Coast of Sanibel Island capable of accommodating up to 300 guests.

New dining options include a daily breakfast buffet overlooking the Gulf of Mexico and a new restaurant, Shima Japanese Steakhouse & Sushi Bar, that can be used for private group events.

Currently, the Sundial Beach Resort and Spa offers special value for groups that book by December 31, 2016, which includes the following:
• Complimentary one hour cocktail reception.
• 10 percent off F&B.
• Waived resort fee.
• Complimentary meeting space.
• Complimentary internet in meeting rooms.

For more information, contact meetings@sundialresort.com.

Talk of the Town
Palm Beach County is home to the only property in South Florida that is directly connected to a convention center. The new 21-story, 400-room Hilton West Palm Beach, which is connected to the Palm Beach County Convention Center with an enclosed walkway, opened earlier this year and boasts 24,000 sf of meeting space including the 13,350 sf Oceana Ballroom and the 5,800 sf Coral Ballroom as well as two 2,400 sf expan-
sive lawn spaces for special events and fitness programming.
Located within the gateway to both Palm Beach and downtown West Palm Beach, the new 12-story convention hotel, featuring 400 guest rooms and 43 suites, sports a double-height grand lobby that features views of the hotel’s landscaped Palm Deck that features a zero-entry expansive pool, private cabanas, Restoration Hardware furnishings and a poolside bar and fire pit.

With an in-house panel of experts to provide programs for teambuilding, including glow-in-the-dark lawn games, scavenger hunts and outdoor bootcamp fitness classes, the hotel goes the extra mile to enrich the group experience. Guests also have access to a state-of-the-art fitness center and specialty classes.

Two upgrades to Ocean Front Suites over the peak nights.
10 percent off Eau Spa services.
Complimentary basic meeting space Wi-Fi.

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Two complimentary welcome amenities — chefs selection. A avenue and Palm Beach, which is three miles away. District are within a short walk of the hotel, along with Worth Beach shops and artists.

Beach Resort & Spa on Sanibel Island.
Palm Beach. And now, it has a highly acclaimed luxury hotel that is ideal for small to medium-sized groups.

When it comes to time-honored Florida destinations, none is more renowned — especially for upscale meetings — than Palm Beach. And now, it has a highly acclaimed luxury hotel that is ideal for small to medium-sized groups.

One of only six new hotels in the U.S. to be recently named one of Forbes Travel Guide’s 2016 Five Star Hotels, Eau Palm Beach Resort & Spa is at the top of the list as one of the hottest meeting and event destinations. This is the first time Eau Palm Beach Resort & Spa has received the Forbes Five Star designation as an independent brand. Its namesake, Eau Spa, received the Forbes Five Star title for the second year in a row, making the brand one of only 21 hotels in the U.S. that hold Forbes Five Star ratings for both the hotel and spa; and one of eight independently owned and operated brands.

Formerly The Ritz-Carlton, Palm Beach, the 309-room Eau Palm Beach Resort & Spa is located on seven acres of prime beachfront property and features more than 30,000 sf of meeting and event space, including a trio of ballrooms. Its 9,860-sf main ballroom can be divided into three separate and equal venues. The meeting facilities also include a pair of state-of-the-art ballrooms. Unique meeting amenities include a 3,000-sf oceanfront terrace with a fire pit.

Resort amenities include a state-of-the-art fitness center, three Har-tru clay tennis courts, a 24-hour Business Lounge, two oceanfront swimming pools, four restaurants including the fine-dining Angle, which features fresh local seafood and locally sources seasonal ingredients, and Breeze Ocean Kitch en, which opened in March.

King, the resort’s managing director, said in a news release, “Breeze Ocean Kitchen is an exciting example of the fresh updates that are making our Eau Palm Beach brand a hallmark of the new Palm Beach lifestyle. Both resort guests and locals will enjoy the access this provides to an unparalleled oceanside oasis, whether it’s for a sunny lunch, vibrant tapas at five, or a Sunday afternoon Paella experience with live music and sparkling cocktails.”

With seating for up to 120 guests, the restaurant features striking design details such as a runway fire feature that lights up evening-lounge areas. A “look out” bar top floats above the resort’s beach to offer extraordinary views of the sea and sun sets. Innovative GPS-controlled slate roofing adjusts to allow both optimal sunshine and protection from afternoon show ers. The relaxed yet energized space is softened by lush foliage and during the evening hours, suspended lanterns and twin kling lights set a magical stage.

Currently, Eau Palm Beach is offering meeting planners the “Meet Your Heart Out” program that requires a minimum of 10 guest rooms per night, starting at $159, and includes:

- One hour complimentary beer and wine reception, including dry snacks.
- Complimentary basic meeting space Wi-Fi.
- 10 percent off Eau Spa services.
- One per 50 complimentary room policy.
- Two upgrades to Ocean Front Suites over the peak nights.
- Two complimentary welcome amenities — chefs selection.

No matter which part of the Sunshine State corporate groups gather in, marvelous memories and unrivaled experiences inspire and vitalize attendees so that they can’t wait to return for another meeting in Florida. And, of course, the sunny, temperate climate can’t be beat, either.
On The Move

Pam Payano was named corporate sales manager for The Greater Miami Convention & Visitors Bureau. She was marketing project manager at Turkel Brands where she worked with the GMCVB’s convention sales department on campaigns to attract meetings and conventions to Miami.

Peter Thoene was named director of sales and marketing at Mauna Lani Bay Hotel & Bungalows on Hawaii’s Big Island. He most recently was director of sales and marketing at Mauna Kea Resort.

Hotel Granduca Houston has appointed Anne Janis as director of sales and marketing. She formerly served as regional director of sales for Four Seasons Hotels and Resorts.

The Westin Nashville has named Dawn Krueis as sales manager. She was sales manager and catering manager at Millennium Maxwell House Hotel in Nashville.

Karina Davies was named director of sales and marketing for Fairmont Washington, DC, Georgetown. She was in the UAE as opening director of sales and marketing for Fairmont Ajman.

Corinthia Hotels has named Diane Parker as head of sales for the Eastern region of the U.S. and Canada, Chicago and the Midwest, as well as Brazil. She was director of leisure sales for Chicago and Toronto at The Trump Hotels Collection.

Hyatt Times Square New York has named Vincent de Croock as director of sales, marketing and events. He was director of sales and marketing at De L’Europe in Amsterdam.

Cat Carter was promoted to complex director of sales and marketing at the Sheraton Grand Chicago and Westin Chicago River North. She most recently served as director of sales for the hotel.

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©2014 Carnival Cruise Lines. All rights reserved. Ships’ Registry: The Bahamas, Panama and Malta.
Gotta say this conference has been an inspiring experience for the whole team. So glad we made the trip to Orlando! Title of today's team-building event: Management Secrets from a Master Chef. BTW, I found a hot new sales lead at last night's Oscar party! #ThisMeetingRocks #OrlandoMeeting