Out-of-the-Box Meeting Places
Unique Venues That Reawaken the ‘Wow’

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ATTENDEES EXPLORE THE SONOMA SERENGETI AT SAFARI WEST IN NORTHERN CALIFORNIA.
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Credit: Grand Hotel Marriott Resort, Golf Club & Spa

Credit: Tourism Northern Ireland

Credit: Luc Rousseau/Quebec City Tourisme

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Reawaken the ‘Wow’

Having just returned from MPI’s World Education Congress (WEC18) in Indianapolis, I feel a renewed sense of appreciation for the power of the event experience to reawaken the "wow" in all of us. I was overcome by just how fabulous the places and people of Indy really are. The opening night celebration in White River State Park, America’s only cultural urban state park, was an event for the senses, with music by the amazing a cappella group Straight No Chaser — originating from Indiana University — savory tastings from Indy’s culinary hotspots, creative activation stations, and many happy sightings of industry friends and colleagues against the beautiful backdrop of the Indianapolis skyline. I had lunch on the field at Lucas Oil Stadium and joined the block party at Monument Circle. Finally, how much more memorable can it get than a closing night celebration at the famed Indianapolis Motor Speedway, where you can take a lap around “the Greatest Race Course in the World” with a professional driver, “Kiss the Bricks” and stand on Victory Podium! Even education sessions were moved out of the classrooms and into experiential WEC Village, which featured interactive environments to spark engagement and innovation. Turn to page 10 to see some WEC18 snapshots.

As all of this illustrates, meetings are critical vehicles for reigniting the passion and inspiration we need to do our best work day after day. And unique venues, like those in Indy and beyond, can be the catalyst. In “Inspirating Spaces” on page 28, we showcase a broad range of memorable off-site gems, starting with Safari West (pictured on our cover) in Northern California. Safari West was just the sort of out-of-the-box venue planner Brenda Alvarez was looking for to shake up her company’s leadership and teambuilding meeting. “Being able to listen to wildlife in the evening is something you don’t normally allow for more creativity and provide attendees with an ‘out-of-the-box’ experience they aren’t expecting. “

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This issue features many more ways to reawaken the ‘wow’, from international cultural immersion excursions on page 34 to the experiential destinations of Canada, the Pacific Northwest, page 56. Having just returned from MPI’s World Education Congress (WEC18) in Indianapolis, I feel a renewed sense of appreciation for the power of the event experience to reawaken the “wow” in all of us. I was overcome by just how fabulous the places and people of Indy really are. The opening night celebration in White River State Park, America’s only cultural urban state park, was an event for the senses, with music by the amazing a cappella group Straight No Chaser — originating from Indiana University — savory tastings from Indy’s culinary hotspots, creative activation stations, and many happy sightings of industry friends and colleagues against the beautiful backdrop of the Indianapolis skyline. I had lunch on the field at Lucas Oil Stadium and joined the block party at Monument Circle. Finally, how much more memorable can it get than a closing night celebration at the famed Indianapolis Motor Speedway, where you can take a lap around “the Greatest Race Course in the World” with a professional driver, “Kiss the Bricks” and stand on Victory Podium! Even education sessions were moved out of the classrooms and into experiential WEC Village, which featured interactive environments to spark engagement and innovation. Turn to page 10 to see some WEC18 snapshots.

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Sea Island Launches New Classic-Yacht Experience

Sea Island Explorer features three decks of options for customized private events.

SEA ISLAND, GA — Sea Island, a Forbes Five Star resort on the coast of Georgia, recently welcomed Sea Island Explorer, a new 71-foot custom-built pas- senger yacht, reminiscent of classic yachts of the 1930s. The three-level vessel gives guests and club members the opportunity to explore the rivers and salt marshes that abound among Georgia’s barrier islands. Accommodating up to 49 passengers, the yacht features a double living room on the main level, a covered top deck, a prep kitchen and additional event space on the bottom level, making it ideal for scenic nature tours, pre-dinner cocktail cruises, customized private events and more. Food and beverage can be customized for each occasion. Clay Fordham, a naturalist and Sea Island captain with more than 10 years of experi- ence in local waters, will lead all operations aboard Sea Island Explorer. Sea Island is currently celebrating its 90th “Emerald” Anniversary. www.seaisland.com

Julie Calvert to Lead Cincinnati USA CVB

CINCINNATI, OH — The Cincinnati USA Convention & Visitors Bureau (NCOVB) has been rebranded and is now officially known as New Orleans & Company. The former CVB led the de- velopment of the city’s multibillion-dollar convention and meetings business, grew the city’s visitors to unprecedented levels and played a key role in New Orleans’ ascendance as the world’s greatest sports championship destination. New Orleans & Company will focus in its new iteration not only on growing the cultural economy and hospitality enterprises, driving dynamic, sus- tainable business growth and career- oriented job creation, but also will focus on continuing its evolution as a thought leader, collaborative convener and partner to the workforce, local government and all citizens. www.neworleans.com

Omni Boston Seaport Hotel Breaks Ground

BOSTON, MA — Set to open in late 2020 at the corner of Summer and D Streets, the Omni Boston Seaport Hotel will break ground this spring in the development in the Seaport District. The hotel will feature 1,055 guest rooms inclusive of 52 suites that will top out at 21 floors. Culinary experiences will include an all-day restaurant and col- laborative workspace, lobby lounge, en-tertainment lounge, French brasserie and boulangerie as well as an elevated pool bar and grill. The hotel will house approximately 100,000 sf of flexible meeting and event space that includes the largest hotel ballroom in Boston’s Seaport District, along with breakout rooms, outdoor and prefunction space. Guests will have access to an urban rooftop pool deck located on the fourth floor. The pool deck will have an option- al space which will allow guests to host year-round events featuring views of Boston’s skyline. www.omnihotels.com

New Orleans CVB Rebrands as New Orleans & Company

NEW ORLEANS, LA — The New Orleans Convention and Visitors Bureau (NOCVB) has been rebranded and is now officially known as New Orleans & Company. The former CVB led the development of the city’s multibillion-dollar convention and meetings business, grew the city’s visitors to unprecedented levels and played a key role in New Orleans’ ascendance as the world’s greatest sports championship destination. New Orleans & Company will focus in its new iteration not only on growing the cultural economy and hospitality enterprises, driving dynamic, sus- tainable business growth and career- oriented job creation, but also will focus on continuing its evolution as a thought leader, collaborative convener and partner to the workforce, local government and all citizens. www.neworleans.com

PCMA Names 2018 Global Meetings Executive of the Year

FRANKFURT, GERMANY — Ben Goedegebuure was named PCMA’s 2018 Global Executive of the Year at the IMEX Gala Dinner for his three decades of generosity and passion for the events industry. Goedegebuure is global general manager — EMEA for Meritum Global Events. He was honored by Sherri Karamat, presi- dent and CEO of PCMA (Professional Convention Management Association). “Ben Goedegebuure leads by example. Throughout his career Ben has worked across all business event disciplines, consistently churning new trails and innovating how business is conducted,” Karamat said.

Goedegebuure has been a passion- ate industry leader for over 30 years and works all facets of the business events industry — from associations, to PCOs, venues and agencies. Throughout his career he has built a remarkable reputation and sphere of influence. Industry colleagues know him as generous, always willing to share his knowledge, and as nurturing to those new or transitioning in the industry. He has shown a strong commitment to association service, now as an active member of the PCMA EMEA Advisory Board. Previously, he chaired PCMA’s International Task Force, served on the PCMA Board of Directors (as the first non-U.S. board member) and chaired the PCMA Global Advisory Group.

Goedegebuure leads Meritum Global Events’ global expansion in EMEA (Europe, Middle East and Africa). In this role he is a well-respected trail- blazer, innovating how business events are conducted and developing partnerships among companies, suppliers and ven- dors drive successful events globally. www.pcma.org

Tips & Trends

Companies may also sponsor and stage the delivery of the test to an open audience by SITE or a local SITE chapter.

Then, in 2013, SITE launched the Certified Incentive Specialist (CIS) certification as an entry-level program designed to provide incentive travel professionals with the elements and nutriments of the trade and accelerate their on-boarding into the industry. Today, more than 1,300 professionals from 48 countries are CIS certified.

SITE is completing its career-spanning certifications by launching Certified Incentive Travel Professional (CITP), aimed specifically at mid-level planners of incentive travel programs in corporations and agencies, but open, too, to senior managers on the supplier side — DMOs, CVBs, DMCs, hotels, cruise companies and venues.

The CITP designation is awarded upon successful completion of a two- hour test designed to measure and validate the candidate’s performance against typical requirements of an incentive travel professional — strategic case-making around the business benefits of incentive travel, finance and budgeting, operations and execution, program design and delivery, CSR and sustainability.

The CITP test may be taken by any incentive travel professional who can demonstrate (a) five years fulltime employment in the business events/ MICE industry and (b) 40 hours of Continuous Professional Education (of which 25 percent must be specifically produced by SITE and related to incen- tive travel)

While there is no specific preparatory course for the CITP certificate, SITE will be offering candidates access to an extensive range of online modules designed to help candidates validate or supplement their exist- ing knowledge and expertise. In addition, relevant content may be found at Motivate, the online knowledge repository powered by the SITE Foundation.

The program will be offered in the following ways:

I. Companies may sponsor and stage the delivery of the test to a closed, qualified group of their own invited candidates (internal staff or clients, for example) during a company meeting, conference or event.

II. Companies may sponsor and stage the delivery of the test to an open, qualified group of incentive travel executives and managers during an industry conference exhibition, trade show or networking event.

III. Upon fulfillment of the qualification criteria, individuals will have the opportunity to take the test under proctored supervision at regional locations throughout the year if and when the test is offered to an open audience by SITE or a local SITE chapter.

For more details, visit www.siteglobal.com/page/certification.
Bally’s Las Vegas Completes Resort Tower Renovation
LAS VEGAS, NV — Located in the center of the action on The Strip, Bally’s Las Vegas has completed a $125 million redesign of 2,052 guest rooms and suites in the new Resort Tower. Nearly every guest room at Bally’s Las Vegas has been renovated within the last four years. The latest redesign features neutral, dark wood tones and striking pops of red throughout decorative accents and fashionable wall coverings, with various geometric patterns that create a contemporary feel. The new rooms include USB charging stations, chic lounge furniture and accessible wall coverings, with various geometric patterns that create a contemporary look.

Atlanta Marriott Perimeter Center Begins Multimillion-dollar Transformation
ATLANTA, GA — This summer, the Atlanta Marriott Perimeter Center will complete a multimillion-dollar renovation encompassing numerous exterior cosmetic changes and major improvements to all 344 guest rooms. The Grand Ballroom, will be completely overhauled; the Junior King and Queen Ballroom will feature floor-to-ceiling windows; and prefunction space will be added. The renovated hotel also will have an updated boardroom; three private meeting rooms, the intimate August Room and an outdoor pavilion with 3,000 sf of space. Other improvements include an all-new lobby, a newly renovated Outdoor Terrace, featuring more than 1,500 sf of al fresco dining with lounge chairs and a completely reimagined Gristroom.

Waldorf Astoria Las Vegas to Debut in August
LAS VEGAS, NV — Waldorf Astoria Hotels & Resorts has announced plans to convert the Mandarin Oriental on the Las Vegas Strip to the Waldorf Astoria Las Vegas in August 2019. Waldorf Astoria will assume full operation of the property with plans to reimagine and renovate the hotel with brand touches and improvements.

Atlanta Marriott Perimeter Center

Omni Hotels & Resorts Announces New Leadership Appointments
DALLAS, TX — Omni Hotels & Resorts has appointed Cara Banasch as vice president of sales. Banasch will lead all field and global sales teams and will be responsible for creating and implementing revenue-generating strategies across the entire luxury hotel brand.

What’s in a Name Badge?
By Jane Scaletta, CIS

Who would have thought that donning your company’s and your name on a simple badge could make such a big difference?

When you think of name badges, you might think of a worn out, outdated piece of paper that nobody wants. However, name badges can be so much more than just a way to identify yourself. They can be a powerful marketing tool, a way to promote your brand, and a way to create a connection with others.

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Approximately 2,200 enthusiastic attendees roared into Indianapolis June 2–5 for three days of celebration, networking, education and innovation at MPI’s redesigned 2018 World Education Congress (WEC). From the Opening Night Celebration at White River State Park overlooking downtown, to the Closing Night Celebration at Indianapolis Motor Speedway, the city of Indy had plenty to brag about. From pep rallies, to a block party at Monument Circle in the heart of the city, to lunch on the field at Lucas Oil Stadium, attendees had plenty to cheer about.

Some fast facts about WEC18:
- Planner to supplier ratio was split about 50:50 with 49.6 percent planners and 50.4 percent suppliers. About 77 percent were MPI members.
- There were 249 chapter leaders in attendance thanks in part to the 2018 MPI Chapter Business Summit, which was held in conjunction with WEC this year.
- The mix of attendees represented 35 countries — with the majority being from the U.S. (89 percent), followed by Canada (5 percent).
- MPI Hosted Buyer Program had 205 planners and 138 suppliers, who conducted just over 1,800 business appointments in two days.
- 158 suppliers exhibited throughout the WEC Villages.
- More than 80 total education sessions allowed attendees to earn up to 11 clock hours.

WEC19 will be held June 15–19 in Toronto.
#MeToo at Your Meetings

Your board has a policy stating the commitment of your organization to diversity and inclusion. You have created a meeting which reflects that commitment. You worked hard to put together a diverse group of content leaders. The images in your marketing materials reflected the diversity of your membership. At registration you asked attendees about their dietary needs, accommodations for disabilities and even their preferred pronouns.

You invited a distinguished member of your profession to present an after-dinner talk. The opening slide of his talk includes an image of a racist stereotype combined with a sexually objectified woman.

You have a Twitter hashtag for your meeting, and on the first full day of the meeting, this appears: “My friend told me she was sexually harassed at last night’s opening reception. #meetinghashtag” followed by “This, and the lackadaisical response of colleagues makes me question my continued presence at #meetinghashtag.” The thread continues, eventually adding up to more than 100 responses and retweets.

What Do You Do?
Both of these have happened. In the first instance, no one on the staff or among the volunteer leaders who were at the dinner took any action in the moment, and the slide stayed up for more than 20 minutes while dessert was served. Several people walked out. The following morning, the association issued an apology. The incident was talked about on social media for weeks afterward.

In the second instance, staff were able to locate the woman who had been harassed, a witness to the harassment and the harasser. He was asked to leave the meeting immediately.

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Sexual harassment “come-ons” and gender harassment “put-downs” occur at professional meetings. A 2016 survey asked scientists about their experiences with harassment at meetings found that 60 percent of the more than 200 respondents — which included people who identified as men, women and transgender — had experienced sexual or gender harassment at a scientific meeting. The harassment included experiences akin to “street harassment” — verbal harassment (catcalling, comments on appearance, calling someone an en-
A simple reporting process for targets and witnesses of harassment, preferably with a single contact point.

Wide visibility at the meeting, including signage, announcements, publication and mobile app.

Take care by training staff to handle reports of harassment incidents with sensitivity and compassion. The individual who takes incident reports must put the wants and needs of the target first, and let the target decide what actions to take. Even in the event of an assault, unless there is an emergent threat to the safety of others at the meeting, let the target decide whether and when to involve security or law enforcement. Ask permission to check in with the target later, and have a plan to debrief staff who may have witnessed or heard about the incident.

Keep incident reports as confidential as possible. Targets are reluctant to report harassment out of fear of retaliation and damage to their careers. Ensuring confidential reporting will encourage targets to come forward.

For the safety and comfort of all meeting participants, act on the assumption that what the target reports is what actually happened. The incidence of “false reporting of harassment in the workplace (where stakes are much higher) is very low and the likelihood of a false report of harassment at a meeting is most likely even lower. Often, the target will not know the identity of the harasser which reporting an incident, either because the incident was so distressing that the target never thought to look at the harasser’s name badge, or because the harasser deliberately hid their badge.

Do it there by handling incidents decisively and quickly, preferable while at the meeting, to protect the safety of your attendees. Decisions should be made by one or two people. Decisions are best made by staff, as volunteer leadership are more likely to find themselves conflicted when the harasser is a friend, colleague or important figure in their field.

Outcomes should be communicated only to those who need to know — the harasser, the target, the person who reported the incident (if they were not the target) and possibly event security.

Sanctions against harassers should be proportional to the incident and the harasser’s attitude on being confronted. If it seems the harasser is just socially awkward or inept, it may be enough to review the code of conduct and get their agreement that they will stop the behavior and avoid the target for the rest of the meeting.

If you have any reason to believe the harasser will not stop the behavior, particularly if they do any of the following, their credentials for the meeting should be revoked and they should be asked to leave the meeting immediately.

- Insists that the target “got it all wrong” and claims that they were not harassing the target.
- Expresses no remorse or understanding that what they did was wrong.

The impact of harassment reaches far beyond the initial incident. And that impact doesn’t stop with the target.

And damage to their careers. Ensuring confidential reporting will encourage targets to come forward.

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- Refuses to accept the consequences of their behavior and continues to defend it.
- Has a pattern of unacceptable behavior in the past.
- Egregious harassment may require banning the harasser from future participation in the meeting. These include: groping, stalking, physical contact and real or implied threats of physical harm, threats of professional or financial consequences, or promises of professional advancement in return for complying. Incidents that violate professional codes of ethics may require the association to activate procedures for removing and banning the harasser from association membership.
- The good news is that harassers have an impact disproportionate to their numbers. The vast majority of your attendees treat each other respectfully and professionally. Eliminating the small minority who are unwilling to change their behavior will go a long way to creating meetings that are fully inclusive and engaging.

Prepare, take care and do it there, and your attendees will thank you.

Sherry A. Marts, Ph.D.,

is a skilled trainer, writer and speaker. Her background includes careers in research, science advocacy and association management. She provides consulting on diversity and inclusion, harassment and bullying, and workplace communication. Her interest in ending harassment arises from her experiences as a woman in science and her training as a self-defense instructor. Marts is the author of “Open Secrets and Missing Stars: Sexual and Gender-Based Harassment at Scientific Meetings” (“Marts Consulting LLC, February 2017).

http://bit.ly/1osmpdf
Whether you make golf part of your corporate program or simply give attendees time to play or practice on their own, a golf resort has the power to drive attendance. Ditto spas, which offer healthful therapies and break options that not only make attendees feel better but may even increase meeting engagement.

**IN THE WEST**

**Loews Ventana Canyon Resort & Spa, Tucson, Arizona**

Stephanie Franco, CMP, owner of Spins Events in San Francisco, booked a client’s sales kickoff event at Loews Ventana Canyon. The February meeting drew 330 attendees.

Franco calls Tucson “a warm, beautiful, unique smaller city that not everyone knows. And everyone was friendly and helpful, from the CVB and hotels to your corporate program or simply give attendees time to play or practice on their own, a golf resort has the power to drive attendance. Ditto spas, which offer healthful therapies and break options that not only make attendees feel better but may even increase meeting engagement.

**Site Selection**

**Golf & Spa Resorts**

**Premier Properties Where Every Attendee Can Find Something to Love**

By Christine Loomis

The new Streamsong Black, one of three golf courses at Streamsong Resort, Bowling Green, Florida.

Kickoff event with 300 attendees, at Loews Ventana Canyon Resort & Spa in Tucson, Arizona.

**The Boulders Resort & Spa, Scottsdale, Arizona**

Another famed Arizona resort was the perfect setting for a national sales meeting in January with 110 in atten-
dance. “A key stakeholder had previously been at The Boulders for a leadership meeting,” says Michelle M. Robinson, CMP. “He loved it and wanted his entire group to experience it.”

The resort was a good fit for the 2018 sales meeting. All meals were on property, including a dine-around. Robinson calls the spa a standout, along with great service and great food. Staff across multiple departments also earned her praise.

Robinson used the Tohono Conference Center for meeting space. “It’s great because it’s self-contained,” she says. “I was able to host my general session, breakfast, lunch and coffee breaks there. It even has a patio. My ‘work’ room and a boardroom for pop-up meetings was also there.”

Golf and spa were among the optional onsite activities. “I had roughly 30 golfers, Robinson says. “I heard the course was somewhat challenging but a great time was had by all. At the spa, attendees could choose between a massage, facial or manicure/pedicure. It’s a very nice spa.”

Overall, Robinson found The Boulders to be ideal. “The size of the property made us feel as though we had the entire resort to ourselves, “ she says. “The excluded nature of the resort gave the feeling of an incentive even though we were there for a business meeting. The resort staff was amazing and the landscape lent itself to beautiful outdoor events, most notably at Promise Rock.”

**The Broadmoor, Colorado Springs, Colorado**

Situated at the gateway to the Colorado Rocky Mountains in Colorado Springs is the venerable Broadmoor, which recently completed updates as part of the resort’s ongoing Centennial Celebration. The hotel’s 100-year-old main lobby has been expanded to include more seating with sofas and gas fireplaces. The resort’s Broadmoor Main rooms and suites have been refreshed with new colors, furniture and carpeting.

The Golf Club now has a new, welcoming experiential lobby area for guests and members that celebrates the 100 years of golf history with photos, displays and descriptions. Also new at the Golf Club is The Grille, with signature dishes, a classic bar and Colorado mountain views. And in Broadmoor Main, Café Julie’s has opened with a design reminiscent of the finest classic Parisian patisseries.

**Hyatt Regency Tamaya Resort & Spa, Santa Ana Pueblo, New Mexico**

The Broadmoor campus has 784 rooms, suites and cottages, 185,000 sf of function space, three golf courses, a Forbes Five Star spa and fitness center and 10 restaurants, including the Forbes Five Star restaurant Penrose Room.

**Hyatt Regency Tamaya Resort & Spa, Santa Ana Pueblo, New Mexico**

The historic Sea Island Resort in Georgia, which opened in 1928, is situated along the scenic five miles of beachfront on the southern Georgia shore. The resort, a sister property to The Broadmoor, is comprised of the 265-room Cliseter, 85-room Inn and the AAA Five Diamond, Forbes Five Star Lodge, with 43 guest rooms. There are also 130 cottages on Sea Island available for rent. The Cliseter houses more than 40,000 sf of meeting space, restaurants and shops, offering “the resort transportation system is well organized for those wanting to reach the nearby Linkside Conference Center or beach at the resort.”

Finally, Wade says, “This staff is one of the best in the industry. They’re organized, knowledgeable about the property and the surrounding community, and they won’t say no. They always do their best to accommodate the customer.”

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Black, the resort is the only location in the state. The property’s third course, a rolling, dune-like landscape under the direction of Love Golf Design, reopening in December for the RSM Classic, an official PGA Tour event. These new additions are breathtaking. All events were held on property. “One of our primary goals is attendee networking,” Jaques says. “By hosting all of our events at the hotel, we’re able to maximize the amount of time our attendees spend together. The Grand is the perfect spot to accomplish this goal because of the various activities offered. There’s really no need for us to go elsewhere while we’re there because we’re provided with so many wonderful options, impeccable service and delicious food.”

Although there are many things Jaques believes planners should know about the hotel, one is of particular note. “The Grand Hotel makes you feel at home. We are not treated like business, we’re treated like family. Our attendees have come to know many of the employees and the employees and the employees have come to know us. We’ve welcomed back time and time again and each time is better than the last. As a planner, I feel at home as well; the team there is like my family.”

“The Grand Hotel has truly mastered the trifecta (collaboration, partnership and professionalism) for creating memorable experiences for our attendees.”

Not only do I consider this team family, but there’s a level of collaboration, partnership and professionalism that I don’t experience with any other venue.

The Grand Hotel has truly mastered the trifecta for creating memorable experiences for our attendees.”

Margaret Jaques, Manager of Events
New Orleans, LA

“The driving distance for our attendees is perfect. We ask attendees to drive in the morning of day one, which is typically a Monday. Our meeting begins with lunch. This means we are not taking time away from our attendees on the weekend and it’s cost effective for us because we don’t have to pay for rooms the night prior to our meeting. It’s win-win for our attendees and our organization.”

Moreover, she notes, the resort has a stellar reputation for impeccable service and delicious food, and the grounds are breathtaking. All events were held on property.

“One of our primary goals is attendee networking,” Jaques says. “By hosting all of our events at the hotel, we’re able to maximize the amount of time our attendees spend together. The Grand is the perfect spot to accomplish this goal because of the various activities offered. There’s really no need for us to go elsewhere while we’re there because we’re provided with so many wonderful options, impeccable service and delicious food.”

Although there are many things Jaques believes planners should know about the hotel, one is of particular note. “The Grand Hotel makes you feel at home. We are not treated like business, we’re treated like family. Our attendees have come to know many of the employees and the employees and the employees have come to know us. We’ve welcomed back time and time again and each time is better than the last. As a planner, I feel at home as well; the team there is like my family.”

“The Grand Hotel has truly mastered the trifecta (collaboration, partnership and professionalism) for creating memorable experiences for our attendees.”

Not only do I consider this team family, but there’s a level of collaboration, partnership and professionalism that I don’t experience with any other venue.

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HISTORY • TRADITION • SERVICE • EXCELLENCE
New hotel technologies promise to improve attendee experiences in guest rooms and meeting spaces by personalizing services, amenities and activities. By Derek Reveron

Technology also will also improve planning efficiency with software that manages myriad functions, including room blocks.

Experts say that hotels will use new technologies to collect customer data and create profiles of guests and groups that include information such as preferences, habits, interests, booking dates, who stays, length of stay and reasons for traveling. And the more often guests return and the longer they stay, the more information hotels can gather and the more they can personalize profiles and experiences.

Hotels will use the data to tailor pricing and booking deals to specific groups and individuals, upsell services and promote guest loyalty programs.

The extent to which hotels will share personalized guest data and profiles with planners isn’t clear. But one thing is evident, says Krueger: “If planners are allowed to apply the knowledge they have about their attendees, and are allowed to tap into hotel systems, the guest experience can be enhanced even further. The ability of the planner to help customize the onsite experience would open up many more possibilities for hotels to surprise and delight their guests.”

Merged Systems

While hotels may not merge their technologies with planners, they may eventually combine all of their own customer-centric systems. These include artificial intelligence (AI), keyless entry systems, virtual concierge, in-room voice technology and robots.

“When I look at that list, I don’t see a bunch of different technologies, but rather a blueprint for a customer experience system,” says Krueger. “Each one of the technologies plays a role in customizing the guest experience, and there are lots of ways they could interact with each other to improve it.” Krueger offers a scenario to illustrate how various technologies could interact to provide services to someone traveling to a meeting: “Artificial intelligence noticed that your flight was three hours late and sends you a notification with the opportunity to check in using the hotel’s mobile app and unlock your door by phone,” says Krueger. “Once on-site, you’re guided by the app to your room via an online map.”

Krueger continues: “After unpacking, you ask the system to order drinks. You don’t feel like walking anywhere, so the waist-high robot brings two cold beers and a toothbrush.”

“Technology really makes it so that the hotel can provide something really different and unique,” Krueger says.

“Technology offers an opportunity to create a new blueprint for a customer experience system,” says Krueger.

Mobile Apps

Many hotel companies are introducing their own branded mobile apps that guests can use to create individual profiles to handle a range of functions including bookings, check-ins and check-outs, television, room access, wake-up calls, spa appointments, room service, temperature and lighting, newspaper deliveries and providing feedback to hoteliers.

Hilton’s Connected Room platform, for example, allows guests to use their Hilton Honors app and mobile devices to customize room experiences. Guests can use the platform to control temperature, lighting, blinds, television and other functions.

The platform also allows guests to load streaming media and other accounts into the room’s television, upload photos and artwork to display in rooms, and control room access.

MGM Resorts International has partnered with StayNTouch, a mobile hotel property management system, to install smartphone-enabled check-in and check-out systems at all of its properties.

The cloud-based mobile platform also allows MGM to track guest preferences and upsell hotel services.

Some Hilton and Holiday Inn properties have implemented The AavGo mobile- and tablet-based hotel system, which allows guests to do everything that once required a phone call or visit to the front desk, including room service, communicating with staff and accessing any information about the hotel and its services.

Radisson Hotel Group plans to...
launch a technology platform named Emma that will encompass business analytics, property management, revenue management and more. Emma will include an integrated customer relationship management tool that uses data about past guest stays to personalize customer experiences.

Planners also are creating their own apps to customize the experience within hotel spaces. Kathy Miller, CEO of Schaumburg, Illinois-based Total Event Resources, says she proposed to a recent group that they create a networking café and app in a hotel that allowed guests to customize their coffee/drink orders and pick them up. “This is only the tip of the iceberg in terms of our ability to customize attendees’ experience in how they plan the event, they didn’t end up implementing the idea, it was one of extreme interest to both the hotel and the client.”

Artificial Intelligence

The popularity of voice-activated systems such as Amazon’s Alexa, Apple’s Siri, Google Assistant, Amazon Echo, IBM Watson and Google Home are leading hoteliers to adopt voice-activated in-room interactive technology through smart speakers.

Best Western Hotels & Resorts has a mobile engagement platform in more than 600 hotels that allows it to communicate with guests via mobile devices and Amazon’s smart-speaker platform. Together, the two technologies enable Best Western to message guests before they arrive, upon their arrival and throughout their stay. Guests can use the Best Western platform to request information about basic hotel services such as dining and spas. Some specific requests such as late checkout are automatically sent via tablet to hotel staff, which responds by phone or in person.

Hotels also are starting to experiment with using smartphone apps to communicate with robots to handle services such as room service, snacks and items such as mouthwash, towels and toothbrushes. For example, a robot called Relay delivers basic services to guest rooms and is “smart” enough to operate elevators and navigate crowds.

Service Robots

According to Miller, “Once these robots and technology became more mainstream, the impact can be explored in many ways — directing attendees, providing customized user experiences such as directional information, and finding the nearest bathroom, hospital or FedEx facility. The robots could also provide signage.”

Experts predict that voice-activated in-room technology eventually will be as common as televisions in hotel rooms. According to a white paper by hotel technology companies SiteMind and Integrated Systems and Decisions Inc., hoteliers believe AI is the key to personalizing guest experiences in the future, but they also fear that properties could eventually be run by robots. Still, AI promises to be a valuable tool for planners. “From a meetings and events perspective, having this technology in a hotel is a definite benefit,” says Faller. “We are always looking for ways to create a memorable experience for attendees, and this technology satisfies those who are used to it and ‘wows’ those who are not. If attendees return from a program talking about their new or different experience with excitement, it adds to the overall value of the meeting or event.”

Miller agrees: “These ‘intelligent’ services can help meeting planners by streamlining the information process and saving on the amount of staffing required,” says Miller.

She offers an example: “Currently, planners are building their own mobile apps with varied information for both a conference and its hotels,” says Miller. “Perhaps there will be an opportunity for savings on the planner side to have hotel information readily available that planners can export into their customized apps, saving time and staff resources in recreating this information each time they build a mobile app.”

Keyless Entry Systems

Hotel brands such as Starwood, Hilton and Marriott are turning to keyless entry systems, which allow guests to use mobile phones to access hotel rooms. Eventually, keyless entry will be one of a wide variety of hotel functions, services and products available via mobile devices and apps. Some keyless systems will allow the management of room blocks and other functions useful to planners.

According to Miller, “Keyless entry systems save time and frustration. Most attendees want to use their phones for convenience in as many ways as they possibly can. There would be no more lost keys or having to go back to the front desk when your key isn’t working. The check-in and checkout processes would be more efficient. All of this information would be provided to the hotel in advance and it creates a better customer experience all the way around.”

Virtual Concierge

A 24-hour virtual concierge service would respond to requests such as those regarding restaurant dining on and off property as well as room service; housekeeping; room and travel reservations; maintenance requests; spa reservations; show tickets; and extra pillows. Caesars Entertainment properties in Las Vegas recently introduced its personalized 24-hour virtual concierge service called Ivy, an automated guest engagement platform powered by IBM Watson. The system now services more than 6,000 rooms in Caesars Las Vegas properties, including Caesars Palace and The LINQ Hotel & Casino.

Ivy allows guests to use mobile phones for dining, entertainment and spa reservations as well as maintenance and housekeeping requests. Ivy also surveys guests. Plans call for Ivy to be introduced to Caesars’ remaining Las Vegas resorts by the end of this year.

In addition, Hilton and Marriott include virtual concierge services in their hotel loyalty apps.

Virtual Reality

Marriott has introduced an in-room virtual reality headset program that allows guests to take virtual trips to other locations. Guests can share the experience with others on a VR content plat
other, eventually become essential to most guests no matter their current technology habits.

According to Faller, “For younger generations, mobile apps and AI are the norm and the expectation. For others, too much technology at a hotel may feel foreign. Then there are those in the middle who, though they may not know or use all the latest technologies, are excited to try them. Regardless of where people fall on that spectrum, how technology impacts the way meetings are planned depends on the type of program and the needs of the client.”

Challenges of adopting hotel technology include educating consumers and training staff on new systems, and security/privacy concerns, since every guest will have physical access to any of the voice-activated devices. “I would venture that some might not find these devices appropriate in a hotel room for security and privacy reasons,” says Faller. “But as long as there is an easy way for hotel guests to turn it off if they don’t want it, it could be a benefit for those who do.”

Privacy Concerns

According to Tyra Hilliard, CMP, J.D., associate professor of hotel, restaurant and meetings management, University of Alabama, “The law is notorious about lagging behind technology, so one of the biggest legal issues that planners need to keep in mind is that there are likely to be gray areas around the legalities associated with the latest technology — meaning planners should tread with care.”

Hilliard adds that “general legal principles such as reasonable care, privacy issues and negligence will apply, but specific doctrine may be slow to be developed and applied or may be extrapolated by courts from cases dealing with older technologies.”

Meanwhile, guests are likely to demand even more from technology as it creates additional options for service and speeds up its delivery. However, no matter how sophisticated technology becomes, face-to-face engagement will remain essential. Technology will enhance, not detract from, personal engagement by hotel staff because they will have more time for guests.

The bottom line for planners: New hotel technologies will provide more ways to enhance attendee experiences.

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CEO, Total Event Resources, Schaumburg, Illinois

Hilliard expects the hospitality and legal industries to eventually determine liability risks for hotel technology as regulations such as the European Union’s General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR) take hold. The regulations streamline data privacy laws across Europe. The GDPR became effective in May and applies to organizations within the EU and any organization outside the EU that provides EU citizens with goods and services.

According to the Meeting Evolution Technology Solutions (METTS) website, the technology provider for Irving, California-based Meeting Sites Resource, GDPR will impact meetings and planners in several ways including the following: Planners who run meetings in an EU country or where its citizens might attend need to provide all attendees from EU nations with an opt-in check box with a date/time stamp and a link to a GDPR compliance document that details how their data will be used and stored.

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At some corporate meetings and events, the chosen venue is a mandatory affair — with the same types of facilities, same menu and same agenda being featured year after year. Brenda Alvarez, meeting planner at Reach Air Medical, a Santa Rosa, California-based company providing emergency air transport services for hospitals, sought an out-of-the-box venue to conduct the company’s offshore leadership and teambuilding meeting.

Memorable Venues

Alvarez turned to Safari West in Northern California as the ideal locale to offer company attendees an unusual meeting experience. “We had heard that they offer meeting space but did not know they would help make it such a memorable experience,” Alvarez says. “We wanted something different and new, and we certainly had that with Safari West.” Safari West allows guests to explore the Sonoma Serengeti on an African-style wildlife safari. While promoting conservation and environmental education concepts, guests can enjoy relaxing in a luxury safari tent under the gaze of a graceful giraffe or exploring the area amidst herds of exotic wildlife. Approximately 20 people attended the meeting with about half staying the night for the full Safari West experience. “The opportunity to spend the night in their amazing tents was something the team members couldn’t stop talking about,” Alvarez says. “Being able to listen to wildlife in the evening is something you don’t normally discuss as part of a leadership meeting so that was definite—ly a unique perk for the team.”

Sara Gorlick, vice president of events for Rakuten Marketing, also recognizes the key role selecting a unique venue can play in a meeting’s success. For every Fashion Week in New York City, Rakuten Marketing hosts an event for influencers and brands in the industry. The event is an opportunity for the company’s guests to create partnerships as each brand has the opportunity to show off their products. “Many influencers want to collaborate with the brands that they feel passionate about and would support even if they weren’t getting paid to advertise, so our event lends itself to making personal connections,” Gorlick says. To add to the week’s uniqueness, Rakuten Marketing hosted their event at Ramscale Studio, located in the former home of Bell Labs, where Thomas Edison and Alexander Graham Bell both worked.

Located in the West Village neighborhood, Ramscale evokes the ambiance of a hidden loft apartment in New York City. “New York City real estate is so unique and each apartment has a story unto itself so the Ramscale is like walking into a secret location in the city that you feel lucky to have stumbled upon,” Gorlick says. “Everyone has been in a conference room — it’s either too hot or too cool and exhausts guests. Unique venues inspire. As event planners we are able to create perks for corporate workers and create experiences they wouldn’t have if they didn’t have a corporate job. It is a privilege to be able to give that to people and unique venues are the way to make it happen.”

For Greg Jenkins, partner at Bravo Productions, a meeting and event planning company in Long Beach, California, choosing a unique venue that stands out in the minds of attendees is paramount to making a meeting or event a success. “As an event and meeting planner based in Southern California, we have staged meetings and events at various unique venues,” Jenkins says, including the Aquarium of the Pacific and Museum of Latin American Art in Long Beach, Hangar 8 in Santa Monica, and Union Station and Petersen Automotive Museum in L.A. “The Museum of Latin American Art was selected for its distinctive representation — it’s the only museum in the United States dedicated to modern and contemporary Latin American art,” Jenkins says. “Union Station is one of the greatest examples of Spanish revival/art deco in the country — and still operates as a train station. It’s just monumental in its scale and is centrally located.”

Event types included networking events, customer/client appreciation gatherings or private parties in conjunction with a conference. “Unique venues (transport) guests to a different time and place, something most hotels cannot achieve without creating a big themed event,” Jenkins says. “In addition, the unique venue might offer the only opportunity for the meeting and conference attendees to experience an outing outside of the hotel and convention center. This is even more important when the attendee is from out of state and has limited time to experience the nearby area. Unique venues also tend to speak the attendee’s sense of adventure and curiosity.”

Making an Effort

More and more companies are taking notice of the unique venues available for their next meeting or event across the country. At the Harley-Davidson Museum campus in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, the onsite Motor Bar & Restaurant offers customizable private dining and event options that really “wow” attendees — both motorcycle and non-motorcycle lovers alike. With the ability to play host to events with 10 to 10,000 attendees, the Harley-Davidson Museum offers a wealth of options for events of all types. “Meeting and event planners should consider using unique venues intermittently to accommodate a change in production needs, to support a theme, to

by Maura Keller

Safari West Wildlife Preserve and African Tent Camp — the Sonoma Serengeti.

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Unique Venues

Safari West Wildlife Preserve and African Tent Camp — the Sonoma Serengeti.

Blue Whale Gala at Aquarium of the Pacific, Long Beach, California.

Fashion Week gathering at Ramscale Studio, located in the former home of Bell Labs in the West Village, New York City.
ing room, a former hotel office, plus a restaurant and a cabaret club all located on the same floor.

“We needed meeting space, and the hotel could not give up its traditional meeting space for two months, due to prior bookings,” Davis says. “We convert the unique settings into classrooms, however, which opened in June 2016, offering faculty members a unique experience all throughout the year.”

While some attendees may enjoy a motorcycle-centered meeting venue, others may revel in attending an event focused on their favorite beverage. Enter repurposed breweries. These historic venues often offer a sampling of their signature ingredients — along with requiring an extensive build-out — but the chance for guests to enjoy an event in such an unconventional venue is invaluable.

According to Adam Sloyer, CEO, Sequence, a meeting and events agency in New York, specializing in production and venue design, the primary advantage to a unique venue such as Basecamp Boulder is excitement.

“We always want to experience something new or different, and a unique venue adds a bit of intrigue,” Sloyer says. “Unique venues also are more likely to generate event buzz, which leads to social marketing, sharing and promotion. Also on the cost side, unique venues may have built-in components that you’d otherwise need an outside company to bring in. Think of a nightclub with in-house audio-visual, or a museum with pre-existing décor or environment.”

One prominent hedge fund that Sequence works with hosts their meetings at the American Museum of Natural History in New York City. DeBernardi and her team work with The Escape Room over the course of several months to customize many of the clues within their rooms to meet

Work & Play

The adage, “All work and no play makes Jack a dull boy” rings true for many meeting planners who work hard to integrate a fun, active atmosphere into a chosen venue.

“Events are all about the experience and are becoming more innovative each year, so shouldn’t the spaces we hold them in reflect this change?” asks Maria Geller, meeting and events manager at Special D Events in Detroit, Michigan. “Traditional venues are becoming stale and clients are searching for venues that allow for more creativity and provide attendees with an ‘out-of-the-box’ experience they aren’t expecting.”

That’s where The Escape Room Indy comes in. Just steps from the Indiana Convention Center in Indianapolis, The Escape Room Indy, housed in a central downtown building, boasts five game rooms, each designed to offer 60 minutes of competitive problem-solving fun. The ultimate team building experience, participants are locked in a themed room and provided clues and riddles in order to solve puzzles and discover keys and other combinations that will enable them to escape the room before time runs out. From Art Gallery to Bank Heist to Jail Break, the themed rooms are intricately designed to take teams of eight guests on an adventure, waking up with a sore back and covered in bug bites. In fact, amenities include hardwood floors, electricity, water boil-

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Greg Jenkins, Partner
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Sara Gorlick, Vice President of Events
Rakuten Marketing, New York, NY
Wine Train provides a unique setting for anyone hoping the venue combines wine and train travel.

Speakeasies also are getting more creative than ever, and with amenities like secret doors, they provide attendees an additional feeling of exclusivity.

Moving Venues
While hosting an event at a historic brewery or a refurbished train depot are ever-popular options, another unique venue combines wine and train travel. The Napa Valley Wine Train, which offers a 36-mile round-trip experience through California’s wine country, is a very unique option for anyone hoping to create a productive and enjoyable environment. Complete with pre- and post-meeting areas, the Napa Valley Wine Train provides a unique setting for groups of all sizes. The train also can be tailored to meet a particular group’s needs — whether it includes cozy tables and the freedom and choices to customize your group function just the way you like.

What’s Old Is New Again
Many owners and operators of historic venues are eager to share the history of their venue, while also providing modern amenities that work for corporate groups. For a stylish and distinctive meeting and event experience The Transept, a historic, 202-year-old church in the revitalized historic neighborhood of Over-the-Rhine in Cincinnati, Ohio, has been transformed into a memorable venue for meetings, concerts, receptions and other social events. After a $4.5 million renovation project, The Transept opened in 2015, and features stained glass, 50-foot vaulted ceilings and a wealth of classic design and architecture with modern amenities. The first-floor public bar is the ideal spot to unwind after a meeting held in one of the venue’s rental event spaces in the basement, first, second and third floors.

Cincinnati is also home to the Rhinegeist Brewery, a microbrewery housed dominantly from Napa Valley, along with a fine-dining experience. Although train travel is conducive to many types of meetings, incorporating a helicopter ride into a meeting or event is another memorable option for today’s meetings. In fact, Sundance Helicopters, based in Las Vegas, offers a distinctive event space at its terminal. Complete with a lavish pre-flight lounge, the terminal can host large groups and serve food and beverages while attendees wait their turn for helicopter tours during the function. Sundance Helicopters offers 25 state-of-the-art helicopters, each seating six people — so there’s plenty of space for groups looking to enjoy breathtaking flights above the Las Vegas Strip, Grand Canyon, Lake Mead and the Mojave Desert.

Events are all about the experience and are becoming more innovative each year, so shouldn’t the spaces we hold them in reflect this change? Maria Geller, Meeting & Event Manager Special O Events, Ferndale, Michigan
Today's travelers want a deeper dive into local culture. Attendees crave authenticity in their experiences, rather than just a generic or mass-market experience. They want an experience that gives them real insight into a destination, from its history, food and drink, activities and culture.

Incentive Travel Providers are Front and Center

In meetings and incentive programs, whether domestically or abroad, attendees want, even demand, authentic experiences that showcase local communities, food, drinks, activities and culture.

It’s no longer enough for tourism offices and DMCs to provide the standard offering of events and activities. Attendees want, even demand, authentic experiences that highlight the unique aspects of a destination.

Some authentic experiences challenge travelers to examine tumultuous periods of history and political conflict, as 100 attendees from a U.S.-based multinational conglomerate found during an incentive program in Ireland.

Michael Dalton, CIS, director of sales with Irish DMC Moloney & Kelly, brought the group to Belfast. There they embarked on a Black Taxi tour of neighborhoods affected by “the Troubles.”

“The tour delves into the political past and what life was like for locals on both sides of the conflict and shows how this shaped Belfast to become the vibrant, buzzy city it is today,” Dalton says.

In addition, they had a range of experiences that showcased different aspects of the country’s culture, past and present. Among them was an offsite dinner in Winterfell Castle, home to HBO’s “Game of Thrones.” “Everyone got in costume and participated in activities such as archery, and they had their photos taken in the Iron Throne,” Dalton notes.

The local destination experience continued with a visit to the queen’s residence in Northern Ireland for afternoon tea on her very own fine china. On arrival at Hillsborough Castle, the bugler sounded the arrival and guests were treated to a VIP tour where they had the opportunity to peruse family photos of the British Royal Family while enjoying some royal treatment themselves.

And then there was immersion in a more modern aspect of culture. Just outside of Dublin in County Wicklow, known as “the garden of Ireland,” the group visited Powerscourt House and spent a day at celebrity chef Catherine Fulvio’s Ballyknocken Farm. In addition to being immersed in the postcard-worthy lush green countryside, they experienced local food and music via hands-on experiences.

“They learned to make Irish scones and how to play the bodhrán, an Irish drum,” notes Dalton. “They participated in an Irish dancing lesson and also learned the art of sheepherding. One of the evening events involved a local farmer’s market experience at Powerscourt House. The event was designed as a bespoke Taste of Wicklow experience, complete with artisan food, beverage and local craft producers.”

Dalton believes that splitting the program between two locations gave attendees a richer cultural experience. “Showing two cultures within one destination offered unique perspectives to attendees. While Ireland is a somewhat small island compared to any state in North America, we have extensive variety throughout the regions. Doing a split program in two locations gave the attendees the opportunity to experience more culture and clearly see the differences between our localities.”

The program exposed the incen- tive group to what Dalton calls “a full immersion of the city, song, dance, history and culture. It provided attendees with a well-rounded destination experience that afforded them the opportunity to learn something new, be it a new talent, taste or even simply uncovering a new hidden gem of knowledge.”

That said, Dalton notes, “I firmly believe that in any destination, it’s the people and the characters that visitors come across that make the difference. When guests get to hear the stories of the Black Taxi drivers or William from Winterfell Castle or chef Catherine Fulvio, they learn so much. These individuals have enormous passion for their trade, their location and their communities. It gives attendees a sense of fulfillment to learn from these enthusiastic ambassadors and allows them to return home recharged, energized and eager to share their own passionate stories of life, travel and experiences with others.”

In terms of the bottom line, he notes, “For planners it’s important to understand that hotel rates include break- fast, Wi-Fi and all taxes and charges. Resort fees and additional taxes or charges do not exist here. This is important when comparing with other cities.”

“Also, there are practical financial supports in place for such things as site inspections and FAM trips. You can typically expect support to the level of 2,000 euros toward a site inspection for a program consisting of 50 people or more staying a minimum of three nights. As a DMC, we complete the paperwork as a complimentary service and the money is transferred directly to the meeting planner.”

Among the hotels Dalton chose for this group were Culloden Belfast and Powerscourt Hotel. “Culloden Belfast was a former bish- ops’ palace and the setting is beauti-
The Culloden is owned and operated as part of the cultural immersion. "The Culloden is owned and operated by the Hastings family, who are extremely supportive of local farmers and businesses in the area. For example, every morning at breakfast guests have a little booklet that tells them exactly which orchard the apple juice comes from or which farm supplied the sausages and bacon. And given its location near the oldest working whiskey distillery in the world, guests will always find a bottle of Bushmills whiskey beside the porridge so they can put a little kick in their step each morning," Dalton says.

Indigenous Interactions in the Outback
Catherine Jones, CMP, CMM, CITE, MA, MBA, Owner The Edventive Group, Dallas, TX

"Accor Hotels has invested heavily in the Uluru area and runs a training program for indigenous peoples in their hotels."

"With four official languages, modern contemporary sites, medieval villages, lakes, mountains, glaciers and palm trees, we can truly identify ourselves as diverse."

Catherine Jones, CMP, CMM, CITE, MA, MBA, Owner The Edventive Group, Dallas, TX

The group got to interact with and learn from members of the Royal Flying Doctor Service (RFDS), which provides medical care in the Outback. "The RFDS faces many of the same challenges that medical providers face in states with rural populations such as Texas," Jones says. "As is the case at Ovation Switzerland, Satigny-Geneva, Switzerland is successful when a company invests heavily in the Uluru area and runs a training program for indigenous peoples in their hotels," Jones says. Staying there gave the group special opportunities for interaction with, and provided insight into, that indigenous culture. "Being located in Uluru in a hotel staffed mostly by indigenous people offers an amazing experience," Jones says.

The Edventive Group, Dallas, TX

Jones says the key for planners to providing a meaningful experience for groups is to first understand your client's goals and aims for their program. "Once you have a deep understanding, you are able to work to construct a truly meaningful experience for your groups, one that is not superficial."

Swiss Splendor
Sometimes, it’s the internal workings of the country itself that give groups opportunities for cultural immersion. Switzerland’s famously punctual and well-integrated transportation system isn’t just a means to get from one place to another. It’s integral to the fabric of Swiss society as well as a portal to the heart and soul of Swiss culture, which in large part is defined by the nation’s eclectic geography. There are French, German and Italian regions, and mountains, lakes and urban landscapes — all defined by the singular cultures within them and connected by an extraordinary transportation system.

Renato Grieco, Director of Sales Ovation Switzerland, Satigny-Geneva, Switzerland

"The RFDS faces many of the same challenges that medical providers face in states with rural populations such as Texas," Jones says. "As is the case at Ovation Switzerland, Satigny-Geneva, Switzerland is successful when a company invests heavily in the Uluru area and runs a training program for indigenous peoples in their hotels," Jones says.
bination of mountain and lake resorts is selected, such as Lucerne and Interlaken or Zurich and Zermatt or Gstaad and the Lake Geneva Region,” he says. Accommodation opportunities in Switzerland are huge — maybe not in terms of hotel size, but definitely in terms of choice,” he notes. “You can go from historical and luxurious properties to charming, family-owned pensions. There is a solution for everyone. Distances from major international airports such as Basel, Geneva and Zurich are quite short, and a transfer in Switzerland is a full-discovery experience.”

Authentic culture, he adds, is simply a given. “Let’s be realistic. It is unlikely an incentive will take place in Switzerland without infusing a local Swiss touch into the program. Sometimes simple things such as a chocolate workshop or a tasting cheese fondue dinner or a visit to a local winemaker can create a rich cultural experience. For this specific client, aspects that were important were innovation and technology, and Switzerland is rich in opportunities when it comes to those areas.”

Grieco believes that cultural immersion elevates a program and Switzerland is a historic hotel in Lausanne, featuring an impressive, magnificent building that has been totally restored and brought to its initial splendor, “The Royal Savoy is a historic hotel in Lausanne, Grieco says. “Try to step into a process where you can be a little bit flexible with dates. There can be strong differences in cost if you have the ability to move the event a few days. Also, please be aware that certain cities in Switzerland offer free local public transportation cards when you are staying in a hotel there. This creates enormous economic benefits for group leisure time or activities. And remember that transportation in Switzerland is an experience; it is not, as in most destinations, just a means to go from point A to point B.

Traveling by panoramic express, cable car or cogwheel train provides a cultural experience rather than simply a functional need.”

Planners looking for cultural immersion for their groups can find it across the world. It does take a bit more time and effort to provide the kind of cultural experience that truly elevates an experience and provides true insight into a country and its people. There are quick options to be sure, such as tasting local food and local drink. But today’s attendees want more than that. The good news is that with the help of local tourism offices and DMCs, it’s easy to find those deeper, more meaningful experiences. C&IT
Whether it’s Vancouver’s mountain-ringed harbor, Calgary’s cowboy culture, Montreal’s music and food, Quebec City’s historically French setting or the metropolis of Toronto and all that the country’s largest city entails, Canada is a treasure trove of destinations.

So varied, so vast, so extraordinary is this region to our north that in reality the biggest problem for planners may not be where to go and what to see, but rather where not to go and what not to see, for it’s chock full of meeting appeal.

Makeup Meetings
“Canada is important to our brand because it began in Toronto and always we try to stay connected to our roots,” says Jennifer Rondinelli, director of meeting planning with MAC Cosmetics, Global Education. An acronym for Makeup, Art and cosmetics, MAC was founded in 1984 by marketer Frank Angelo and Frank Toskan, a photographer and makeup artist. The company’s goal was to meet the cosmetic needs of the contemporary woman. Three-plus decades later MAC is a top global makeup brand.

Having conducted MAC’s June 2017 Education Leadership Meeting and its March 2016 Trainer Academy in Toronto (both consisting of 100 company leaders from North America, Asia, Europe, U.K., Ireland and Latin America), Rondinelli describes the events: “Our meetings are focused on training initiatives and strategy, artistry and seasonal makeup collections and collaborations.”

Having often partnered with The Ritz-Carlton Toronto, Four Seasons Hotel and Residences Toronto and Park Hyatt Toronto, luxury is the name of MAC’s meetings game.

Home to the largest convention center in Canada, Toronto’s facility also ranks among the top 10 largest continuous-space convention centers in North America. Its award-winning Metro Toronto Convention Centre — featuring 442,000 sf of exhibit space, 77 meeting rooms, multiple-purpose ballrooms and a theater — has added 11,000 sf of dedicated meeting space.

Toronto also has two airports serving airlift and city center locations, “explains Rondinelli. “Our main destinations are Miami, Orlando, San Francisco and Los Angeles, in addition to Toronto.”

However, another of the cosmetic company’s Canadian destinations is Vancouver, site of the January 2017 MAC Global Sales and Training Meeting for 250 attendees from North America, Asia, and Latin America. With The Fairmont Waterfront as the home base, general sessions were conveniently only steps from the Vancouver Convention Centre.

Gearing up for its busiest convention year to date, Vancouver will welcome 33 citywide conventions and events in 2018 — in no small part due to its convention center’s appeal. Its iconic West building has been awarded the LEED Platinum certification, recognizing its living roof and seawater heating and cooling system. Coupled with its 2010 Platinum certification for new construction, the center is the world’s first double LEED Platinum convention center. Together the West and East buildings have 466,500 sf of function space.

“The meeting facility at the Vancouver Convention Centre was fantastic. We used the main room on the ground floor that offered great views of the water and mountains. The entire team at the convention center was helpful, organized and professional,” says Rondinelli.

“We typically have an evening event, but we don’t plan anything else so that our attendees can explore the cities on their own,” says the planner of this city that offers such uncommon choices as floatplane tours to whale watch or to attend a Canucks NHL ice hockey game, complete with exclusive access, high-end dining and meet and greets with the players.

To promote MAC’s meetings the company uses a meeting website, most recently Attendease (which is based out of Vancouver). The planner explains that they use surveys, Q&A and polling features in the app to measure results.

“Vancouver was always a destination on our radar and I think that most attendees have never been to the city, so it was a new experience, destination and culture,” Rondinelli says of Canada’s westernmost big city.

Another Vancouver fan is Jeff Richards, CMP, vice president of Gavel International (a North American meeting and incentive company), who planned the February 11–15, 2018, Regional Leadership Conference for 275 attendees of a global manufacturing firm. Its purpose: to align the global teams on strategy, vision and execution moving into 2018.

Vancouver and the JW Marriott Parq Vancouver (one of two luxury and lifestyle hotels under one roof) were a match for a multitude of reasons. “Vancouver was selected, in part, due to its geography and available lift from global destinations. In addition, the gain on currency was also an influencing factor.”

With respect to the recently debuted hotel in a city of 13,000 downtown hotel rooms, the Gavel executive explains: “Being a new property and having all of the function space on one level were attractive to my client. In addition, the proximity to many restaurants and shops — all within walkable distance — was a deciding factor.”

Located in the heart of the city’s energetic entertainment district, dine-arounds took place one evening featuring 10 restaurants — including such notables as Blue Water Café, Chambar and Hawksworth.

Conceived by two-time James Beard Award nominee Elizabeth Blau, Parq Vancouver restaurants and lounges number eight. “The banquet staff did an excellent job, especially for a Panoramic view of the Quebec City skyline.

•

“Canada! From Culture to Cowboys, this Welcoming and Diverse Land Beckons U.S. Planners

By Cynthia Dial

June 2018 • Corporate & Incentive Travel • TheMeetingMagazines.com

Panoramic view of the Quebec City skyline.

We didn’t know much about (Calgary) before visiting but found that it really does have a lot to offer — great food, beautiful nature and hospitable people.”

Kendra VanVelzor, Event Content Specialist/Events Team Kumon North America Inc., Teaneck, NJ

TheMeetingMagazines.com • Corporate & Incentive Travel • June 2018
Toronto is a Tony Town

Frequently compared to New York City (it’s Canada’s largest city and North America’s fourth largest city behind Mexico City, New York and Los Angeles), Toronto has it all — from luxury lodging to live theater to one-of-a-kind attractions — and is within a 90-minute flight for more than half the U.S. population.

Known for its dramatic diversity, Toronto has been called the world’s most Global City, with 50 percent of its population born outside the country and approximately 130 languages spoken — all of which is reflected in its neighborhoods and F&B offerings.

“The presentation (at JW Marriott Parq Vancouver) was unique, and... each event was impactful. The quality of the food was also excellent.”

Jeff Richards, CMP, Vice President
Gavel International, Vernon Hills, IL

New on the Toronto scene is the reopening of the Museum of Contemporary Art Toronto Canada. A 55,000-sf area located in a heritage-designated building formerly known as the Tower Automotive Building, it covers five floors and is five times larger than its former Queen West location.

Additional news for this city of 36,000 hotel rooms in more than 170 hotels include Kimpton’s soon-to-open 13-story, 189-guest room hotel in 2018 (becoming Toronto’s first of the brand); the library of Canada’s first Canopy by Hilton. New York’s Library Hotel Collection has opened the 30-story, 406-room Hotel Montréal Toronto will become Canada’s first St. Regis Hotel, a designated AAA Five-Diamond property.

Toronto has been designated a UNESCO Creative City of Media Arts and its attractions are many — from Casa Loma, a historic mansion and garden in midtown Toronto, to CN Tower soaring above the skyline. And in theater, the Broadway-acclaimed “Come From Away” (a show about a small Newfoundland town and its role in the aftermath of the September 11, 2001) has returned to the Royal Alexandra Theatre, through September 2.

Montreal’s Many Offerings

The city is a collection of communities begging to be explored — how dish by dish and festival after festival. So, whether it’s enjoyingoutine, bagels or smoked meat (it’s known for these foods) during a walking tour, a fine-dining meal at a chef’s table, a dine-around through its ethnic neighborhoods or perhaps swaying to the music of Chris Botti during the Jazz Festival (one of more than 100 annual festivals), there’s no shortage of entertainment.

Out of the Boardroom and Onto the Rails

Imagine a corporate meeting beginning just as an animal sighting is announced. “Bear on the right!” ripples through the train — more specifically the Rocky Mountaineer — creating an infectious excitement.

A luxurious rail-journey operating between Vancouver on Canada’s west coast and Jasper or Banff/Lake Louise, both snugly ensconced within the Canadian Rockies, this is a two-day opportunity for groups looking to host indoor meetings surrounded by an extraordinary and ever-changing outdoor setting.

This on-the-rails venue offers more options than dramatic panoramas. A boycott of a custom-designed Rocky Mountaineer SilverLeaf or GoldLeaf dome car (think premium versus premium-plus) includes transfers, culinary service and gratuities. Another possibility is the exclusive use of a lounge car equipped with presentation screens, a large meeting table and lounge-style couches — a flexible setting for the perfect meeting environment or as a purely social space.

Two words best describe what can be next for an out-of-the-box-thinking planner in a country whose corporate and incentive programs annually generate more than 1 million travelers and 1 billion dollars in revenue:

All aboard! — CD

Rocky Mountaineer provides spectacular scenery as the backdrop to an intimate meeting.
QUÉBEC CITY, YOUR SUCCESS MAKES HISTORY.

French civilisation in North America. With its European old-world charm and modern-day flair, Québec City features a wide variety of chain and boutique hotels that offer an entire spectrum of state-of-the-art facilities. The renowned Québec City Convention Centre is centrally located in the heart of the city. Québec City, one of Canada’s leading meeting destination, has assisted countless meeting planners around the world to organize successful meetings, conventions, tradeshows and incentive experiences.

Contact Carissa Koral, our U.S. based sales rep, and ask her about our exclusive incentive program for U.S. meeting planners.

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ckoral@meetquebeccity.com

*Don’t worry, she has our contagious joie de vivre.
properties including ALT Hotel. With views of the Bow River and the
downtown skyline, it’s scheduled to open August 2018.

The city’s two convention centers, the Calgary Telus Conven-
tion Centre (122,000 sf of meeting space, 36 breakout rooms
and connected to three four-star hotels) and BMO Centre at
Stampede Park (500,000 sf of versatile event space and 25
breakout rooms), are both located downtown.

On the F&B scene, five breweries are opening in a six-
block radius and an assortment of restaurants, from Gringo
Street’s Latin street food to Donna Mac, an eatery focusing
on locally grown produce — adding to the city’s more than
200 downtown spots.

Calgary Tower celebrates its 50th anniversary this year with
an assortment of functions, and scheduled to open November
2018, is Calgary New Central Library. Noted as one of
200 downtown spots.

Quebec City Is North America’s Paris

Though situated 500 miles east of Toronto and almost 3,300
miles west of Paris, the 3,475-square-mile municipality is decid-
edly French. This is a city with window boxes overflowing with
flowers, cafes serving crepes and croissants and cobblestone
streets everywhere. As the only walled city north of Mexico and
flowers, cafés serving crepes and croissants and cobblestone
and Queen Elizabeth and Paul McCartney, as well as
as many a group. But beyond this recently renovated legend,
which can host an intimate meeting of 12 and a major confer-
ergie for 700, is an assortment of hotels, including Delta Hotels
Québec, Hilton Québec and Hotel Château Laurier Québec.
Among its equally exceptional venues are Le Parlementaire,
an elegant setting for black-tie events and Voltigeurs de Qué-
bec Armoury, the oldest Francophone regiment in Canada. Sit-
uted between the iconic Plains of Abraham and Grande Allee,
it can host up to 1,300. An equally cool selection, is the Hôtel
de Glace (Ice Hotel) entirely made of ice and snow, making it
the perfect setting for a unique winter event. Also available
are guided tours, followed by cocktails in the ice bar (served in
carved ice glasses, of course).

Vancouver’s Variety

Located harbor-side, bordered by a mountain range and
punctuated with skyscrapers, the setting is known for its seren-
ty but beneath this tranquility are superlatives that beckon the
planner and best define this Canadian metropolis.

In a city offering 13,000 downtown hotel rooms, the city’s
historic Fairmont Hotel Vancouver (357 rooms) which is called
the “Castle in the City” updated its Fourteenth Floor Heritage
Suites. Commemorating the city’s royal visit by King George VI
and Queen Elizabeth and the royal couple’s hotel stay during its
1959 grand opening, the recently-revealed luxurious lodgings
are reflective of this era’s monarchy.

Among the destination’s made-in-Vancouver teambuilding
activities are such out-of-the-norm options as learning the art
of axe throwing from lumberjacks atop Grouse Mountain, arriv-
ing by boat to have a scavenger hunt at Sewell’s Marina within
the Howe Sound fjord (home to whales, seals and sea birds)
and participating in a shoreline cleanup sponsored by the Van-
couver Aquarium (also fulfilling a CSR goal).

With Vancouver’s International Airport’s recognition as the
continent’s best airport for eight consecutive years — serving
56 airlines to 125 non-stop destinations and with 78 daily U.S.
flights — it’s little surprise Vancouver was named 2017’s No. 1
Destination for a Business Meeting in North America, accord-
ing to STR’S Destination MAP (Meeting Assessment Program).

From Vancouver to Quebec City, there are a world of choices
for planners to consider in this second largest country on the
planet that is second to none in its power to impress.
Orlando is known for its world-class theme parks, but for corporate and incentive meeting planners, Orlando also means world-class meetings infrastructure and services guaranteed to draw burgeoning numbers of international attendees. In fact, according to Business Review USA and Visit Orlando, 83 percent of meeting professionals say attendance spikes when meetings rotate to Orlando. Visit Orlando reports that among the record 72 million annual visitors to Orlando recorded in 2017, Orlando's Orange County Convention Center welcomed an unprecedented 1.53 million attendees.

Sold on Personalized Service

When Christine Gilmore, meeting planner and vice president of training at Bell Partners Inc. was planning to teach a daylong training session in April 2018, she chose Orlando as the destination for attendees. Specifically she selected DoubleTree by Hilton Orlando at SeaWorld to host the event. "The hotel is really nicely renovated," Gilmore says. "They have a beautiful meeting space and outdoor space. It is a great balance of the functional part of having a meeting and a relaxing atmosphere while you almost feel like you are on vacation."

The location of DoubleTree by Hilton Orlando means guests can enjoy staying in the Downtown Disney Resort Area. The facility's strong reputation for highly personalized service makes the hotel attractive to meeting planners, and is what keeps bringing them back. Being an official Walt Disney World hotel, they can offer access to private events in the Disney parks, teambuilding, character greetings and entertainment onsite and much more.

The team at Bell Partners was so pleased with the attention to detail and overall collaborative nature of the staff at the event at Rosen Centre Hotel, which also has 150,000 sf of indoor meeting space.
DoubleTree, that they have booked the company’s upcoming annual leadership conference, with more than 500 attendees expected, at the hotel.

“They are always very responsive and have the attitude of, ‘the answer is yes. What is the question?’”

Gilmore is not alone in her selectivity as it relates to Orlando. More and more meeting and event planners are turning to Orlando as a preeminent meeting location, and for meeting attendees, Orlando leaves nothing to be desired.

Orlando leads the pack for a variety of reasons, according to Visit Orlando, including affordability, accessibility, quality and variety of facilities, alongside the unforgettable experiences attendees enjoy.

Jane Scaletta, general manager at AlliedPRA Orlando, notes that the city never stops changing. “One of the main reasons planners choose Orlando is because they can return with a program year after year and there is always something new and exciting to offer,” Scaletta says. What's more, Orlando is the perfect fit for any meeting, incentive, convention or event because of the non-stop air travel from over 100 cities into Orlando, along with the near perfect weather of 65–75 degrees during the winter months, and the wide variety of offsite venues and restaurant choices at affordable prices. And better yet, Orlando is still considerably cost-effective compared to other large cities in this size.

According to Scaletta, Orlando has the second largest convention center and offers the second highest number of hotel rooms in the country. “Also due to the location, we were able to really integrate some of our world-class theme park elements and entertainment that make Orlando so special,” Scaletta says.

What most people may not know is that Orlando hosts 40 percent of the HCEA (Healthcare Convention & Exhibitors Association) top 50 largest medical meetings and is quickly being known as the medical meetings hub of America.

“While we have the large convention center and lots of hotels rooms, we also have intimate and boutique hotels to handle smaller meetings,” Scaletta says. “We have restaurants that cater to smaller groups with private dining rooms, like Ceviche downtown and Mango’s Tropical Cafe, Tapa Tora, Del Frisco’s Double Eagle Steak House and Cafe Tu Tu Tango on International Drive, and Urbain 40 and Rocco's Tacos in (the) Dr. Phillips area.”

New and Renewed

As a constantly evolving destination, Orlando entices meeting and event attendees to return time and again. For instance, Disney Springs has added intelligent parking garages, along with new shops and restaurants. One of

“(The hotel staff) are always very responsive and have the attitude of, ‘the answer is yes. What is the question?’”

Christine Gilmore, V.P. Training
Bell Partners Inc., Greensboro, NC

Ceviche downtown and Mango’s Tropical Cafe, Tapa Tora, Del Frisco’s Double Eagle Steak House and Café Tu Tu Tango on International Drive, and Urbain 40 and Rocco’s Tacos in (the) Dr. Phillips area.
Scaletta’s favorites is the newly opened 1920s-era The Edison, which exudes an “Industrial Gothic” feel. Also the Wine Bar George is expected to be popular with more than 100 selections of wine by the bottle.

“With regards to hotels, Orlando is growing with many new hotels being built,” Scaletta says. The new Margaritaville is opening along with a new dining and entertainment district and 12-acre water park. What’s more, in August, Universal Orlando Resort is opening Aventura Hotel at Universal with a 16-story glass tower of 600 guest rooms and the first-ever rooftop bar and grill in Universal, Bar 17 Bistro. DoubleTree by Hilton Orlando at SeaWorld recently unveiled new state-of-the-art event spaces and services. Located at SeaWorld Orlando, the resort renovated guest rooms and public areas, and added a wealth of welcoming outdoor lawn spaces to enjoy Orlando’s beautiful weather. The hotel features 100,000 sf of indoor and outdoor meeting and event space, which includes three conference centers each with their own ballrooms. The recent renovations resulted in the new 20,000-sf Majestic Ballroom, and the new outdoor Palm Promenade, which offers four distinct event spaces and a covered pavilion.

Jane Scaletta, CIS, General Manager
Allied PRA Orlando

“One of the main reasons planners choose Orlando is because they can return with a program year after year and there is always something new and exciting to offer.”

which offers four distinct event spaces and a covered pavilion. Rosen Hotels & Resorts’ three convention properties, the 1,501-room AAA Four Diamond Rosen Shingle Creek, the 1,334-room Rosen Centre Hotel and the 800-room Rosen Plaza Hotel — offer a combined 700,000 sf of indoor and outdoor meeting and event space with flexibility for all types of events. For instance, Rosen Shingle Creek boasts 99 breakout rooms of all sizes.

According to Leslie Menichini, vice president, sales and marketing, Rosen Hotels & Resorts, “We can accommodate from the most intimate group of 10 to more than 9,000 in our 95,000-sf column-free Gatlin Ballroom. Being independently owned, we have the freedom to work with a planner to create the most unique experiences while keeping budget constraints in mind. We’re always up for a challenge,” she says.

Rosen Hotels & Resorts recently completed an ultramodern upgrade of Rosen Centre, including all of its 1,334 guest rooms and suites. Rosen Plaza, which is connected to the newly-renovated Orange County Convention Center, also recently completed refurbishments of all 800 guest rooms and suites, and Rosen Shingle Creek recently refreshed its 1,501 guest rooms and the grand lobby with contemporary furnishings. The Shingle Creek Golf Club now features a newly redesigned championship course by Arnold Palmer Design Company. All three hotels recently have installed Sonif Solutions in-room entertainment, which includes interactive TV options and streaming via StayCast. The system also will provide a new group messaging system, allowing planners to send mass messages, photos and video to their entire room block.

Space is also top of mind for planners who select the all-suite Caribe Royale Orlando, which features 29 breakout rooms, the 40,000-sf Grand Sierra Ballroom and the additional 26,000-sf Caribbean Ballroom within its Grand Caribe Convention Center. The resort’s standard suites are perfect residences for attendees, and the fully-outfitted villas, located near the conference center, can provide extra meeting space as needed. And the facility’s new Island Spa, two-story fitness center and paved running and bike trail will appeal to those looking for a break from other activities.

And while Caribe Royale Orlando offers flexible meeting space, the same can be said for The Grove Resort & Spa Orlando, which offers indoor and outdoor meeting venues for groups of up to 125 people. Set on Lake Austin, amid a portion of Central Florida’s conservation grounds, the resort is a sanctuary from the boisterous pace of the theme park areas. Recently, The Grove Resort & Spa Orlando enhanced its family-centric appeal by opening its Surfari Water Park, which features waterslides, a winding lazy river and a dual-rider surf simulator. Perfect for meeting attendees who bring their families, Surfari Water Park is set on its own parcel of the 106-acre resort, separate from The Grove’s three existing swimming pools.

Hilton Orlando Bonnet Creek also embraces the natural beauty of the surrounding area. Situated on 482 acres of nature preserve, the resort-style hotel boasts nearly 132,000 sf of flexible meeting and function space, including four ballrooms and 44 high-tech breakout rooms. Planners also can take advantage of stunning and unique outdoor venues including a pavilion with sweeping views of waterways and the golf course. When it’s time to take a break from work and enjoy some play time, Hilton Orlando Bonnet Creek offers a relaxing lazy river, glorious spa and Rees Jones-designed championship golf course.

Nearby, Hilton Orlando Buena Vista Palace features 108,000 sf of modern event space. The newly renovated property offers state-of-the-art technology and is a mere 10 minutes from the Orange County Convention Center. In addition, the resort features the Disney Institute, which allows meeting planners to access programs, speakers and behind-the-scenes tours. What’s more, a meeting’s entertainment can be significantly enhanced with the available stage shows and character appearances.

Space, Space and More Space

Considered one of the largest meeting properties in the Orlando area, the Orlando Resort at ChampionsGate recently underwent a $40 million expansion, which added 100,000 sf of conference center space at the Osceola Conference Center. The 862-room resort now offers a total of 248,111 sf of indoor-outdoor meeting and event space. The new Grand Salon Ballroom, designed particularly for galas and special events, boasts a new porte cochere for private arrivals, an expansive new ballroom, and a delightful terrace with a fireplace, promenade, patio space, event gardens and grand event lawn.

The resort’s self-automated business center means that meeting professionals and attendees can have access 24 hours a day.

And in this era of “doing good and giving back,” to help companies further their philanthropic and sustainable giving initiatives, Omni is working to end hunger in America by contributing one meal per actualized reservation, allowing companies to give back for each attendee who stays at the resort.

If getting away from it all while still having access to the myriad of Orlando theme parks sounds appealing, Reunion Resort may be the perfect retreat for an upcoming corporate meeting or event. Situated on 2,300 rolling acres, Reunion Resort features championship golf and recreation aplenty. The resort, which offers a variety of accommodations including one-, two- and three-bedroom villas plus vacation rental homes, also boasts 25,000 sf of meeting and event space, as well as a Grande Event Pavilion, complete with stunning views and a luxurious waterfall.

Work Some, Play Some

Universal Orlando Resort’s five onsite hotels — Loews Portofino Bay Hotel, the Hard Rock Hotel, Loews Royal Pacific Resort, Universal’s Cabana Bay Beach Resort and Loews Sapphire Falls Resort — offer a total of 5,600 guest rooms. Meeting attendees can enjoy convenient access to a myriad of beautiful outdoor scenery within the resort, as well as the convenience of being connected to the Orange County Convention Center via a walkthrough skywalkway, but the hotel features more than 315,000 sf of event space including five ballrooms, 105 breakout rooms and an awe-inspiring 56,000-sf rotunda.

The Grove Resort & Spa Orlando recently opened the Surfari Water Park.
of event options at Hard Rock Live, Universal CityWalk and all of the Universal Orlando theme park amenities. And when it’s time to get down to work, the Loews Meeting Complex offers more than 295,000 sf of meeting and event space indoors and another 97,000 sf of outdoor space, as well as an expansive business center. The complex connects the meeting space at Loews Sapphire Falls Resort and Loews Royal Pacific Resort. Universal recently introduced Fast & Furious Supercharged at Universal Studios Florida. In addition, Universal’s new Volcano Bay water park offers new ways for meeting attendees and their families to beat the heat.

Walt Disney World Swan and Dolphin Resort is synonymous with exceptional event experiences, thanks in part to its expansive meeting facilities and ideal location between Epcot and Disney’s Hollywood Studios and nearby Disney’s Animal Kingdom and Magic Kingdom. Comprised of two distinct hotels, the Swan and the Dolphin boast a combined 330,000 sf of meeting space. The resort also has recently completed a $140 million renovation that encompassed all guest rooms.

New and upcoming at Walt Disney World Resort are Pandora — The World of Avatar in Animal Kingdom, featuring the exhilarating 3-D ride Avatar Flight of Passage; the Frozen Ever After attraction in Epcot; Star Wars: Galaxy Edge, opening in 2019 in Disney’s Hollywood Studios; and the Guardians of the Galaxy roller coaster in Epcot, which will be one of the world’s longest enclosed coasters when it opens in time for Disney’s 50th anniversary in 2021.

If golf is the draw for meeting attendees, the Villas of Grand Cypress features 45 holes of Jack Nicklaus Signature-designed golf, including a new Scottish links course, and a 21-acre Academy of Golf training center. Accommodating groups of up to 240 meeting attendees, the Villas of Grand Cypress’ 7,200-sf Mediterranean-style Executive Meeting Center features meeting rooms that surround an open atrium overlooking a scenic garden terrace. Because of its beautiful locale, the 1,500-acre property also boasts 10,500 sf of outdoor event space.

At the Wyndham Grand Orlando Resort Bonnet Creek, the well-appointed lakefront hotel is equipped to handle business functions, from board meetings and large conferences to corporate fundraisers and trade shows. It’s been two years since the Wyndham added approximately 6,000 sf of meeting space to its facilities for a total of 32,000 sf of meeting and event space. Located on the banks of a beautiful 10-acre lake, Wyndham Grand Orlando Resort Bonnet Creek offers peaceful surroundings — the perfect backdrop for productive, yet enjoyable events. The Bonnet Creek area, also home to Hilton Bonnet Creek and The Waldorf Astoria Orlando, will welcome a new JW Marriott Orlando Bonnet Creek resort with 50,000 sf of meeting space in early 2020.
Wine country, abundant seafood and cultural elements.

Son, Atlanta averages 50 inches of rainfall annually, Orlando to Vancouver, and into Idaho, a region sometimes called Cascadia.

Mountains and islands, water and desert, green and lush. That means you’ve got skiing, kayaking, horseback riding and all the outdoor elements, but you can pair it with the wine country, abundant seafood and cultural elements.

The city recently received a long-awaited green light to construct a second, non-contiguous building for its convention center. The existing WSCC has been the smallest facility of any major West Coast city, so the added square footage is vital for keeping the Seattle meeting and convention business competitive. Construction breaks ground in July 2018, with an anticipated completion date in 2021.

“It gives us a lot of flexibility,” says Norwalk. “It’s a building of slightly larger size, and it will allow us to do two meetings simultaneously.”

Additionally, eight hotels catering to a divergent audience are opening in Seattle this year. The additional 2,431 rooms will represent a 20.5 percent increase in inventory for the city. Among them is LeBlanc’s Embassy Suites Seattle Downtown Pioneer Square, which opened its doors March 28 in the city’s oldest neighborhood, 1.5 miles from the convention center. The 282-room hotel features a six-story atrium — ideal for receptions — and nearly 10,000 sf of meeting space, including a 7,433 sf pillar-free ballroom.

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Also new for Hilton and part of the Curio Collection is The Charter Hotel. Debuting in July and located just a block from Pike’s Place Market, the 229-room hotel features 10,000 sf of flexible meeting space, a 2,500 sf fitness center, an Argentine restaurant focused on locally sourced meats, fish and seasonal produce, and the Fog Room, a 16th-floor rooftop lounge.

Twelve miles south of the city in Tukwila, 3.8 miles east of SeaTac International Airport, Hotel Interurban opened its doors on May 22. The 185-room hotel offers 15,000 sf of flexible meeting space, a 2,500 sf fitness center, an Argentine restaurant focused on locally sourced meats, fish and seasonal produce, and the Fog Room, a 16th-floor rooftop lounge.

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Meeting and Entertainment Center (right) in April. Embassy Suites Seattle Downtown Pioneer Square opened its doors March 28 in the city’s oldest neighborhood.

Embassy Suites Seattle Downtown Pioneer Square opened its doors March 28 in the city’s oldest neighborhood.
This has been a long-awaited project, and it’s a game-changer for us,” suggests Norwalk, who adds that the location is walkable and its easy to reach the downtown core. “They’re adding lots of meeting and function space to the city.”

For Seattle, such expansion couldn’t come soon enough. The city recently celebrated its eighth consecutive year of tourism growth — overnight visitors were up 3.9 percent in 2017 — and SeaTac International Airport has grown to be the nation’s ninth busiest by passenger volume.

“The only challenge for us has been one of the sheer size of convention center,” says Norwalk, who adds that attendance is “incredibly strong” for meetings coming to Seattle. “There’s a misconception that we’re a seasonal destination, but even our first quarter is doing well — 10 months out of the year, we are busy.”

But challenges of weather and capacity are outweighed by the vibrancy and uniqueness of Seattle, according to Norwalk. “We’ve never been a traditional cookie-cutter, chain-restaurant town,” explains Norwalk. “That tight, compact downtown core provides an ease of getting around, meaning transportation isn’t as big a priority as it is for some convention destinations.

“There’s been a renaissance in Seattle over the last couple years, and it will afford meeting planners more choices, more hotel space, and more offsite venues to work with.”

Portland
Down the road in Oregon, Portland is also experiencing major tourism growth, much of it aimed at the meeting and convention market. The city’s hotel room inventory is projected to increase 40 percent by 2020, with six hotels opening this year alone.

While this year’s crop of new hotels in Portland mostly targets business travelers and the leisure market, the new Hyatt Regency Portland at the Oregon Convention Center (OCC), opening December 2019, will be a dramatic addition to the city for meeting planners. The $244 million, 600-room hotel located next door to the OCC will feature 32,710 sf of meeting and event space, including a 12,655-sf ballroom. The hotel will be located near bus lines, a streetcar line, the MAX light rail line, and a bike-share station, providing guests and meet-

Credit: Deschutes County Fair and Expo Center

Credit: Grand Hyatt Seattle

Credit: Sheraton Seattle Hotel

Deschutes County Fair and Expo Center visitors can enjoy more than 300 days, annually, of high-desert sunshine.
ing attendees with quick access to downtown Portland, the central eastside and the airport.

The opening of the new Hyatt Regency will be of benefit to meeting planners such as Anne Hallinan, CMP. In January, Hallinan oversaw the Sales University 2018 event for Beaverton-based Tektronix Inc. (Tek), manufacturer of oscilloscopes, logic analyzers and video and mobile test protocol equipment. The 630 attendees were split between the 477-room DoubleTree by Hilton Portland, located in the up-and-coming Lloyd District, and the 202-room Courtyard by Marriott Portland Downtown/Convention Center. "Our challenge is tight availability," explains Hallinan. "The meeting is held during the first quarter, and although Portland in January isn’t high on people’s choice for vacation, convention center and hotel space is tight. We don’t have much, if any, choice in dates. We are at the mercy of the calendar and need to fit between other, larger events.” Hallinan says the new Hyatt Regency is long overdue and very exciting. "As a meeting planner and someone very engaged in the meetings industry, I am thrilled that Portland finally has this in their portfolio. For my client and this particular conference, this may open up additional dates for us as sometimes the hotel occupancy has dictated when we could hold this event. "We hold our conference at the Oregon Convention Center. It is ideal because we have a fair number of breakouts, plus general sessions, ancillary meetings and group meal functions with seating for 600 — the convention center can accommodate all under one roof with minimal, if any, room turns. This meeting also requires quite a bit of electricity due to all of the equipment used in the breakouts. This is problematic for most hotels, but the convention center can handle it easily.

"I love the fact that the hotel and the convention center are industry leaders in sustainable meetings, from power conservation to recycling and composting," says Hallinan. "Additionally, the first time I worked on this program, I was impressed by the fact that the DoubleTree had Chinese-speaking front desk agents. This was invaluable, as some of our guests have limited English and it was a great welcome to them as they arrived after many hours of travel, especially if they had any issues with their hotel reservations or credit cards." But Hallinan also cautioned that the DoubleTree is on the light rail line, and it can be heard in many of the guest rooms, "especially early in the morning when the service starts up again for the day.”

For the event, Hallinan says Tek arranged dinners throughout the city at restaurants and breweries. "It was a great opportunity for our attendees to experience Portland since their schedule is so tight while they are here. The restaurants were very flexible and provided a really nice experience for everyone.” Like many visitors, Hallinan praised Portland’s light rail system. "It’s a huge advantage," explains Hallinan. "The vast majority of our attendees fly in from around the country and internationally. Being able to use MAX (Metropolitan Area Express) means we don’t have to pay transportation costs to get everyone to and from the airport. Our attendees use it to get to and from hotels and the convention center (for those who don’t want to walk the short distance).

Hallinan also recommended utilizing the meeting planning services of Travel Portland. "They are extremely helpful not only with putting together meetings but also with group meal functions with seating for 600 — the convention center can accommodate all under one roof with minimal, if any, room turns. This meeting also requires quite a bit of electricity due to all of the equipment used in the breakouts. This is problematic for most hotels, but the convention center can handle it easily.

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Meeting space at the LEED-certified Hyatt at Olive 8 overlooks downtown Seattle.

Rendering of meeting space at the Hyatt Regency Seattle, which opens this November as the largest hotel north of San Francisco.

HYATT REGENCY SEATTLE
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Located in the heart of downtown Seattle, a stunning building designed to celebrate the very best the city has to offer and built with the highest environmental standards in mind. Our hotel features 1,260 guest rooms, 103,000 square feet of meeting space, 3 restaurants and bars and unique gathering areas to relax and make connections. Here, we have thought of every detail, so you can focus on taking care of business.

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For more information, contact sears-rtp@hyatt.com or visit seattle.regency.hyatt.com

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the meeting space/sleeping room package that works for the

For Leah Silber, CEO of Tilde Inc., an open source code
developer, a quality convention center and other attributes
weren’t mere motivation for holding a conference in the city.
“...Because we utilized the convention center and (maybe) the size of our
room block, Travel Portland provided us with complimentary
passes for the light rail and bus system.”

“My company moved our headquarters to Portland about
five years ago, in part because we knew we’d want to be host-
ing more and more of our events here,” says Silber. “The con-
vention center really is a pleasure to work with and I recom-

“We've worked in cities all over the country, and it's really hard
to beat the staff and facilities at the Oregon Convention Cen-
ter,” Silber continues. “The venue makes or breaks the show,
and it's amazing — and rare — to know you can really rely
on the convention center staff to do their jobs perfectly just
about every time. The OCC also has shockingly good retention
of staff, so when we go back year after year, we're dealing with
the same people over and over again. Most of the folks we
work with there have been at the convention center 10 years
or more, and some have been there as long as 30 years! Being
able to establish and lean on that rapport is a serious competi-
tive advantage if you're a repeat event organizer.

“We’ve all worked with venues that really made our lives
difficult, or even seemed to sabotage our events. Being able
to know you don't need to worry about things like that is a
real game-changer.”

Silber says that lodging needs have been evolving for
her meetings, including her most recent, EmberConf 2018,
which drew about 1,000 attendees and
the DoubleTree by Hilton Hotel Portland provided the prin-
cipal room block.

“We’ve been moving to smaller and smaller hotel room
blocks, even as our events grow, because so many people
are choosing Airbnbs. They’re harder to track. ...On the other
hand, they don’t come with liability for us in terms of guar-
anteed nights — so there are ups and downs. It’s definitely
changed things in a big way, and I’m interested in seeing how
it plays out long term.”

During her events, Silber typically arranges a private VIP
or team dinner for 30–50 people. “We invite all the folks who
are instrumental in making our program stand out and take
them for a dinner we hope they won’t forget. Portland helps
us deliver. There are so many great restaurants to work with,
and I’m constantly finding new and interesting private spaces.

Seattle is home to some of the most successful companies in the world and the fearless entrepreneurs who
bring them to life. Experience the determination and inspiration for yourself and learn more about placing your
meeting in Seattle at visitseattle.org/meetings.
On The Move

David Berzofsky was appointed director of sales for Teneo Hospitality Group, Midwest. With more than 25 years of hospitality sales experience, he most recently was global account executive for The Ritz-Carlton Hotel Company/Marriott International.

Elise Gertenbach was promoted to director of group sales for Hotel Contessa in San Antonio, Texas. She most recently served as national account director for the hotel.

Renaissance Baltimore Harborplace Hotel has announced Jennifer Lewis as director of sales and marketing. She most recently worked as the director of sales and marketing for the Kimpton Hotel Monaco Baltimore.

Gary Baker, CMP, has joined The Spa a Norwich Inn, Norwich, Connecticut, as director of sales. He formerly served as director of convention sales and services at Mohegan Sun in Uncasville, Connecticut.

DoubleTree by Hilton Ala Moana Waikiki Beach in Honolulu, Hawaii, has promoted Cheryl Lynn Nasser to director of sales, marketing and revenue. She most recently served as director of revenue management for the hotel.

Scott Ward was named director of sales and marketing for Benchmark’s Santa Barbara Beach & Golf Resort, Curacao. He was previously interim director of sales and marketing for Benchmark’s South Florida properties, Beachwalk Resort in Hallandale Beach and Marenas Beach Resort in Sunny Isles.

Hyatt Regency Jacksonville Riverfront hotel has named Melanie Brickner as group sales manager responsible for large group bookings in the Southeast and Florida state association clients. She formerly served as meeting connection sales manager at Hyatt Regency St. Louis at the Arch.

Next Level Performance in New Brunswick, New Jersey, has named Leigh Wilkins as director, travel experiences. She returns to co-manage the travel department, after having worked on the travel team for several years in the past.

Fontainebleau Miami Beach has appointed Kevin Bryant as executive director of sales. After holding the position of director of sales and revenue management at the resort, he served as corporate director of revenue management at Fontainebleau’s parent company, Turnberry Associates.

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