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Academic Janet Sperstad will deliver the keynote on Purposeful Meetings at next month’s IMEX America 2017.

Oceania Cruises’ Marina offers unique spaces and a great view for those planning a meeting at sea.

A poolside event planned at Eau Palm Beach Resort & Spa is sophisticated with a touch of whimsy.
Creating Purposeful Meetings

I had the great pleasure of sitting in on Michael Cerbelli’s “Hot List” presentation at the HGA Global Forum earlier this summer. I was so taken by his dynamic and entertaining ideas for maximizing attendee engagement that I asked him to share some of his favorites with you. Michael, who is CEO of Cerbelli Creative, and graces our cover, developed his Hot List to “share the wealth” with planners. “It is my way of giving back to the industry that has given me so much the past 40 years.”

It’s in this spirit of engagement and connection that IMEX America’s Talking Point for 2017 is the concept of “purposeful meetings.” I’m very much looking forward to attending IMEX America on October 10-12 in Las Vegas, the year’s premier, must-attend event for our industry. This worldwide exhibition for incentive travel, meetings and events, is preceded by Smart Monday “Powered by MPI” on October 9, a full day of learning with 30 sessions (see our IMEX Preview on page 12). The day begins with an opening keynote by Janet Sperrstad, CMP, program director, meeting and event management at Madison College, who will present fascinating research on “Purposeful Meetings — Driving Deeper Meaning and Insights.” Janet, who will also be honored during a gala at IMEX as one of three inductees in the Events Industry Council’s 2017 Hall of Leaders, expands on this topic for us on page 20 “Understanding the New ‘Purposeful Meetings.’” The concept and goal of purposeful meetings, according to Carina Bauer, CEO of IMEX, “is to stop and think beyond logistical details alone to the overall experience you are creating for people... What will touch them or resonate with them long after they return home? What ideas and concepts can they put to work right away? This spirit of experience is what is at the heart of purposeful meetings.” Sperrstad and her colleague Amanda Cecil, Ph.D., CMP, note that their research “explores the elements of neuroscience and human behavioral research, technology, event design, content programming and community impact to achieve truly purposeful results. We drive into how to optimize the meeting experience to create more moments of creativity, learning and connectivity.” Turn to our feature to learn more.
IRF Study Reveals Strategies of Top Performing Companies

WASHINGTON, DC — The Incentive Research Foundation has announced the release of the IRF Incentive Benchmarking Survey. The study examines what truly successful companies are doing differently regarding non-cash rewards and recognition.

“The Incentive Benchmarking Survey revealed a wealth of best practices for human capital investments from truly exceptional companies,” said Melissa Van Dyke, IRF president. “To be considered a top performer for this study, companies must benchmark in revenue, growth, customer ratings and employee ratings. Of the 500 companies reviewed, only 300 organizations made the cut.”

“In today’s war for talent, organizations need to embrace incentives and recognition more than ever, both internally and within the channel,” said Christine Zureik, Incentives and Recognition Solution Manager at ITA Group. “These benchmarks help them ensure their strategies are best in class, making them more relevant to talent and ultimately putting them ahead of the competition.”

The research revealed that top performing companies are more likely than average performing businesses to use non-cash rewards and recognition programs to reward their salespeople (90 percent), employees (88 percent) and channel partners (81 percent). Top performing companies also think about, design, and support programs differently. http://therf.org/research/ten-things-top-performing-companies-do-differently-2020

Marriott Seattle Tacoma Hotel Breaks Ground

TACOMA, WA — Interstate Hotels & Resorts has been selected by Varetn Investment & Management to operate the Marriott Seattle Tacoma, anticipated to open in spring 2020. Adjacent to the Greater Tacoma Convention Center, the 303-room, 22-story hotel will be a new landmark of luxury as the second tallest building in Tacoma, offering a four-star standard for regional, national and international conventions. The hotel will offer several elegant meeting spaces that will complement the convention center including a 10,000 sf of ballroom, divisible into three separate spaces, in addition to 9,000 sf of among seven breakout rooms. A Garden Terrace on the sixth floor will be a popular gathering area for both hotel guests and convention center attendees. High-end luxury amenities throughout, the hotel will include a ground-floor Marriott Great Room with a sweeping, open concept layout, in a modern design reflecting the vibrancy of the surrounding city, joined by a contemporary restaurant and lounge area. www.marriott.com

GCB’s ‘Future Meeting Space’ Funded by PCMA

NEW YORK, FRANKFURT — The GCB (German Convention Bureau) has announced that the Education Foundation of the Professional Convention Management Association (PCMA) is funding the second phase of the “Future Meeting Space” (FMS) research project, a cooperation between the GCB, the European Association of Event Centres (EACEV) and the Institute for Design and Engineering of the Fraunhofer Association (IAO) — Europe’s largest application-oriented research organization.

The FMS project began over two years ago to help create a vision for how people will meet in the future, and to turn this vision into practical, hands-on tools for meeting planners and suppliers to help them get ahead of the curve of what’s to come. The “Future Meeting Room” was unveiled in 2016 and by the end of August 2016 the second phase of the project will deliver additional recommendations based on the new participant-centric focus. www.pcmaconvene.org/plenary/howwellmeet

AlliedPRA Acquires NYC DMC Briggs

OHIO, IL – AlliedPRA, Inc., which leads the Destination Management sector (DMC) of the business events industry with 26 locations and $115 million in system revenue, has acquired Briggs, the DMC sector leader in the New York market. Anthony Napoli, CMP, DMCP, president of Briggs, will continue to lead the award-winning team under the highly respected Briggs brand, now owned and operated as an AlliedPRA company. Gary Newman and Casmo Bruzzese will continue their leadership of Briggs in the roles of EVP, finance and operations, and VP of business development, respectively.

Founded in 1982, the award-winning Briggs team specializes in custom transportation solutions, corporate and incentive events, and offers its clients a wide variety of activities and experiences unique to the New York market. The Briggs team has established strategic relationships with all the major incentive houses, leading hotels, event venues and hundreds of business partners throughout the region supporting the critical business objectives of Briggs’ clients. The Briggs team takes enormous pride in the successful business and relationships we have built over the last 35 years in the greatest city in the world, New York City,” Napoli said. “We will continue our dedication to our employees and our partners, with our steadfast commitment to creating one-of-a-kind New York experiences for and with our valued clients. Now as a member of the market-leading AlliedPRA family, we are invigorated by what we can do together to redefine the DMC sector of the Business Events industry. We are thrilled about what the future holds for our business with AlliedPRA.” www.alliedpra.com, www.briggsncy.com

Tips & Trends

Unique Experiences for Small Groups

By Ron Berndal
Looking for some inspiration in planning your next small corporate or incentive event? Try these adventurous ideas on for size.

Meeting groups in Lexington, Kentucky, now have the opportunity to meet the city’s championship thoroughbreds. Through the newly created Horse Country (www.visithorsecountry.com), visitors can make group tour reservations at some of the area’s noted horse farms, including Ashford Stud Farm, home to Triple Crown winner American Pharoah, and Taylor Made Farm, where California Chrome resides.

In Key West, meeting planners with groups overnighting at sister properties Casa Marina and The Reach can dine on the grounds of the Hemingway House, the former home of legendary Ernest Hemingway. This exclusive experience, available for up to 200 people, allows private corporate groups or executive retreat participants to experience the rich literary history of Key West in a landmarked historic site.

On Florida’s Gulf Coast, the Catch-and-Cook Fishing Experience at The Westin Cape Coral Resort at Marina Village takes attendees on fishing charters guided by professional boat captains. Then the hotel’s chefs prepare guest’s fresh catches for a complete “sea-to-table” experience.

At New York State’s Watkins Glen International Racing, small corporate groups can experience a NASCAR pit crew team building experience. Dressed in pit crew gear, the group will be in charge of an actual race car pit stop, working together to prep the car in under a minute before the driver takes off down the track.

For groups staying at Puerto Rico’s Wyndham Grand Rio Mar Beach Resort & Spa, a new adventure takes attendees body rafting through El Yunque National Rainforest in the resort’s own backyard. The excursion takes advantage of the hilly landscape where body rafting is a favorite teambuilding experience that can be coupled with group hikes, cave exploring and floating through canyons.

The Orlando Eye observation wheel, with air-conditioned, private capsules holding up to 15 people each, offers the Champagne Experience, in which attendees enjoy a glass of champagne while viewing the Orlando, Florida, landscape from a height of 400 feet.

For up-to-the-minute news, visit us online at TheMeetingMagazines.com

Tips & Trends

Body rafting through El Yunque National Rainforest.
Construction Finally Begins on Hyatt Regency Portland

PORTLAND, OR — Portland dignitaries and officials recently gathered in the city’s Lloyd District to kick off construction of the new $624 million Hyatt Regency Portland at the Oregon Convention Center. The 600-room hotel is expected to draw 150,000 room nights annually.

Located north of the existing Oregon Convention Center, the 14-story Hyatt Regency Portland will include 32,000 sf of meeting venues, as well as a lobby, bar, restaurant, gym and gathering areas for guests to relax, meet, engage and recharge. According to a Metro survey, 79 percent of national meeting planners said they were more likely to book events at the Oregon Convention Center if there was an amenity-rich hotel next door.

Hotel guests will benefit from the ongoing revitalization of the surrounding Lloyd District, which is bringing more public spaces, sidewalks, storefronts and dining options to the neighborhood.

Located near Lloyd Center, Oregon’s largest shopping mall, is nearing completion of a two-year remodel.

Convention business is projected to grow 33 percent once the hotel opens in winter 2019.

Portland’s continued emergence as a travel and convention destination has already spurred a hotel boom, with 3,000 new rooms in the city’s pipeline between now and the end of 2019.

www.hyattregency.com

Incentive Marketing Association Announces New Board for 2017-2018

MINNEAPOLIS, MN — John Hornbogen, director, business development, RPG Card Services, is the 2017-2018 President of the Incentive Marketing Association (IMA) Board of Directors.

Hornbogen brings incentive buying and selling experience, which provides him with a comprehensive view of the reward and recognition industry and how the IMA can help maintain its credibility and foster continued growth.

“I am grateful to have this opportunity to serve as president during this exciting time for the IMA. As we continue to grow our membership, we will also look to expand our marketing and promotional efforts. We are in the process of updating our strategic plan and will include input from a diverse selection of IMA members. This valuable input ensures that all our efforts are reflective of member needs,” Hornbogen said.

www.incentivemarketing.org

Events Industry Council Features 2017 Hall of Leaders Inductees

WASHINGTON, DC — The Events Industry Council continues the tradition of celebrating the best and brightest in the events industry with their Hall of Leaders awards program with three new inductees in 2017. These inductees will be honored at the 2017 Hall of Leaders and Pacesetters awards celebration on October 10 in Las Vegas, Nevada, during IMEX America 2017. Inductees have demonstrated the forward-thinking and innovation that shaped the events industry into what it is today.

David Peckinpaugh, CMP, was nominated by the Events Industry Council Board and is seen throughout the events industry as a passionate leader and tireless advocate. David now serves as president of Maritz Global Events.

Patricia “Patti” Roscoe, CIT, was nominated by the Society for Incentive Travel Excellence (SITE) and has volunteered her time to SITE and the events industry for many years. In 1981, Patti founded PRA Destination Management Company.

Janet Sperstad, CMP, was nominated by the International Association of Exhibitions and Events (IAEE) due to her contributions from over 25 years as a meeting professional and executive leader in the corporate and nonprofit sectors. Janet created the U.S.’s first Associate Degree in Meeting and Event Management at Madison College in Madison, Wisconsin, where she currently serves as Program Director.

www.eventsindustry.org

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www.eventsindustry.org
### Contingency Planning Checklist

1. 24-hour access to call centers, emergency services and corporate travel agency.
2. A list of other vendors available.
3. Additional insurance.
4. Backup plans for no-shows, transportation, suppliers, speakers, Wi-Fi, airlines, etc.
5. Standard operational procedures (SOPs), policies, procedures and crisis management (safety and security) manuals.
6. Classroom training and online workshops.
7. Dedicated resources for contracting, legal review guidance and counseling.
8. Extra staff, employee assistance and fail-safe team.
9. Financials and funding.
10. Security assistance (especially at global level) and security training.
11. Registration with U.S. Embassy and State Department (in case of international events).
13. Travel advisory information.

Legal protection is of course key for organizations running modern meetings. While limitation of liabilities is the most frequently included legal protection in contracts, planners often or always required force majeure or indemnification in their vendor contracts as well. Roughly 70 percent of planners also requested waivers for attendees and guests. Beyond vendor trust and legal protection, communication and switching partners are also key strategies. Nearly half (49 percent) of planning companies actively communicated potential disruption situations and suggested actions to their attendees. Organizations requiring vendor contingency plans are more likely to communicate about potential disruptions and suggested actions. Likewise, almost half the planners (49 percent) said a partner’s poor disruption handling has caused them to switch at least one partner. Almost 70 percent of planners have switched the destination due to perceived risks or disruptions. Hotels were the most frequently switched partner (26 percent) for failure and poor disruption handling.

According to the study, previous disruption experiences seem to make planners more careful in assessing disruption risks associated with the event venue and partners, perhaps because most disruptions were attributable to the venue or partner. Planners who had experienced disruptions in the past 12 months discussed potential disruptions and contingency plans with their business partners 14 percent more often than planners who had not experienced disruptions during the same time frame.

Before contracting, the planners who have experienced disruption in the past 12 months evaluated destination venue (16 percent greater) and potential program partners (13 percent greater) to a greater extent than planners who had not experienced disruptions. Not surprisingly, as the amount of financial loss an organization has experienced from a disrupted event increases, so does the organization's tendency to readily switch vendor partners for perceived risks.

Most importantly, the 2016 Event Disruption Study revealed a crucial cycle: as disruption becomes more of a constant, the more planners must focus on disruption planning with their partners. When a planner experiences a disruption, those "lessons learned" raise new concerns that must be addressed with partners during the next cycle of contracting and planning. With this heightened awareness of potential disruptions, working with trusted (creative, cooperative and often patient) partners is more critical than ever.

The 2016 Event Disruption Study can be viewed and downloaded here: http://irf.org/research/2016-event-disruption-study/2134/.

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### Overcome Event Disruptions With Proper Planning and Trusted Vendor Partners

By Melissa Van Dyke

Meeting and incentive planners spend months — or even years — researching, visioning, planning, scripting, scheduling and choreographing a flawless event. More and more, however, major event disruptions are becoming a very real and sizable part of doing business in the meetings and incentives industry. Almost 60 percent of planners estimate that one of their events in the last 12 months has experienced a major disruption.

But what counts as a major disruption to meetings and incentives? For purposes of the recent Incentive Research Foundation (IRF) Event Disruption Study, we looked at major challenges negatively impacting the attendee experience, event finances and company reputation. Disruptive incidents can include weather-related phenomena, public enemy occurrences such as wars and terrorism, business partners’ mistakes and even the client’s lack of cooperation.

These disruptions were not just an issue for the participants, organizers or company brand either. Over 40 percent of planners reported that one or more of their recent disruptions caused financial loss. The most frequent financial loss falling between $10,000 and $99,999. So how are meeting planners preparing for the unexpected? The study pointed to proper planning measures such as risk evaluation, contingency planning and legal protection, but even more importantly, working with trusted partners.

Planners listed vendor trust — strong relationships and cooperation with vendor partners — as the most needed resource for disruption planning. When evaluating what built trust within the vendor partner relationship, a vendor partner’s cooperative behavior had the strongest impact (64 percent), followed by the partner’s creativity (57 percent), resources (55 percent), and then financial capability (53 percent).

Legal protection is of course key for organizations running modern meetings. While limitation of liabilities is the most frequently included legal protection in contracts, planners often or always required force majeure or indemnification in their vendor contracts as well. Roughly 70 percent of planners also requested waivers for attendees and guests. Beyond vendor trust and legal protection, communication and switching partners are also key strategies. Nearly half (49 percent) of planning companies actively communicated potential disruption situations and suggested actions to their attendees. Organizations requiring vendor contingency plans are more likely to communicate about potential disruptions and suggested actions.

Likewise, almost half the planners (49 percent) said a partner’s poor disruption handling has caused them to switch at least one partner. Almost 70 percent of planners have switched the destination due to perceived risks or disruptions. Hotels were the most frequently switched partner (26 percent) for failure and poor disruption handling. According to the study, previous disruption experiences seem to make planners more careful in assessing disruption risks associated with the event venue and partners, perhaps because most disruptions were attributable to the venue or partner. Planners who had experienced disruptions in the past 12 months discussed potential disruptions and contingency plans with their business partners 14 percent more often than planners who had not experienced disruptions during the same time frame.

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Innovation, White Space Culture and Purposeful Meetings

These Themes and More Are Featured in IMEX America’s 2017 Education Program

New insights into innovation, white space culture and purposeful meetings are among the striking themes featured in the wide-ranging education program at IMEX America 2017, taking place in Las Vegas October 10-12.

The program for four days of free first-class education is now live (portal.imexamerica.com/events). It gives details of the 180-plus engaging education sessions covering 10 very different topics, for the thousands of industry professionals at the show.

The schedule reveals sessions to suit highly experienced senior professionals looking for new ideas and to update their knowledge as well as for those relatively new to the industry.

It is not only wide-ranging but also eye-opening with intriguing session titles such as “Fishbowl: Solutions to What’s Keeping You Up at Night.” “Neuroscaping — Applying Science to Improve Event ROI” and “Cyber Safety — Is Your Head in the Cloud?”

Revelations About Purposeful Meetings

It all begins on the Monday before the show opens. Monday, October 9 is Smart Monday, powered by MPI (see schedule opposite) and supported by other association partners, and the day starts with fascinating revelations when Janet Sperstad presents industry research on “Purposeful Meetings — Driving Deeper Meaning and Insights” during the Opening Keynote. (See related story starting on page 20.)

This is the first of more than 30 inspring sessions during a day dedicated to learning that includes a packed program created for everyone in the industry. There are also special education programs for senior association executives, the new Association Leaders Forum and the Executive Meeting Forum for meetings strategists working in the corporate sector, as well as the ever popular PCMA Business School.

Wider perspectives on purposeful meetings, the IMEX Talking Point for 2017, emerge from the program throughout the week with “Understand Why You Don’t Understand — and Be Understood,” “Make A Movement — the Hierarchy of Human Gatherings” and many more.

Learn About White Space Culture

The IMEX trade show and business appointments get fully underway on Tuesday after Juliet Funt’s morning keynote “Activity is Not Productivity.” This delves into the relatively new sphere of white space culture and introduces new thinking on increasing creativity, productivity and engagement.

Recognizing the influence of the economic and political trends in the world, former White House director of economic policy Todd Buchholz will be sharing his knowledge and views in his morning keynote on Wednesday: “Prosperity Ahead — or Not?”

Plenty of Innovation and Technology Education

Innovation and inventive approaches to ongoing challenges are prominent throughout the week, with innovation tours twice a day and sessions such as “Building a Culture of Innovation in Your In-House Team,” and “Innovate or Die — Revitalization Strategies for Your Events” before culminating in Thursday morning’s keynote by Brent Bushnell, “From Relatable to Down the Rabbit Hole. Win With Surprise and Delight”.

The imporance and influence of technology in the industry guarantees it a place in the program. “New Technology for Impactful, Decisive Meetings,” “Using Augmented Reality to Enhance Participants’ Experiences” and “Using Event Tech to Manage Teams Like a Boss” are among more than 40 tech sessions throughout the week to help buyers gain a better grasp of the latest technology developments.

From technology and business skills to health and well-being and sustainability, the key topics in the industry today all will be illuminated by expert speakers, thought-provoking presentations, workshops and case studies at the Innovation Hub, now located in Hall G next to the show’s popular Food Court.

C&B

Smart Monday Powered by MPI

The schedule of Education and Events at IMEX America on Monday October 9, 2017

7:00 am - 1:00 pm • Shorebreak Shootout
8:00 am - 5:00 pm • IAEI, IEMA, Group Conference and meeting management • IAEI
8:00 am - 8:20 am • Mindful morning and guided meditation • Lee Papa
8:00 am - 4:00 pm • Executive Meeting Forum - IMEX
8:00 am - 4:00 pm • SITE Young Leaders Conference • SITE
8:00 am - 12:30 pm • U.S. Certified Inbound Specialist - SITE CIS
8:30 am - 9:30 am • MPI Keynote: Purposeful Meetings — Driving Deepening Meaning and Insights • Janet Sperstad, CMP
9:30 am - 11:00 am • The CM and customer experience • SITE and IMEX
9:40 am - 10:40 am • Guided meditation: the right of the seagull • Lee Papa
10:00 am - 11:00 am • Meeting/Centric tour: back-of-the-house lessons • Venetian/Palazzo/Sands Expo
10:00 am - 4:30 pm • The Event Design Certificate (EDC) Program Level 1 of Mastery - The Event Design Collective
10:00 am - 11:00 am • Setting the pace for sustainable events - EIC Sustainability
10:00 am - 11:00 am • What’s really happening in that head? • ILEA
10:00 am - 11:00 am • Cyber safety: is your head in the cloud? • EIC
10:00 am - 11:00 am • Meeting safety and security • Amre Conference Solutions
10:00 am - 5:00 pm • CMP masterclass: prepping for the exam and applying it at work • MPI
10:00 am - 11:00 am • Fishbowl: solutions to what’s keeping you up at night • MPI
10:00 am - 11:00 am • Unveiling the meeting room of the future • IACC
11:00 am - 11:15 am • Guided meditation: journey by the river • Lee Papa
11:15 am - 12:15 pm • The art of networking and selling at trade shows • MCI Group - Orations Global DMK
11:15 am - 12:15 pm • Meeting/Centric tour: back-of-the-house lessons • Venetian/Palazzo/Sands Expo
11:15 am - 12:15 pm • SITE Index: the incentive travel industry annual forecast • SITE
11:15 am - 12:15 pm • FOD meeting planner and DNC • what’s happening • HAPCO
11:15 am - 12:15 pm • Catering 101 for events - culinary session
11:30 am - 12:00 pm • Guided meditation: the world experience • Lee Papa
11:00 am - 1:00 pm • Women in leadership: executive leadership skills • MPI
1:15 pm - 1:45 pm • Guided meditation: the healing tree • Lee Papa
1:45 pm - 1:50 pm • Crisis? What crisis? The yin and yang of crisis management • HCA
1:45 pm - 1:50 pm • Meeting/Centric tour: back-of-the-house lessons • Venetian/Palazzo/Sands Expo
1:45 pm - 4:30 pm • PCMA Business School - PCMA
1:45 pm - 4:30 pm • What’s keeping hospitality and meeting planners up at night • ISMMAI
1:45 pm - 4:30 pm • Recovering VAT in Europe: what organizers of association and corporate events should know • ECM
1:45 pm - 3:45 pm • No one said there’d be math involved • Strategic Meetings and Events
1:45 pm - 3:45 pm • Deep Dive Part 1: Addressing “uh-oh” situations in your contracts • MPI
2:45 pm - 3:00 pm • Guided meditation: the crystal cave • Lee Papa
3:15 pm - 4:30 pm • Meeting/Centric tour: back-of-the-house lessons • Venetian/Palazzo/Sands Expo
3:30 pm - 4:30 pm • Meeting/Centric tour: back-of-the-house lessons • Venetian/Palazzo/Sands Expo
3:30 pm - 4:30 pm • Meeting/Centric tour: back-of-the-house lessons • Venetian/Palazzo/Sands Expo
3:30 pm - 4:30 pm • Creating a culture of innovation • SongDivision
3:30 pm - 4:30 pm • Deep Dive Part 2. Addressing “uh-oh” situations in your contracts • MPI
4:00 pm - 4:20 pm • Chakras clearing by the river guided meditation • Lee Papa
5:15 pm - 7:00 pm • SITE Nite North America • SITE
7:00 pm - 10:00 pm • SITE North America • SITE
Las Vegas has it all, world-class dining, unmatched entertainment and unlimited meeting space. Caesars Entertainment’s nine Las Vegas properties offer 1,030,000 sf of meeting space and can accommodate both large and small meetings.

Caesars Entertainment reinvests in its product. Flamingo Las Vegas completed a $6.8 million renovation of its meeting space in July 2017. In addition, Flamingo has begun a full redesign of its 1,270 rooms and suites, a $90 million investment. The rooms will feature unique, contemporary and retro-chic designs with accents that celebrate Flamingo’s rich history as the centerpiece of the Las Vegas Strip.

Caesars Palace is currently redesigning the Palace Tower, which has direct access to the meeting space. Also, all of the escalators inside the hotel are being replaced, a $6 million investment. The Julius Tower is the latest piece of a $1 billion investment, cementing Caesars Palace as the premier resort at the center of the Las Vegas Strip.

Caesars Entertainment offers unique special events venues such as The Colosseum at Caesars Palace, the High Roller at the LINQ Promenade and the Wildlife Habitat at Flamingo Las Vegas. In addition, Caesars Entertainment features celebrity chef dining and can host small groups or large group buyouts. Guests can enjoy culinary arts in Giada at The Cromwell, Guy Fieri’s Kitchen & Bar at The LINQ or, coming in 2018, Gordon Ramsay’s Hell’s Kitchen at Caesars Palace.

Caesars Entertainment features unmatched amenities. World-renowned Qua Baths and Spa at Caesars Palace can accommodate any request from groups. Qua can arrange for a personal trainer to work out with your group, offer quick 15-20 minute massages or even stay open for extended hours to accommodate a busy meetings schedule. Groups also can take advantage of the pools and fitness centers offered at all of our nine properties in Las Vegas.

As the trendsetter in celebrity dining, world-renowned entertainment and first-class retail experiences, we’re setting the standard for contemporary accommodations in Las Vegas. In 2017, Caesars Entertainment will renovate 6,400 hotel rooms, representing 40% of our guestrooms in Las Vegas.

Find out what Caesars can do for your business at CaesarsMeansBusiness.com or call 855-633-8238.
Surrounded by the excitement of downtown Austin’s business and entertainment districts, the towering 31-story Hilton Austin is one of the largest hotels in the area. A $25 million renovation transformed its guest rooms, lobby and meeting spaces; and two new restaurants and an event venue also were added: Cannon + Belle, with a menu as ambitious and unexpected as Austin itself, is Austin’s answer to Texas-fresh. www.CannonandBelle.com

The Austin Taco Project, a block off of Austin’s music “Main Street,” is a craft beer and fusion taco bar featuring an expansive street front patio. www.AustinTacoProject.com

The Reverbery, with an “Austin-cool” recording studio vibe, is an event venue that is part cozy, part funky and all Austin with flexible indoor/outdoor space and specially designed food and drink menus that reflect the culinary culture of the Live Music Capital. www.TheReverbery.com

Let’s connect at IMEX 2017 — Marina del Rey Convention & Visitors Bureau Sales Manager Lawrence Stafford will be at Booth C430. Come learn why the Marina is the best destination for corporate meetings and events in Los Angeles. Located in the heart of the Los Angeles coastline and just four miles from LAX, Marina del Rey is the L.A. area’s premier waterfront destination with more than 100,000 sf of meeting space and 1,100 hotel guest rooms. Traditional meeting spaces take a backseat to unique venues for your entire group or breakout sessions. Picture your event on a waterside terrace, a chartered yacht or a ballroom with a panoramic view of coastal L.A. Marina del Rey offers fun teambuilding options such as parasailing, a group kayaking or standup paddleboarding class, or deep-sea sportfishing. We can help make your event more affordable. Save up to $2,000 through our incentive program.

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Atlantic City is a hidden gem along the New Jersey shoreline, offering visitors much more than a seaside destination.

Atlantic City offers round-the-clock fun and excitement after the work and meetings are through. Take a stroll on the famous historic Boardwalk, bask in the glowing sun or take a dip in the Atlantic Ocean. You can unwind and dine with plentiful dining options all customized to fit your convention delegates’ taste buds from brand-name eateries to celebrity-chef restaurants. The Entertainment Capital of the Jersey Shore will have you laughing, singing and dancing all night long. Shopaholics can shop till they drop at our tax-free outlet shopping, Tanger Outlets The Walk, with more than 100 retail stores. While in town, try your luck on the table games or slot machines at any of our seven casino resorts.

Atlantic City is made up of more than 16,000 first-class hotel rooms that are the perfect accommodations for your attendees’ complete comfort and relaxation. The Atlantic City Convention Center provides more than 600,000 sf of meeting space, as well as 45 meeting rooms, ample prefunction space and all the amenities you would expect. Harrah’s Waterfront Conference Center is the largest convention center-hotel complex from Baltimore to Boston with its two 50,000-sf ballrooms which offer state-of-the-art, technologically advanced meetings space that can be utilized by up to 3,000 attendees. Resorts Conference Center has added an additional 15,000 sf of meeting space spread over 12 rooms — for a total package of 24 function rooms with more than 64,000 sf of usable space. Borgata Hotel Casino & Spa has debuted its new Central Conference Center, which contains an additional 25,000 sf of meeting and convention space.

Atlantic City is 60 miles from Philadelphia, 125 miles from New York City, and 175 miles from Washington, DC. Any way you look at it, Atlantic City guarantees fast-paced excitement and non-stop year-round activities. Meet AC will be happy to help you locate the right space, assist with attendance building, housing and much more.

IMEX Booth #B717

Atlantic City Means Business! Planning a conference, convention, meeting or other event? Discover Atlantic City, a new kind of meeting destination. With event venues galore and more than enough attractions, activities and entertainment to keep attendees busy, AC should be at the top of your list.
Meeting Trends

"We dive into how our minds and bodies work, to understand social drivers and how to optimize the meeting experience to create more moments of creativity, learning and connectivity."

Janet Sperstad, CMP, Program Director
Meeting and Event Management
Madison College, Madison, WI

Janet Sperstad will deliver the keynote address “Purposeful Meetings — Driving Deeper Meaning and Insights” at IMEX America in October.

Understanding the New ‘Purposeful’ Meetings

The Human-centric Approach That Leads to Deeper Meaning, Innovation, Insight and Positive Outcomes

By Christine Loomis

N o one has ever elected to have a “purposeless” meeting. What, after all, would be the point of a meeting with no goals or objectives, one during which participants gather together to work toward nothing, engage in nothing and thus get nothing out of it? So why is the idea of “purposeful” meetings even a thing?

As Lisa Langford, corporate meeting planner for Finance and Resource Management Consultants, which works with the petroleum industry, says, “If we’re looking to create purposeful meetings now, what were we doing before?” A definition is a good place to start. The concept of purposeful meetings sounds straightforward: a meeting with purpose. But ask three meeting planners what it means and you’ll quickly learn that the term is open to multiple interpretations.

Preparation Filters
Melissa Jimenez, global events director with Reval, a leading technology company, agrees and adds, “For me, the term purposeful meetings also means having targeted filters in preproduction, where experience and production decisions are made based on predetermined criteria. This helps to keep a great idea focused when additional stakeholders are added to the process.

“For conference content, I ask, ‘Why does this content need to be present live and in person? What about the content or the production requires this to be in person?’ If the answers are not clear and focused, perhaps the content should be presented in a webinar or article. Clients’ time is so valuable. To warrant meeting in person, the content should be so compelling and presented in such a manner that it has to be done in a live setting and would not work as a webinar or article. This filter makes presentations much more meaningful and the ROI easily captured.

‘For networking events, again, I feel that if we have a purposeful meeting requires a preproduction filter. How will networking be enabled so that attendees are leaving with meaningful contacts or deepened relationships? How are we actually facilitating that? I focus on an experiential-based production model where we don’t use any traditional icebreaker formats. The event itself is experiential, so the conversations that flow out of those experiences occur naturally. Connecting the right people to each other is very methodical and not left to chance.”

Langford hits on a definition that varies to some extent based on age range, noting that it may have a more specific and concrete meaning for millennials.

“The standard of measurement to plan a purposeful meeting is to go beyond the intellectual and catch an engaged audience, identifying their individual value as both a singular and collective voice of change in the world. The challenge is to create something unique that stands out from the common collective experience yet results in an immediate common collective voice.”

IMEX Talking Point

The truth is that the concept of purposeful meetings encompasses all of those definitions and more, and it is a yearly “refresh” for both shows. “We chose purposeful meetings to start off our talking points as we think it’s a really rich concept that brings together a lot of core, strategic threads in the industry today,” Bauer says.

Bauer says it also gives the industry “a chance to explore a single, emergent or important trend in-depth and from a number of different angles. In this way,” she adds, “our talking point will act as a catalyst — one that hopefully truly inspires and also helps our partners, attendees and exhibitors to understand and to achieve more.”

So far, the results support that notion. “Purposeful meetings as a discussion point and education umbrella was very well received at IMEX in Frankfurt,” Bauer says. “We all want to make our meetings richer experiences, more positive, more impactful for the people that participate in them. Professionally, we all want to have a more strategic seat at the table as well, and purposeful meetings is a great platform for that.”

Where, then, do planners begin their quest to create purposeful meetings?

“For me, the term purposeful meetings also means having targeted filters in preproduction, where experience and production decisions are made based on predetermined criteria.”

Melissa Jimenez, Global Events Director
Reval, New York, NY

Sperstad was the keynote speaker at IMEX in Frankfurt this year, where thousands of attendees were introduced to “Purposeful Meetings” as the first of the show’s annual talking points. The new yearly talking point, integral to both Frankfurt and IMEX America in Las Vegas next month, will serve as the focused lens for some educational content and industry research.

Carina Bauer, IMEX CEO, says that the annual talking point will give education programs at IMEX and IMEX America a stronger focus and provide a yearly “refresh” for both shows. “We chose purposeful meetings to start off our talking points as we think it’s a really rich concept that brings together a lot of core, strategic threads in the industry today,” Bauer says.

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“Perhaps one of the most powerful things about the concept and goal of purposeful meetings is to stop and think beyond logistical details alone to the overall experience you are creating for people.”

Carina Bauer, CEO
IMEX, London, UK

“While creating a purposeful meeting is a human-centric approach to planning a meeting, the attendees are not there to understand or know what’s good experience for them,” Cecil says. Planners must also understand that creating a purposeful meeting is not about being smart or clever. “Changes in the way we think and act, particularly our checklist of to-dos. It’s an approach to use at multiple stages of the event-planning process to ensure that you are designing a fulfilling experience for your participants and not designing an experience around the space you have,” Sperstad cautions.

“Don’t feel like you have to approach this as step one, two and three” she continues. “It’s more about looking at your objectives for the event and focusing on the human element and the human performance, both cognitive and physical, to have a successful event. Being open to shifting your perspective in planning your next meeting will be their takeaways? What will they really value?”

And, she adds, the definition of meeting success itself has also changed in ways that echoes those of Langford’s millennials. “Event practitioners are looking for more ways to drive value and create meaningful, authentic experiences in a fast-paced, digital world. Disciplined event success has moved beyond financial return on investment (ROI) measurement and learner outcomes to exploring the elements of a meeting experience that influence human behavior and leverage the experience to influence decision-making, create moments of meaning and insight, and inspire creativity.”

Of course ROI remains important; it’s just that there are additional ways to create and measure positive outcomes for meetings, particularly for the attendees — and that doesn’t mean they have to cost more than other meetings. Cecil says there are no-cost and low-cost ways to bring purpose to the experience to create more moments of creative, learning and connectivity.”

“Defining event success has moved beyond financial return on investment measurements and learner outcomes to exploring the elements of a meeting experience that influence human behavior.”

Amanda Cecil, Ph.D., CMP, Associate Professor
Indiana University, Indianapolis, IN

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Science-based Research

Understanding the research is perhaps one of the best starting points for planners. “Our research on purposeful meetings,” says Sperstad and Cecil, “explores the elements of neuroscience and human behavioral research, technology, event design, content programming and community impact to achieve truly purposeful results. We dive into how our minds and bodies work, to understand social drivers and how behavior is influenced in various experiential scenarios to create moments of creative, learning and connectivity.”

By their nature, the two researchers add, “meetings and events often can feel overwhelming, dull or unhealthy. ‘Purposefully’ designed meetings are precisely the opposite — engaging, inspiring, and long-lasting, with long-lasting, positive outcomes.”

While it’s true that the intent of meetings has always been to be purposeful, as planners point out, it’s important to note that the focus on creating purposeful meetings is different today, in part because of how researchers are approaching it. “This topic is part of the implementation of the interdisciplinary approach, as well as the incorporation of science-based research into our field,” says Cecil.

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Meeting planners who’ve handled the logistics for an incentive program know how challenging it can be to assemble the disparate pieces for a successful event. Between accommodations, transportation, multiple dining venues, meeting rooms, AV requirements and activities to appeal to a multifaceted group, fitting together the puzzle pieces requires a commitment of time and energy.

But cruise-based incentive programs streamline many elements of planning. And by assembling the disparate functions under one umbrella, logistics can be contained. Meeting planners we’ve spoken to say that such bundling also usually leads to cost savings over comparable land-based meeting options.

No wonder a growing number of companies are finding that corporate events at sea sometimes offer an edge over traditional land-based programs. In May, Cruise Lines International Association (CLIA) announced that the number of cruisers in 2016 reached 24.7 million passengers, up almost 6.5 percent from 2015. CLIA is projecting a 4.5 percent increase for 2017, fueled by a growing supply of new and bigger ships.

Thirteen new ocean cruise ships will debut this year, according to CLIA. But 15 ships are already under construc-
Alaska is on everybody’s bucket list. At 4,000-passenger vessel will spend its in
26
when you retired, but Alaska is more
summer, Fitzgibbons chose Norwegian
Bucket List Cruise
Cruise Line, launching in April 2018. The
addition to land-based events.
"We like to use the newest products out there. It needs to be an incentive for the guest, and newer ships have a lot more to offer."
Kathy Fitzgibbons, Senior Travel Buyer
Maritz Travel, a Maritz Global Events Company, Fenton, MO

Bucket List Cruise
“We like to use the newest products out there,” explains Fitzgibbons. “It needs to be an incentive for the guest, and newer ships have a lot more to offer.”
For an incentive program planned by a leading financial company for next summer, Fitzgibbons chose Norwegian Bliss, the newest ship from Norwegian Cruise Line, launching in April 2018. The 4,000-passenger vessel will spend its inaugural season in Alaska, becoming the largest ship to ever cruise the 49th state.
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series, following in the footsteps of Koningsdam, which launched in 2016.

MSC Cruises has two new ships out this year — both of them new designs. The 4,500-passenger MSC Meraviglia arrived in June, while 4,140-passenger MSC Seaside debuts in November. Both are targeted to the U.S. market and will be homeported in Florida.

Other cruise lines are spending millions to refresh their fleets. Silversea Cruises' venerable Silver Cloud is in dry dock now, undergoing transformation into a 254-passenger luxury expedition ship. Primped with balconies and outfitted with 16 Zodiaks, come November Silver Cloud will boast five gourmet restaurants and an ice-class hull for voyages to Antarctica.

As part of its $170 million fleet-wide refurbishment program, Silver Explorer underwent a stem-to-stern remodel last spring. The all-inclusive luxury ship accommodates 144 guests for sailings to the Arctic, Antarctica and Africa to the Americas, French Polynesia and the Russian Far East. Incentive program participants can take advantage of onboard destination lectures, exploratory Zodiac excursions and interactive walks ashore, led by experts in their field — marine biologists, ornithologists, geologists, botanists, historians and anthropologists.

High-end Regent Seven Seas is having it both ways, having launched its newest ship, the $450 million, 750-passenger Seven Seas Explorer last year while spending $125 million to renovate its three older ships, Navigator, Voyager and Mariner. A new Explorer-class vessel will build on the runaway success of Seven Seas Explorer. Scheduled for delivery in 2020, the new sister ship will retain many of the high-end features and amenities that have led to Seven Seas Explorer being hailed as the most luxurious ship ever built.

November, Princess Cruises launches its ambitious Ocean Medallion system aboard Regal Princess. The wearable devices are a technology platform to link guests to reservation systems aboard the ship, delivering a more seamless travel experience. In addition to replacing the traditional room key, waiters in restaurants will be alerted to allergies or to a birthday; reservations for shore excursions and spa appointments will be integrated. By removing points of “friction,” Princess aims to make the cruise experience more personalized.

“Cruise ships definitely have less meeting space than land programs. ...You have to be more creative on a cruise ship to find places for your private events and meetings.”

Mark Walker, Senior Global Sales Executive
Morris Meetings & Incentives, Salt Lake City, UT

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Royal Caribbean’s “Anthem of the Seas” offered new and exciting ship design with state-of-the-art technology, as well as skydive simulators, bumper cars and extraordinary shows with professional set design.”

Jeffrey Paul Broudys, President
United Meetings & Incentives, Philadelphia, PA

Meanwhile, the ships built by Royal Caribbean over the last decade have been plumped with conference and meeting space than land programs, easier to plan and is less expensive than a land-based program. A program with Carnival offers far greater value, is much easier to plan and is less expensive than a land-based program. Plus, you can be confident in recommending Carnival’s friendly and attentive service.

An employee-of-the-month plaque or a Carnival cruise vacation? Hmm, not exactly a toss-up. Incentivize your organization with, say, a Caribbean cruise at the end of your carrot stick. Your team can relax in our luxurious Balcony staterooms, savour an excellent meal at the steakhouse, enjoy sunsets on the Lido Deck...the reward opportunities are endless. Show your appreciation for your team’s milestone accomplishments! We promise to pamper your team all day long and well into the wee hours.

You know what else is fun? Easy planning. A Carnival Meetings & Incentives representative will help you plan everything you need for your incentive program, starting with which ship, itinerary and departure port best meet your needs. Our professional team looks forward to working with you to plan the perfect program.
"The ship was able to cater our events without a problem," adds Walker, who used Oasis of the Seas for a seven-day Caribbean cruise. "We had a big welcome and farewell party on the boardwalk, and we also had coffee and pastry stations in the theater and in Studio B during the general sessions. The CSM’s onsite were amazing — they are the ones that we work with to execute all our meetings, private events, etc. They were super-patient, organized and nice to work with."

Singing the Praises of Anthem
Jeffrey Paul Broudy, president of Unitled Incentives, used Royal Caribbean’s two-year-old Anthem of the Seas for a home furnishings channel incentive in June for 360 attendees. Broudy says that every incentive program has its own “signature.”

La Cuisine Bourgeoise by Jacques Pépin, a culinary program for small groups, will be offered on two Oceania cruise ships.


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Princess Cruises’ Ocean Medallion system eliminates the need for a cabin key (below); most ships offer free Wi-Fi.

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Anthem of the Seas has a conference center for meetings and the North Star POV attraction (right) for fun.

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The beauty of the ships is that the space and AV on board — which can be extensive due to the large production shows offered on some of these ships — is complimentary. Some of these shows — is complimentary. This is the weakest link in cruise programs compared to land-based programs, wherein the entire enterprise of CSM, hotel, DMC all work at the same location during the planning process. Accordingly, we tend to only work with cruise lines with whom we have maximum confidence.

Tackling these kinds of logistics early on is also important to Karen Devine, president of 3D Cruise Partners. Devine is in the planning stages for a March 2018 annual sales meeting to be held aboard Celebrity Infinity. She needed exclusive use of the theater on several days for multiple hours. “You may need to be a bit more flexible with your meeting and/or function needs relative to setup — i.e., theater style vs. classroom or U-shape, etc. Depending on the show you may be using space — such as the main show lounge — that is also utilized for other purposes. But I worked with the ship well in advance to identify space and ensured that it was confirmed in the contract.”

Devine noted the cost savings inherent with planning a meeting or incentive at sea. “The beauty of the ships is that the space and AV on board — which can be extensive due to the large production shows offered on some of these ships — is complimentary. There are no meeting room rentals, no cost to use the sound booth, screens, the ship’s bands, staging, etc. — it’s all complimentary!”

And that adds up to the key advantage planners cited for cruise events compared to traditional land-based meetings and incentives: budget control. “A cruise can be 30 to 40 percent less than a comparable land program,” Devine adds.

“It’s better bang for the buck, absolutely,” says Kathy Fitzgibbons. “Clients ask me what it will cost for a general session on the ship, and they’re surprised to hear that the room is included — that’s a huge cost savings. If you do the beverage package in advance you’ll get a commission on the drinks. It’s definitely more of a value, and it’s an easier budget to control.”

Mark Walker concurs: “Cruise programs usually end up being less expensive than land programs — it is practically an all-inclusive experience. The food is included, there are fewer travel expenses, and lots of costs are included like AV, setup fees, etc. The price point is very good compared to land-based programs.”

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Karen Devine, President 3D Cruise Partners, Mundelein, IL

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C&IT
Michael Cerbelli’s
The Hot List
A Creative Event Expert’s Favorite Ideas to Take Events to the Next Level
By Michael Cerbelli

Editor’s Note: Following his trademarked “Michael Cerbelli’s: The Hot List” events presentation in June for the HGA Global Forum, we asked Michael, who is CEO and president of Cerbelli Creative, to share some of his favorite ideas with Corporate & Incentive Travel readers. For more than 39 years, Michael has done more than change the paradigm of prestigious happenings — he has become the paradigm. Though a fixture in the New York City events scene, Michael’s influence is worldwide, from the Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland, to a birthday party for the King of Morocco.

Sixteen years ago, I started Michael Cerbelli’s: The Hot List. I’ve spoken at various conferences and meetings throughout the year to reveal the hottest and most innovative trends in events and entertainment. When I first started this, people thought I was crazy. They thought to themselves, why would you share all this information? Why give away all your ideas? The truth is, it all started when I asked a colleague about an idea. In the late ’90s and early 2000s, I, along with many other meeting and event planners, were going to conferences to learn, to find ways to be a more effective event planner and to make our events more exciting.

In 2001, I saw a presentation by a great event designer and an incredible speaker. He took out a vase, put it on the table, and turned a switch and the vase lit up. He said, “This is an LED light.” The entire audience was awed; back then no one knew what an LED was! I went up to him and I asked for more information about this vase, this LED, what in the world was this and how can I get my hands on this? I wanted to bring this from California to New York, to use in my own events. This man (who today I actually have the honor of calling one of my dear friends) would not share the information, and this frustrated me. I thought to myself, why are people NOT sharing their ideas?

Thus, the Hot List was born. I have my own ideas, and I wanted to share the wealth. At the very first Hot List, they put me in a classroom with 300 seats, and 500 people showed up. The attendees knew I was going to open my black book of ideas. Today, Michael Cerbelli’s: The Hot List is now a staple to The Special Event conference, and for the first time ever, we did a second live show in the same year for MPI’s World Education Congress. The response was phenomenal. There are people who attend every year because they will be taking away tangible information, content that can be used immediately when they arrive back to their office and share with their teams. It is my way of giving back to the industry that has given me so much the past 40 years.

I have included a few of my personal favorites from this year’s Hot List in hopes of that this helps inspire you to think creatively and create memorable experiences, whether it be general session, sales meeting or closing celebration.
The mobile Buffet Train integrates platforms for cirque performers.

Food & Beverage

Buffet Train: Led by a trike, theBuffet Train is pulled through the event space creating a truly unforgettable mobile buffet and performance platform. The train is comprised of two 8-foot-long wagons for caterers, fashion or anything from desserts to cocktails and platforms to support an array of acrobatic talent. Make an impressive entrance for dessert by driving it to the center of the room with cirque performers! Contact: Chris Lashua, Cirque Mechanics, chris@cirquemechanics.com, 800-770-1694

Gastro Garage: Los Angeles-based catering company Gastro Garage uses blowtorches to cook onsite, creating an interactive and entertaining option for food. These chefs, called “mechanics,” deconstruct classic dishes and reconstruct them into gastro “tanks”: brioche-style doughnuts that are torched and filled with nitrous foam in a variety of flavors. They are created in front of the guests by the mechanics, who complete the look in full uniform and goggles. The real star is the food—with sweet and savory options ranging from Philly cheese steaks and cubanos, to s’mores—they will have your guests raving. This team really get the crowds FIRED up and is a treat to both the eyes and taste buds.

Contact: Adam Manacker, The Gastro Garage, adam@thegastrogarage.com, 310-993-3979

Entertainment

Body Marbling: Body marbling puts a psychedelic twist on temporary tattoos. Pigments chosen by attendees are manipulated into patterns and designs that transfer directly upon dipping. These funky tattoos are best showcased in the dark under UV light. Best of all, they can be washed off easily with soap and water. BlackLight Visuals, the pioneers of Body Marbling, have become a huge hit at monster music festivals such as Coachella and Electric Daisy Carnival. Branding opportunities make it a great option for unique attendee engagement at corporate events.

Contact: Brad Lawrence, BlackLight Visuals, booking@BLVisuals.com, 248-762-9983

Chocolate Genius: Paul Joachim, also known as The Chocolate Genius, can speed-sculpt anything out of chocolate. I have personally had him in the past sculpt skylines, logos, busts of honorees and even myself—the best-looking piece of them all. He has sculpted everything from a life-size LeBron James to a giant elephant. He can speed-sculpt a masterpiece in as little as one hour, doubling as both entertainment and dessert.

Contact: Barbara Parham, Artistic Talent Group, barbara@artistictalentgroup.com, 407-876-3729

GENTRI: GENTRI (short for the Gentlemen Trio) combines rich, dynamic vocals with powerful three-part tenor harmony. They bring a spine-tingling sound that’s sure to bring clients to their feet, move them to tears or motivate them to open their pocket books. From legendary covers, iconic Broadway show tunes to epic originals, their show is sure to leave your audiences shouting “encore.”

Contact: Stuart Ambrose, About Entertainment, sambrose@about-entertainment.com, 424-201-5428

Well-Strung: These guys are the best of both worlds, fusing classical music with today’s pop in amazing, four-part harmony. Imagine walking into a room with a dashing string quartet playing classical pieces at a reception, blending into the background and setting the mood. Then, surprisingly, they become the main act and catch everyone’s attention with a surprising classical mashup of Mozart and Kelly Clarkson. It is a unique and memorable experience that will certainly have your guests talking (and gawking).

Contact: Stuart Ambrose, About Entertainment, sambrose@about-entertainment.com, 424-201-5428

Wells: These West Coast based vocalists blend their musical talents with their own unique twists on traditional songs. The Gentlemen Trio’s unique sound inspires audiences.

The Gentlemen Trio’s unique sound inspires audiences.

Light Visuals, booking@BLVisuals.com, 248-762-9983

Chocolate Genius sculptures double as entertainment and dessert.
AERIAL DRONES: On January 12 at The Special Event, I unveiled aerial drones as being the next big thing in event entertainment. Drones are creating visual spectacles with choreographed movements that create shapes and patterns mid-air. On February 5, Superbowl Sunday, 300 drones flew in formation at the opening of Lady Gaga's amazing halftime performance in front of 160 million people! What started out as a sea of bright stars came together by the end to form an American flag. Combining drone technology with Lady Gaga's artistry created a truly memorable experience. I was very impressed, and this was all made possible by the ever-growing interest in drones. Drones hovering above and around performers are creating spectacular new images and camera views that were never possible before. Drones are now even being used to show messages and point guests to event locations, like flying robot valets! Furthermore, aerial drones can be "dressed up" with themed elements and can be coordinated with live performers or other live special effects.

VIDEO SPHERE: The KM Custom Video Sphere is a cutting-edge product that gives your guests a true 360-degree view of your message. The video sphere works great as a centerpiece to any type of event and can be programmed to display any image, video or media on its LED surface. Imagine: Visuals at a party, logos for a corporate gala, messages to patrons at a convention are just some of the possibilities!

These are just a few ideas from this year's Hot List. I encourage you to take these ideas and your own ideas, and find how to make your own wow. Think outside the box — what have people not seen before? How can I take a classic and put a unique spin on it? Don't shy away from big ideas, even for small events or with small budgets. I always say, "An event doesn't have to be large to be big. It doesn't have to be extravagant to be 'rich' and it doesn't have to be over the top to 'raise the roof.'"

Lastly, I will leave you with this: Many people ask me, "What is the next big thing? What will we be seeing a lot on next year's Hot List?" I predict it is going to be HEAVY on technology, particularly with drones, virtual reality and augmented reality. It will allow us to see things we previously could not see before (think of doing a venue walkthrough with VR in the comfort of your office), and it's going to take our event industry by storm in a very strange way. There are things we only could have dreamed of that are now within reach, have become very affordable, and are allowing us to take events to a different level.

For speaker inquiries for Michael Cerrelli’s: The Hot List, please contact edith@cerrellicreative.com.

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**Serious issues? Seriously...I can help!**

The character was a hit for all the right reasons - taking serious issues and bringing them to light in an entertaining way. And making the corporate folks look good because they 'get it'.

Mark Henneberger
VP Shows and Events
WalMart
Colorado Springs

And rising to the top of Colorado’s legendary resorts is the Penrose Room, Colorado’s only Forbes Five Star, AAA Five Diamond restaurant. Activities include mule rides, hiking, archery, yoga and crafts.

Other outdoor activities include mountain biking, rock-climbing tours, paintball, fly-fishing and falconry. Teambuilding options include Pikes Peak Cog Railway, The Broadmoor Soaring Adventure zip-line courses and Seven Falls.

Meetings at The Broadmoor are hosted in the over 200-room, 37-story Hotel Tower or in 185,000 sf of flexible meeting space. The 185,000 sf of flexible meeting space includes a grand parlor that accommodates up to 120 for cocktail receptions and 60 for a private dinner or meeting. The dining room seats 16 for dinner. Spaces suitable for breakouts include an outdoor covered veranda overlooking two croquet lawns as well as the library and third-floor meeting room. Some guests can stay in five luxurious bedrooms.

The Broadmoor’s amenities include three championship golf courses, a year-round tennis program, a Forbes Five Star spa and fitness center as well as 26 retail boutiques. There are more than 20 restaurants, cafés and lounges, including the Penrose Room, Colorado’s only Forbes Five Star, AAA Five Diamond restaurant.

Also last year, The Broadmoor opened The Overlook at Cloud Camp, a dedicated 1,500-sf meeting and event space atop Cheyenne Mountain. Located seven miles from the Broadmoor, Cloud Camp accommodates up to 60 guests. Activities include mule rides, hiking, archery, yoga and crafts.

Small Property, Great Fit

The variety of outdoor activities in Colorado Springs helped attract Dow Agrosciences LLC to the destination in October. The company’s three-day meeting for 53 sales and marketing employees was held at the 117-room Mining Exchange, a Wyndham Grand Hotel with 17,000 sf of event space including seven meeting rooms and the 3,500-sf Grand Ballroom. It was the group’s first meeting at the property.

Reach Peak Inspiration, From Mile-High Denver to Mountain-top Meccas

The size of The Mining Exchange was a big factor in its selection. “With this being a small property, it was a great fit for a group of around 50 people,” says Audra Stewart, CMP, event planner for Indianapolis, Indiana-based Dow Agrosciences. “It allowed us to be the only group on the property and provided a small, intimate atmosphere for attendees to connect and network with each other as well as meet their overall meeting objectives.”

The layout of The Mining Exchange’s meeting spaces matched the meeting’s objectives. “This group had a large amount of material to cover in a small amount of time, and with meeting rooms right next to each other, attendees didn’t have to spend much time walking around the property looking for the rooms,” says Stewart. “The close proximity of meeting rooms allowed the group to have quick turnaround times between sessions.”

The size and flexibility of the Mining Exchange’s meeting spaces also fit the group’s needs. “The rooms were large and conducive to a variety of setups that, on occasion, allowed two of our groups to be in the same room at the same time without being disruptive to each other,” says Stewart. “We used a variety of setups throughout the week including conferences in the breakout rooms. The general session space also held an awards banquet.”

Colorado

Colorado to make a change from the previous location where the meeting had always been held,” says Sullivan.

Sullivan found The Broadmoor’s 185,000 sf of flexible meeting space to be a good fit for the meeting. “The resort provided ample space for general sessions, breakouts, meal rooms, breaks and entertainment all in close proximity,” says Sullivan. “The hotel layout and variety of options allowed employees to focus on the meeting elements while their guests had multiple options for entertainment and relaxation.”

All of the group’s activities were held onsite. Sullivan used a range of The Broadmoor’s venues for a variety of functions. Ballroom and banquet spaces hosted general sessions, breakouts and breakfasts as well as several other activities, including cooking and mixology classes, a margarita-making competition and yoga.

Sullivan and her team transformed The Broadmoor International Center throughout the week for a variety of functions. “We used this space and the built-in stage for lunches and dinners,” says Sullivan. “The hotel layout and variety of options allowed employees to focus on the meeting elements while their guests had multiple options for entertainment and relaxation.”

Rates for food and beverage were top-notch. “There was great value,” says Sullivan. “The chef made custom menus to fit our themes and worked with us on our budget. We received several comments from attendees on how wonderful the food was.”

The 784-room Broadmoor is constantly offering more meeting options. Late last year, The Broadmoor opened The Estate House, a lavish 12,000-sf historic mansion designed during the 1920s that is perfect for small private parties and receptions.

The Estate House offers several customizable meeting spaces, including a grand parlor that accommodates up to 120 for cocktail receptions and 60 for a private dinner or meeting. The dining room seats 16 for dinner. Spaces suitable for breakfasts and network with each other as well as meet their overall meeting objectives.”

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The Lakeside Terrace Patio at The Broadmoor in Colorado Springs.

Properties such as The Mining Exchange are only part of what attracts groups to Colorado Springs. “We have so many activity options in Colorado Springs that it is easy to continue to give guests a new experience each time,” says Danielle McNair, director of sales and business development, Colorado, for DSC (Destination Services Corp.), an AlliedPRA Company. “We have some groups who come back annually and it is a trick to keep things fresh, but we look for inspiration everywhere.”

McNair says, “One of our team members created an amazing ‘Rhinestone Cowboy’ event after seeing a dance-floor ceiling covered in mirrored balls while on vacation in Mexico. This was a new twist on Colorado’s cowboy and Western heritage. The clients and guests loved it. Microbreweries are popular so we created a microbrewery tour.”

“It’s no wonder that Colorado Springs set visitor records in 2016, attracting 7.4 million overnight visitors, representing a 32 percent increase since 2011, according to the Colorado Springs Convention & Visitors Bureau.

Colorado Springs is not alone. More people are discovering Denver’s mix of urban modernity, mountain beauty and frontier history.

Denver

Last year, Denver welcomed a record 31.5 million visitors, including a record 17.3 million who stayed overnight, according to Visit Denver, the city’s CVB. According to Richard Scharf, president and CEO of Visit Denver, “Since voters approved an increase of tourism marketing dollars in 2005, Denver has seen tourism grow 62 percent — nearly three times the 22 percent national average.”

Denver continues to offer planners more of what they need to plan successful meetings. “Because of large citywide conventions and the growth of Denver in the past 10 years, venues have expanded to accommodate larger groups,” says McNair. “Downtown areas like the River North Art District (RiNo) and Lower Highlands are revitalized and trendy.”

In addition, McNair notes, more entrepreneurs are opening farm-to-table restaurants using local ingredients. Despite all the change, she adds, some of the main attractions continue to be things like the Rockies, sports stadiums and museums.

More meeting space and hotel rooms are on the way in Denver.

Denver city officials recently announced plans for a $233 million expansion of the Colorado Convention Center (CCC), located within walking distance of 10,000 hotel rooms. Plans call for a 50,000-sf outdoor terrace with views of the Rocky Mountains, various multifunction meeting spaces and several modified lobbies. The CCC currently offers 100,000 sf of meeting space on one level and 584,000 sf of exhibit space.

Located just outside Denver, Aurora will be home to the state’s largest combined convention center and hotel, the 1,500-room Gaylord Rockies Resort & Conference Center, when it opens in late 2018. The property will offer 485,000 sf of meeting and convention space including four 8,000- to 59,736-sf ballrooms, up to 81 breakout rooms and a 175,000-sf Exhibit Hall with a 20,000-sf outdoor patio. The property also will offer eight dining experiences, an indoor/outdoor pool complex, Relache Spa and Salon, and state-of-the-art fitness center.

Hyatt’s Denver properties include the 1,100-room Hyatt Regency Denver at Colorado Convention Center with more than 60,000 sf of event space, and the AAA Four Diamond Grand Hyatt Denver, which offers 516 rooms and 52,600 sf of event space, including two ballrooms. Both properties offer scenic views of the Rocky Mountains and downtown.

The 196-room JW Marriott Denver Cherry Creek, in Denver’s iconic shopping and dining district, features 9,400 sf of meeting space, including the newly remodeled 1,400-sf Fireside & Patio indoor and outdoor venue with LED chandeliers. Other spaces include the 2,175-sf Bluebell Ballroom and 1,100-sf The Deck – 3rd Floor outdoor event and reception space.

The 370-room Westin Westminster, located between Denver and Boulder, offers more than 60,000 sf of meeting space encompassing 26 indoor rooms and six outdoor venues. The largest meeting space is the 11,914-sf pillarless Westminster Ballroom with a 60-foot glass wall offering views of the Promenade Lake and Fountain. An adjacent 15,000-sf prefunction space allows access to two outdoor courtyards.

Mountain Resorts

The number and variety of luxury mountain resorts sets Colorado apart from other U.S. destinations. Such properties include the four-diamond Cheyenne Mountain Resort in Col-
Rooms will offer large windows and balconies overlooking the mountains and forest, and freestanding soaker tubs in spacious five-fixture baths. Skiing amenities include a dedicated chairlift as well as ski rentals and ticket office. In addition to skiing, guests can enjoy mountain biking, kayaking, snowmobiling, snowshoeing and a 58,000-sf athletic club as well as three restaurants.

The Keystone Resort and Conference Center is the largest freestanding meeting venue in the Colorado Rocky Mountains. The facility offers planners everything they need for meetings, including a total of 100,000 sf of meeting, event and exhibit space. Two flexible ballrooms, one of which is circular, are on the ground floor. Two ground-level loading areas provide easy access for exhibits and large displays. Keystone provides attendee lodging in 1,200 units in Keystone Lodge & Spa, West Keystone, River Run Village and Ski Tip Lodge. In addition, Keystone offers two golf courses – Keystone Ranch Golf Course and The River Course at Keystone.

In Breckenridge, attendees enjoy mountain ski town culture at the 208-room Doubletree by Hilton Breckenridge near downtown with scenic views of the Rockies. Hundreds of restaurants, galleries, shops, museums and night sports are nearby. The property offers 9,000 sf of meeting space, including 10 meeting rooms. The Hilton is across the street from Breckenridge Ski Resort's Peak 9, which offers ski equipment rental and a range of outdoor activities.

Whether it’s Breckenridge, Denver, Boulder, Colorado Springs or any other mountain town, Colorado offers some of the most unique meeting venues in the nation. “The Colorado meeting experience goes beyond state-of-the-art facilities and world-class accommodations,” says McNair. “You can meet on a dude ranch, at a winery, at a mountain-top venue, or cosmopolitan hotel. Corporate groups are seeking experiences that are outside of the standard meeting room environment.”

Danielle McNair, Director of Sales and Business Development, DSC, an AlliedPRA Company, Avon, CO

“Sometimes, McNair continues, the best place to close a deal or inspire a sales team is on a ski lift, river, trail or even on horseback. Meeting among nature's stunning mountains and peaks stimulates ideas and innovation, she adds. Indeed, Colorado's spectacular settings are matched by a Western hospitality guaranteed to garner a tip of the Stetson from every attendee.

Get your blood flowing at CONVENTIONSELEVATED.COM

With unlimited outdoor activities in the city and Rocky Mountain backyard, your attendees will never run out of new adventures. Denver is waiting to inspire your team to new heights.
Destination Florida is a big state — 447 miles north to south, 361 miles east to west. While its 663 miles of beaches and 1,197 miles of coastline are huge draws for attendees, it’s hardly a “one-size-fits-all” destination. Each coast, city and resort area offers its own distinct vibe. Here are just a few possibilities.

Orlando

Orlando is known for inspired theme parks, but corporate planners know it as a top national and international meeting destination. There’s no lack of hotels and resorts to choose from, including chains and independents.

Caribe Royale Orlando is an independent, a plus for Virginia Dodge, CMM, HMCC, president of VA Productions Inc., whose client BSN Medical held its national sales conference there in February, with 250 attending. “This was my third time at the Caribe Royale. I think independently owned properties can make a difference in the area of flexibility. We got a great rate and the sales staff was a pleasure to work with to negotiate the things my client needed and expected.”

Orlando itself offers value as well. “Local incentives often exist for bringing meetings to Orlando,” Dodge notes. “Airport is a bit lower on average with the bonus of having so many direct flights per day.”

Dodge calls the all-suite Caribe Royale “a beautiful property with real wow factors for attendees.” She notes that the ample conference space is all on one level and the property is nicely laid out. “A covered walkway from one tower to the conference center makes for a short walk, and there’s a gorgeous workout facility with early and late hours, which is important to clients these days.” Then there’s the staff. “John Murray, director of sales and Kim Bester, senior sales manager, were everything you want in a sales team: professional, pleasant, knew the property inside and out, extremely accommodating, really worked to get what we needed — no games, no empty or incorrect promises. Our associate director of catering and convention services, Yvonne Gollatt-scheck, was spot on taking care of the details and going with the flow. Requests were handled in a timely manner by all staff. It’s frustrating when requests are not taken care of and you have to follow back around addressing the same things more than once. When it’s done well and right like it was at the Caribe Royale, it makes a huge difference for the planner and ultimately for the attendees, which is most important!”

In terms of meeting space, technology and catering, Dodge says, “It was easy to find the right fit for my numerous specific group needs, and Kim and Yvonne worked with me to make it all come together. My company, VA Productions Inc., is an audio-visual company along with being a meeting-planning and video-production company so we brought our own AV equipment and team. I was concerned there wouldn’t be enough bandwidth the way attendees now connect multiple devices and some sessions involve all attendees being online at once, but there wasn’t a single issue.”

In addition to the standard suites of nearly 500 sf, there are fully outfitted villas near the conference center. “These can be great for planners, with two bedrooms, two bathrooms and extra workspace areas. They also work for overflow small breakout rooms if needed,” Dodge notes. Also convenient is the range of dining options, including the fine-dining Venetian Chop House, which Dodge highly recommends for executives or small group dinners.

The only hitch came from the same meal room not being available for the entire conference. In the end, Dodge says, "The ambience was beautiful — sun setting, a little Key West-type duo playing music, strung lights crisscrossing the terrace. It was picture perfect. I don’t know how we’re going to top that for next year.”

Liz Baldwin, CMP, Executive Assistant The Boler Company Itasca, IL

Shine On, Florida

Big, Beautiful and Built for Memorable Meetings

By Christine Loomis

Florida is a big state — 447 miles north to south, 361 miles east to west. While its 663 miles of beaches and 1,197 miles of coastline are huge draws for attendees, it’s hardly a “one-size-fits-all” destination. Each coast, city and resort area offers its own distinct vibe. Here are just a few possibilities.

Gulf-front event space at Sundial Beach Resort & Spa on Southwest Florida’s Sanibel Island.

Credit: Sundial Beach Resort & Spa

The perfect meeting has a name.

By Christine Loomis

Gulf-front event space at Sundial Beach Resort & Spa on Southwest Florida’s Sanibel Island.

Credit: Sundial Beach Resort & Spa
Yvonne worked hard, got creative and came up with a solution that worked for my client, ultimately keeping them in the same room all week.

She plans to return to Orlando with two groups next year, and hopes the Caribe Royale will work for at least one. “This resort is a hidden gem among the masses of hotels in Orlando. Once you go there, you’ll want to go back, which is why I say book early. They have so many clients return year after year that in the busy season it can be tough to find the availability and space you need.”

Omni Orlando Resort at ChampionsGate gives planners an option just to the south of Orlando with 36 holes of championship golf. Laurie Sorensen, learning architect with HTG Peer Groups, booked the company’s fourth-quarter meeting there starting in November 2016, with subsequent meetings 2017-2019.

“Omni is a hub city with great flight options from almost any airport, and ChampionsGate has a resort feel but is located near the airport. The Omni brand delivers a very high quality of service and we appreciate the Omni Select Guest Program. The team at the property is also one of our favorites,” she continues. “Senior Sales Manager Nolan Hart always takes care of our group with individualized attention and we appreciate the Omni Select Guest Program. The team at the property is also one of our favorites,” she continues. “Senior Sales Manager Nolan Hart always takes care of our group with individualized attention and we appreciate the Omni Select Guest Program. The team at the property is also one of our favorites,” she continues.

Among the highlights: now completed is the new Lake View Room on the Swan side, which is two connected rooms, one accommodating up to 277 and the other up to 119 attendees. The floor-to-ceiling windows provide views of resort’s private lake and the Dolphin resort, however, full length shades offer planners the option to darken the room for presentations and privacy.

Guests of the Swan and Dolphin enjoy some valuable extras normally availed only to those staying at a Disney-owned property. They can take advantage of extended theme park hours, as each day one of the four Disney theme parks opens an hour early or stays open up to two hours after regular closing. And Disney’s scheduled boat launches and bus transportation throughout the resort are available to Swan and Dolphin guests.

Spread across a lush 28-acre property and located within walking distance to the Orange County Convention Center, the DoubleTree by Hilton Hotel Orlando at SeaWorld is in the process of completing a renovation that will add the 20,000-sf Majestic Ballroom and 20,000 sf of outdoor meeting space to the property’s existing 230,000 sf of meeting space.”

It is a bit of a walk from the guest rooms to the meeting rooms, but Sorensen says, “With many of our attendees coming from cold climates, the short walk in Florida weather is welcome.” She gives the property her highest recommendation, noting, “I would encourage planners to check out Omni’s unrivaled multimeeting and multiyear packages.”

Also among Orlando’s multitude of resorts is Walt Disney Swan and Dolphin Resort, which recently completed a comprehensive $5 million renovation of its total 329,000 sf of meeting space at both the Swan and Dolphin properties. The makeover is part of the Swan and Dolphin’s multiphase $140 million redesign, including all 2,267 guest rooms. The Swan’s guest rooms were finished in 2015; the Dolphin’s rooms will be completed by the end of this year; and the $12 million lobby redesign will be done by this fall.

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The meeting space is ideal as well. “The Osceola meeting center has breakout space and ballroom space,” Sorensen notes, “so it gives the feeling of an intimate event within a much larger property since it is all enclosed and set apart from the hotel meeting space.”
court yard space, divisible into five event spaces, slated for the completion by the end of the year. The hotel will boast a total of 100,000 sf of indoor/outdoor event space when the project is finished.

Rosen Shingle Creek recently refreshed all 1,501 guest rooms, redesigned the resort’s championship golf course and unveiled a swank new open-air covered pavilion, perfect for private functions. Perhaps most important for business travelers are new recharging stations and added power outlets for increased connectivity in public spaces.

**Jacksonville**

Tucked into the northeast corner of the state, Jacksonville encompasses more than 800 square miles where the St. Johns River meets the Atlantic Ocean, molding an urban riverfront downtown with sweeping coastal beaches. It’s largely off the radar of corporate planners — but shouldn’t be.

“Visit Jacksonville’s sales and services team is increasing investments in our partnership with Meeting Professionals International and national and other associations that cater to corporate travel and meeting planners. Jacksonville is a destination where you don’t have to choose between the beach and the city, nature and culture or the comfort of convention hotels and the high-service of all-inclusive resorts,” says Monica Smith, V.P. of sales and marketing at Visit Jacksonville. “To ensure a seamless re-imagination of our partnership with Meeting Professionals International and the comfort of convention hotels and the high-service of all-inclusive resorts,” says Monica Smith, V.P. of sales and marketing at Visit Jacksonville. “To ensure a seamless re-imagination of our partnership with Meeting Professionals International, our team is developing new collateral and brochures highlighting key local businesses and industry segments that can help planners leverage local resources for successful meetings. Plus, we are offering special promotions for short-term meeting opportunities and small meetings through 2018. It’s time to consider Jacksonville to host big events.”

**Miami**

With its Latin heart and international vibe, Miami has high appeal for groups. Among the meeting-friendly hotels is a pair of Trump properties. This year, Trump International Beach Resort Miami offers a Meetings With A View package including ocean or Intra-coastal Waterway views from all meeting rooms, discounts on catering and room rates, free Wi-Fi for meetings and more. It’s good through December 2017 and select dates in 2018. Trump National Doral Miami completed a $250 million renovation that included the addition of Trump Spa suites and reimagined golf courses. Coming this fall: the new Rick Smith Golf Academy.

**Palm Beach County**

Famous for upscale shopping and high-end resorts, Palm Beach County also offers plenty of nature, outdoor adventures and resorts that meld upscale with beach casual.

Eau Palm Beach Resort & Spa is one resort that defines today’s elegance — upscale and sophisticated with a touch of whimsy. The resort has received the Mobil Five Star Award for the past two years, and its sensational 42,000-sf spa has received the Mobil Five Star designation for three years running. The resort encompasses 309 guest rooms and suites in three towers on seven pristine oceanfront acres.

Amenities and services include three tennis courts, four restaurants, 24/7 room service and a 24-hour business lounge. The state-of-the-art fitness center includes spinning and yoga studios, Pilates classes and personal trainers, giving hardworking executives and planners a place to rev up and wind down.

The resort features 30,000 sf of meeting and function space, with fabulously stylish indoor and outdoor venues for events. Groups of 10 to 1,000 are easily accommodated. The largest of the three ballrooms is 9,680 sf, divisible by three. Prefer to meet by the pool? Poolside cabanas are available and the spa’s “Self Centered” Garden offers water features and a private courtyard. In August, the resort announced the appointment of a new chef, David Viviano, who will oversee all culinary operations.

Now on the scene is Hilton West Palm Beach, which opened in 2016 and is connected to the Palm Beach County Convention Center by an enclosed walkway. At the county’s north end is Jupiter Beach Resort, where Excel Medical, a specialist in medical software technology, held its national sales meeting in February with 50 attendees. “Jupiter Beach Resort is directly on the beach, which provides a beautiful location for our team,” says Joanne Minnaert, manager, corporate meetings and events. “The staff is friendly and the cost for meetings is very competitive with surrounding hotels, but the attention to detail is second to none. It is also a quick 30-minute ride from the Palm Beach airport.”

Minnaert likes that the resort is near a variety of local activities and that the staff stands out. “The sales team at JBR is without a doubt the best I have ever worked with. They make you feel you are part of the family before and during events. They work as a team and every effort was made to make everyone in our company feel welcome.”

Ditto for the entire team, Minnaert says. “Graziezza Del Grande, Diana McAlistier, Betsy Gonzalez, Amanda Ross, Juan Rodriguez, Diane D’Amico — they are always accessible and friendly. They check in to make certain we are happy and make themselves available for last-minute changes or requests. The doormen and front desk staff are exceptionally friendly.”

Minnaert says this level of responsiveness helps with ROI. “Whether it’s before or during the meeting, I have never spent any time worrying about things going wrong. There is always someone checking to make certain people are happy.

Virginia Dodge, CMM, HMCC, Owner

VA Productions Inc.

Reading, PA
“Jupiter Beach Resort is directly on the beach, which provides a beautiful location for our team. ...The cost for meetings is very competitive with surrounding hotels, but the attention to detail is second to none.”

Joanne Minnaert, Manager  
Corporate Meetings and Events  
Excel Medical  
Marshfield, MA

Sanibel Island

Just off the coast of Fort Myers Beach and connected to the mainland by a three-mile causeway, Sanibel Island is compact but offers a charm that still captures a sense of Old Florida. Liz Baldwin, CMP, executive assistant and corporate event planner for The Boler Company in Itasca, Illinois, says Sanibel originally was chosen for the company’s quarterly business and board meeting in February because the chairman spent winters on Sanibel. “Having our executive team go down for our winter board meeting was convenient for him but also a welcome break for those of us who had to spend winters up north.”

It still works. This year’s meeting took place at Sundial Beach Resort & Spa, which has a host of amenities including a 12-court pickleball stadium. “These are beach communities where families go to vacation,” Baldwin says. “Many of these resorts offer individually owned condos where décor differs from unit to unit. Knowing this was one of my hot buttons, my sales contact, David Irwin, worked diligently to ensure our group would be happy in the rooms. But I now know people who come here want to be outside doing things. Sundial has a beach for guests, which all resorts here don’t have. It also offers plenty of activities for spouses and attendees, including bikes for exploring.”

Baldwin likes that Irwin provides one-stop-shopping for planners. “He books the meeting, handles F&B, arranges AV, and he even took care of my shipment when no one else at the hotel seemed to know how to! He is one of the nicest and calmest people I’ve ever worked with. Who needs to go to the spa? Just hang around David,” she says. “Then there’s banquet manager, Joe Knapp, a young man who is helpful, professional, courteous, efficient, on the ball, high energy and great at his job! These two made quite a team.”

Baldwin’s group used one meeting room over three days. “Our setup is pretty space intensive,” she says. “We used one of the Sundial room sections and it was one of the best rooms we’ve ever had at a hotel. It met the needs of our setup and offered windows and a terrace so that when the group broke, attendees could go outside and enjoy the ocean view and weather. We had a dinner on the terrace one evening. The ambience was beautiful—sun setting, a little Key West type atmosphere.”

Sanibel Island

Credit: Visit Jacksonville

The largest U.S. city by landmass, Jacksonville’s vast 800-square-mile area spreads from the St. Johns River to the Atlantic Ocean.

Go to visitjacksonville.com/meetings to explore Jacksonville’s meeting options!
Tampa Bay and Environments:

This area offers surprising diversity, from inland golf resorts to bay and beachside properties. Inland from Tampa, Streamsong Resort near Bowling Green is already a phenomenal golf destination. This month its third course, the much-anticipated Streamsong Black, opens, along with a new clubhouse and restaurant, expanding options for groups.

Beachside, Wyndham Grand Clearwater Beach, with 343 rooms and 22,000-plus sf of meeting space, opened in January. Among its features: Dunes Ballroom, accommodating 700 guests in high season, the traffic getting on and off the island can be unbearable. But Sundial is near the causeway, so you don’t have to travel too far into island traffic to get there.”

To planners considering The Sundial on Sanibel, Baldwin advises, “Make sure you work with David Irwin and Joe Knapp!” Kinman says planners should understand that the resort was picture perfect. “We’re a regional law firm with locations in Tampa, Clearwater and St. Petersburg,” says Suzanne Kinman, director of public relations. “The resort had all of our required elements. Within 45 minutes of all three area offices, ample meeting space with good AV, close to a major airport with shuttle service for out-of-town speakers, an outdoor venue for dinner the first night, a formal indoor venue for a dressy dinner and dance the second night, activities for spouses/significant others, a hospitality suite, and reasonable costs.”

Kinman made four site visits to the property pre-meeting, ensuring that every function was customized with a backup plan in case of poor weather. Being assigned a dedicated team member from the start was beneficial. “A one-on-one relationship is huge because I need to count on our decisions being carried out in a made-to-order fashion,” she says. “I have spent many years in this industry so I’m aware of my client needs. Attorneys put a huge value on their time and are very detail oriented.”

The staff made Kinman’s job easier: “It’s imperative that I work with property planners and managers who understand our needs from day one. I would rate the event planners first class.”

Food is a priority for this group and it didn’t disappoint. “I would rate the food excellent, service excellent and the restaurant managers as very keen on detail,” Kinman says. “But it was stellar AV that boosted the meeting’s success.”

“This was our most expensive area of spending,” Kinman says. “We launched a new website at the retreat. This was a huge moment for me personally, as I was responsible for coordinating the design and launch of the website from its inception. It was important that the AV work perfectly. The launch went without a single hitch. As an aside, our website just won a gold dotcom award, an international competition honoring excellence in web creativity and digital communication. My point: you get what you pay for, and this set us up for next year.”

Kinman says planners should understand that the resort is spread out, but that it isn’t a deficit. “There’s free ample parking everywhere, great for our event because many spouses/significant others drove separately. The shuttle service in on task. And though meeting rooms are spread out, many are within walking distance or shuttle friendly. It should be a non-issue.”

Her additional advice to planners: “During the meeting, rent a golf cart for ease in changing locations quickly without getting in and out of a car, parking and waiting on a shuttle. Work with one contact and let that contact guide you on meeting and event locations on property because many I would never have considered.”

The Walt Disney World Dolphin lobby will undergo a $12 million re-design, the final stage of a $140 million renovation project, the largest makeover in the resort’s history. It will be completely transformed into a sleek, contemporary space featuring new food and beverage options and offer an inviting area for guests to relax or network. A recipient of the prestigious Meetings & Conventions Hall of Fame Award, the Walt Disney World Swan and Dolphin is a nationally respected and recognized leader in the convention resort arena. The resort offers more than 329,000 sq. ft. of meeting space, 84 meeting rooms, and 2,267 guest rooms and suites which feature the Westin Heavenly® Bed. Attendees can also relax in the luxurious Mandara Spa, indulge in one of our 17 world-class restaurants and lounges or enjoy our unique Disney Differences.
as Vegas’ relentless reinvention allows planners to create distinctively unique meeting and convention experiences for attendees no matter how often they visit. “Luckily for planners and DMCs alike, there’s no shortage of brand new restaurants, shows, activities and venues, so providing a completely new itinerary for annual clients is never a challenge,” says Patty Kindness, national sales manager, AlliedPRA Las Vegas. “Even if planners request the same or similar activities for their participants year after year, we have the versatility to put a new twist on existing offerings.

“For example,” Kindness adds, “if the planner requests a tour of the Hoover Dam again, we might propose the tour along for a different way of experiencing the dam from the water. “The hotels that we select for this meeting are a reflection of our brand,” says John McIndoe, executive vice president, chief marketing officer and planner of the conference. “The quality of the Wynn, attention to detail and customer service reflect our brand and company culture. The Wynn offers so much that other hotels don’t.”

IRI Worldwide also returns to Wynn because it feels a connection with the resort’s staff. “At the end of the day, we fall back on the relationship we have with our partners at the Wynn,” says McIndoe. “We developed quite a collaboration with them. The overall end-to-end experience they provide planners, executives, VIPs and clients is second to none.”

Value also was a big consideration. “We have evaluated and negotiated with other properties,” says McIndoe. “We negotiate very aggressively, and we feel there is solid value at the Wynn.” Wynn’s meeting space is a perfect match for IRI Worldwide’s needs. “We have very intensive ballroom space requirements,” says McIndoe. “We need 1,200-plus sleeping rooms for 1,500 people.”

Spacious Meeting Rooms McIndoe made good use of Wynn’s 200,000 sf of convention space, which includes two column-free ballrooms and 18 meeting rooms. A general session was held in the 50,000 sf Lafite Ballroom and included an elaborate on-stage setup and keynotes. “The ballroom was repurposed in the evening for a big networking gala with games and big-name acts,” says McIndoe. “They turned the ballroom around quickly. We ended the general session around noon and had a total transformation experience by five.”

Thirty breakout sessions were held in portions of the 25,000 sf Latour ballroom and in various other meeting spaces. IRI bought out Encore Beach Club for a reception and held a party at Intrigue Nightclub (formerly Tryst). “Intrigue has a nice blend of indoor and outdoor space. It gives people the experience of being in a very exclusive nightclub without the hassle of waiting in line or paying fees,” says McIndoe.

In addition, a member of IRI’s executive team decided to have an after-hours evening reception for about 50 executives and gave the Wynn a two-hour notice. The resort quickly put together a celebration on the Sunset Terrace that included food, beverages, entertainment and hand-rolled cigars. Wynn Las Vegas plans to keep groups returning with several improvements, including the new $1.5 billion Wynn Paradise Park, which will begin phase-one construction by January.
The park will include a 1,000–2,000-room hotel tower and 260,000 sf of beachfront meeting and ballroom space overlooking a 20-acre lagoon with water sports activities, a 4,000-foot boardwalk and a white sand beach.

**High-end Shopping**

Additionally, Wynn will offer more upscale shopping outlets with the construction of Wynn Plaza, a 75,000-sf Strip-front expansion scheduled for completion during the first quarter of 2018. Currently, Wynn Las Vegas and Encore Las Vegas offer shopping options that include the 99,000-sf Wynn Esplanade and the 7,000-sf Wynn Collection boutique. In addition, The Wynn’s Parasol Up, which reopened last year following a new design, refreshed the bar menu and updated technology. The 2,716-room Wynn Las Vegas’ sister property, the 2,034-room Encore, offers 60,000 sf of customizable meeting space including 17 meeting rooms, a 20,650-sf ballroom and three private boardrooms.

Wynn’s improvements will add to its already legendary service. The property is known for catering to the desires of planners and attendees on short notice.

McIndoe cites an example: “We had a senior executive with a major manufacturer who suddenly decided to host an impromptu day of meetings,” says McIndoe. “The Wynn helped us quickly find the meeting space, helped us with food and beverage, and obtained additional entertainment. Within 36 hours, they had planned a phenomenal meeting for about 25 executives.”

Cindy Black, president of Minneapolis-based Five Star Productions, has planned five corporate meetings either at the Wynn or Encore since 2006. The number of attendees at the meetings ranged from 800 to 3,000.

Black says that The Wynn’s service sets it apart from competitors. “It’s clear that Mr. (Steve) Wynn invests in the development of his people to create superior customer service throughout the hotel, and this focus is reflected in the glowing feedback we’ve received from past attendee surveys,” says Black. “From arrival to departure (bell service, front desk personnel, housekeeping, banquets and conference services, concierge service) they are truly the best in the industry at delivering unique luxury meeting services,” says Black. “For these reasons the Wynn jumps to the top of my list every time I consider a property for a large event.”

**Elsewhere on The Strip**

The 390-room M Resort Spa & Casino offers 60,000 sf of customizable meeting space including 17 meeting rooms, a 20,650-sf ballroom and three private boardrooms.

The quality of the Wynn, attention to detail and customer service reflect our brand and company culture.”

John McIndoe, E.V.P., C.M.O.
IRI Worldwide, Chicago, IL

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**Elsewhere on The Strip**

The 390-room M Resort Spa & Casino offers 92,000 sf of flexible meeting space including a conference center with
Hard Rock Hotel & Casino now boasts a total of nearly 110,000 sf of contiguous meeting and convention space.
to hold its annual event of 30,000 attendees at Mandalay Bay and other MGM properties.

Mandalay Bay offers three different hotel experiences, including the all-suite luxury Delano Las Vegas with 20,000 sf of indoor meeting space spread over 31 meeting rooms. Dining options include the South Beach-inspired Delano Beach Club, which groups can reserve for receptions. The Delano's Sage Living Room with overstuffed couches allows guest networking in comfort.

**Home to Blue Man**

Luxor Hotel houses the 830-seat Blue Man Theater and one of the nation's five permanent productions of the Blue Man Group, which offers an innovative mix of comedy, music and technology that is continuously refreshed to attract repeat visitors. Cirque du Soleil recently purchased Blue Man Group owner Blue Man Productions, and announced that it will be part of a new strategy to diversify beyond circus-style presentations.

Groups can rent the Luxor's Blue Man Theater for a private meeting followed by a Blue Man Group performance ranging from a few minutes to 90 minutes. Other options include a full-show buyout for groups of 500–820 attendees, pre-show receptions for up to 75 people, show-and-dinner packages, and meet-and-greet experiences.

**Caesars Leads**

Caesars Entertainment Corporation is among the leaders in improving its Las Vegas properties. The Strip's most storied property, the Flamingo Las Vegas, has completed a $6.5 million meeting space renovation, which began in April 2017. A $90 million renovation of 1,270 guest rooms began last month, with completion scheduled for the second quarter of 2018. Caesars describes the new look as "unique, contemporary and retro-chic designs with accents that celebrate Flamingo's rich history." The 70-year-old hotel offers more than 3,500 guest rooms and a 73,000-sf Corporate Convention Center and Executive Conference Center.

The Flamingo project comes after Caesars Entertainment's upgrades in 2016 of more than 3,500 guest rooms and suites at four of its Las Vegas properties — Hollywood Resort & Casino, Caesars Palace, Paris Las Vegas and Harrah's Las Vegas. By 2018, over half of the rooms at Caesars Las Vegas properties will have been upgraded since 2014.

In addition, Caesars Palace plans to develop 90 acres of land that Caesars Entertainment owns in front of the property. Ongoing renovations at Caesars Palace include suites in the Julius Tower and Augustus Tower, and 11 mini-villas.

World-famous Caesars Palace offers 300,000 sf of luxurious meeting space, including the Octavius Ballroom, Forum Ballroom, Augustus Ballroom and Palace Ballroom. Other venues include the 4,100-sf Colosseum at Caesars Palace, a theater with one of the world's largest LED screens, and the 4.5-acre Garden of the Gods Pool Oasis.

Continual improvements at Las Vegas properties add to the destination's considerable advantages over its competitors. "Planners have the ability to leverage large hotel chains for rooms, meeting space, and food and beverage," says Kindness. "They can maximize budgets, take advantage of multitenanted price points, and benefit from the consistency of service delivery. They have quality of services and experience from tenured professionals in the hospital industry. They have the ability to provide offsite events for up to 20,000 guests at several arenas and outdoor festival venues."

Combine ever-improving Las Vegas properties with the destination's ever-expanding offsite options and you have a practically irresistible meeting destination. As one planner once said tongue-in-cheek, "If a group doesn't have a good time and successful meeting in Las Vegas, it's their own fault."
Jay Marsella was named director of sales and marketing for Sawgrass Marriott Golf Resort & Spa in Ponte Vedra Beach, Florida. Previously, he served as the opening director of sales and marketing at the Houston Marriott Marquis in Houston, Texas.

The Walt Disney World Swan and Dolphin Resort in Lake Buena Vista, Florida, has named Beth Campion group account director for the Northeast and mid-Atlantic regions. She was director of national accounts at The Diplomat Beach Resort in Hollywood, Florida.

AMResorts has promoted Jan LaPointe to vice president of strategic sales planning, North America. She recently celebrated her 15th anniversary with AMResorts and has more than 30 years of experience in the tourism industry.

VisitDallas has promoted Mary Grimley to vice president of sales. She most recently served as director of group sales for the bureau.

Teton Mountain Lodge & Spa and Hotel Terra Jackson Hole in Wyoming has appointed Matt White as director of sales. He most recently was director of sales at The Wort Hotel in Jackson, Wyoming.

Laura Jung was promoted to director of sales and marketing for the San Francisco Marriott Marquis in San Francisco, California. She most recently served as director of group sales for the hotel.

Daniel Surette was named vice president of sales for Omni Hotels & Resorts. He was the vice president of North America sales and field marketing for Starwood Hotels & Resorts Worldwide.

Team San Jose has named Ken Slattery as vice president of sales and destination services. He was global sales director at Omni Hotels and Resorts.

Gabriela Ong was appointed as vice president of sales for Meet Puerto Rico. She most recently served as brand sales manager, Northeast for Meet Puerto Rico.

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