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CORPORATE & INCENTIVE TRAVEL

THE MAGAZINE FOR CORPORATE MEETING AND INCENTIVE TRAVEL PLANNERS

A Whole New Level of Wow!

Planners Are 'Pushing the Envelope'
for Memorable Experiences

PAGE 30

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Emerging Destinations

Why These Newly Discovered Meetings
Cities Deserve a Second Thought

PAGE 42

Group dining in Wynwood — one of the largest open-air
street art collections in the world — Miami Beach, Florida.

WHERE ONE DESTINATION HOLDS
A WORLD OF POSSIBILITIES.

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Credit: Playa Hotels & Resorts

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The iconic Golden Gate Bridge, San Francisco. **PAGE 54**



Credit: Barbara Kraft

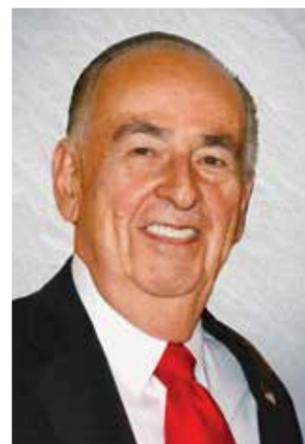
Guests can swim day and night while enjoying the party at the XS Nightclub at Wynn Las Vegas and Encore. **PAGE 60**

Publisher's Message

Make It Memorable

Corporate meetings are undergoing a transformation. Planners are looking to create experiences that engage and excite attendees — to produce an effect lasting long beyond the actual meeting. It is no longer as “simple” as offering attendees geographical convenience, generic hotel F&B and standardized meeting rooms.

“...In a very important way, an ‘experiential’ strategy is...a way of better engaging attendees for a more successful meeting,” says Karen Shackman, president of Shackman Associates New York, a meeting/event planning and destination management company, in our feature “A Whole New Level of Wow” on page 30. Attendees are looking to engage with meeting content and destination in more personal ways. By utilizing unusual offsite venues like a transformed historic bank vault or a science museum, planners are on the cutting-edge in their meeting design — for large and small groups alike.



Also in the spirit of out-of-the-box thinking and adventurousness, this month we are reminded to take a second look at “Emerging Destinations” (page 42) like Omaha, Nebraska, for budget-friendly locations that can still be counted on to provide luxurious accommodations, amenities and superior service. Rob Helling, vice president of creative development for Sonburst Communication, says of the city, “Even if we were not based (here)... I would put Omaha up against any convention city in the country...” And, in “Top 10 Animal Encounters for Groups” planners take adventure to the next level by combining unique experiences — like iguana feeding or cattle-herding — with teambuilding and networking activities.

Negotiation is another important part of a planner's repertoire. The ability to negotiate — whether it's a hotel contract, a personal relationship, working with a destination's CVB or organizing complex ground transportation — is not inconsequential. In “Ground Transportation Do's & Dont's” (page 30), Jessica Niblett, CMP, national sales manager, Allied PRA Orange County/Los Angeles, reminds us that early planning and setting clear expectations with transportation vendors is key to avoiding complications and confusion later. And Elizabeth Ingram, events coordinator for Bojangles' Restaurants, Inc., advises in “Working With CVBs and DMCs” (page 48), that we “utilize their expertise and experience...to help (us) succeed.” For specific tips and techniques, read “Negotiating Hotel Contracts,” on page 24.

To get and give the most from your programs, turn to “All-Inclusive Resorts” (page 18), as well as updates on perennial favorite destinations — California (page 48) and Las Vegas (page 54).

Harvey Grotsky
Publisher

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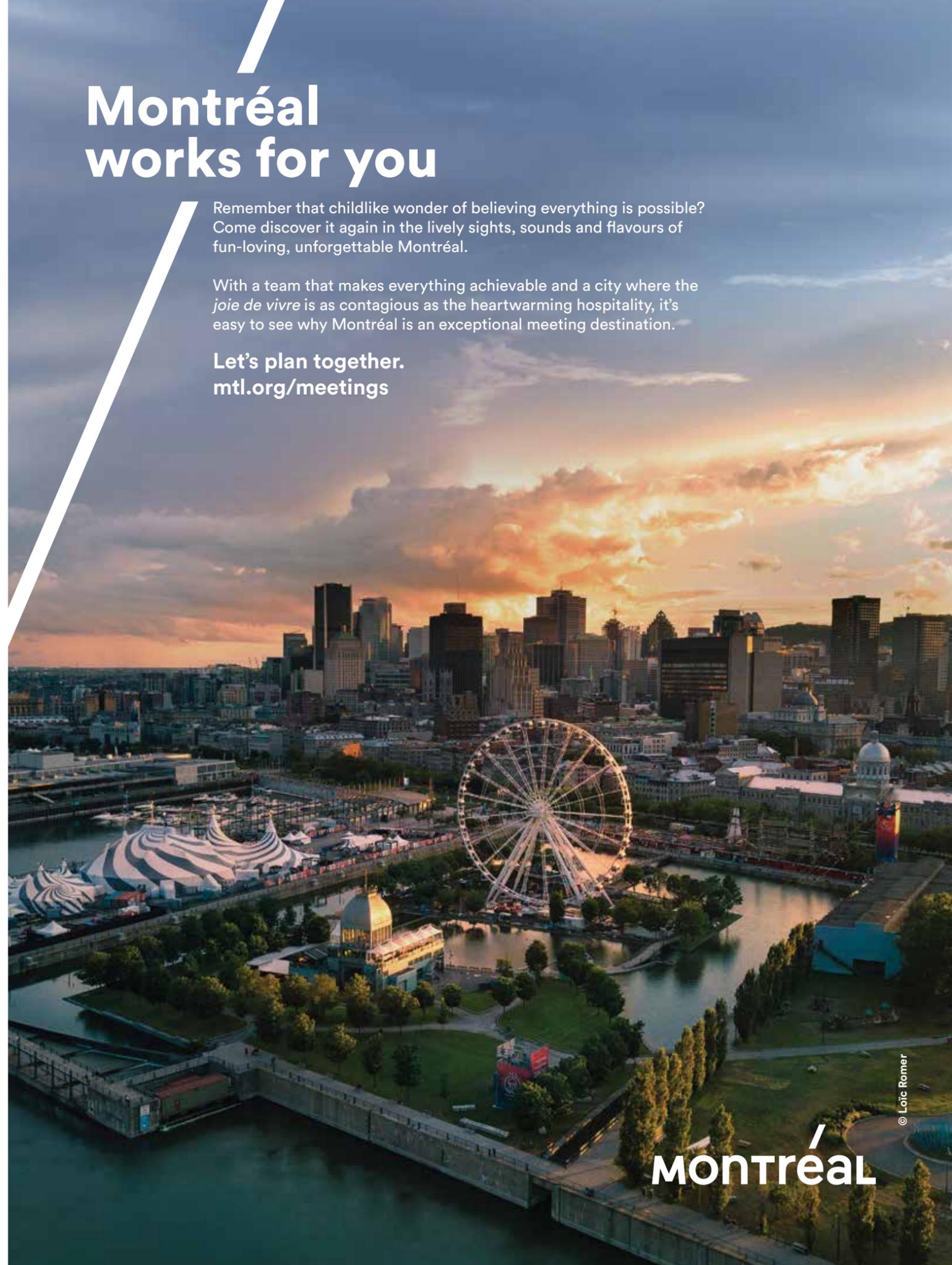
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MONTRÉAL

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Hilton Santa Barbara Beachfront Resort Unveils New Meeting and Event Spaces



Hilton Santa Barbara Beachfront Resort

SANTA BARBARA, CA — Hilton Santa Barbara Beachfront Resort announces the completion of the renovated meeting and event spaces. To commemorate its completion, the hotel will debut a special Coastal Meetings Made Easy package designed to bring the boardroom to the beach. The package is geared to groups ranging in size, with 25 guest rooms (with a maximum of 50 guests) Sunday through Thursday through the end of 2018.

The design and architecture of the Hilton Santa Barbara

Beachfront Resorts renovations were inspired by the scenic beauty of Santa Barbara and the town's coastal-chic, serene atmosphere. Throughout the ballrooms, meeting spaces and boardrooms, the design team incorporated hammered rock tables, found objects from the beach, driftwood-inspired tables and tall blue-hued chairs and ocean-inspired artwork. The color palate throughout the spaces blends deep blues from the Pacific and clear skies with neutral tones to provide a fresh, refined interior.

A Revolutionary New Terminal for a Revolutionary New Ship

FT. LAUDERDALE, FL — Designed to leave guests in awe, Celebrity Cruises celebrates another milestone with the unveiling of the line's first ever brand-designed cruise terminal, Terminal 25 (T25), located at Port Everglades. Designed to complement the sophistication of the terminal's

future resident — the industry's most anticipated new ship, Celebrity Edge — T25 features cutting-edge technology and a sleek design, all crafted to create the ultimate guest experience.

T25 melds a warm design with unique technology, such as Frictionless Arrival, which will make the check-in process absolutely seamless and an interactive light wall art installation. T25 will also offer Suite Class guests The Retreat, with an exclusive lounge, elevator lobbies, screening areas and a private rooftop terrace. T25 is scheduled for completion in late October 2018.



Rendering of Ft. Lauderdale's Terminal 25 Grand Plaza

American Airlines to Add Dozens of Nonstop Routes in 2018

FORT WORTH, TX—The country's largest airline now provides its customers with more than 50 additional routes for summer travel. American Airlines passengers will find that more options for both nonstop and connecting flights are available; changes include expansions to both domestic and foreign flight services.



New TSA Rule Affects Quantity of Powders Allowed in Carry-ons

WASHINGTON, DC — The TSA has implemented stricter rules related to carrying powder-like substances on flights bound for the United States from abroad. Flyers with more than 12 ounces of powder will be subject to additional screening. Substances not verified as safe will not be allowed on flights. Passengers will need to place such granular items as sugar, ground coffee, spices, powdered milk (such as baby formula) and cosmetics, in a container no larger than 12 ounces, about the size of a soda can.

Domestic Business Travel Projected to Outpace Leisure Segment

WASHINGTON, DC — Travel to and within the U.S. grew 3.4 percent year-over-year, according to the U.S. Travel Association's latest Travel Trends Index (TTI) — marking the industry's 101st straight month of overall expansion. However, mounting trade tensions work against America's pursuit of an increased share in the global travel market.

Most notable in the TTI is the effect near-historic highs in consumer confidence is having on the domestic travel market. According to the Leading Travel Index, domestic travel is expected to increase by approximately 2.5 percent in the next six months. However, there continues to be a concern that the U.S. is losing out on its share of the global travel market. Despite modest increases in arrivals from some key markets, the sluggish rate of growth will see the U.S. fall further behind markets like China, Germany and the United Kingdom.

Tips & Trends

Best Hotel Rooftops in Chicago

From developing signature craft cocktail menus to boasting some of the best views of their respective cities, rooftops are a hot commodity. Here are some of the best hotel rooftops for your meeting's entertainment and all are available for corporate events.

- **Raised**, located at 1 W. Wacker Drive, provides a stunning view of the skyline and Chicago River, with an outdoor area that features fresh flowers, fire pits, cabanas, couches and an outdoor bar with a decidedly urban feel. Under the direction of chef Timothy Powles, the regular menu at Raised features

American bar food with a twist, highlighting sharable plates — ideal for mixing and mingling while soaking up the summer. Chef Powles focuses on all things local, sourcing his menu ingredients within 200 miles of Raised. The beverage program at Raised features an array of wines on tap, an extensive offering of local craft beers on draft and by the bottle, and specialty cocktails served by the glass or in a shareable decanter. Raised was designed by The Gettys Group, fusing an industrial aesthetic with eclectic style and raw finishes.



Credit: Raised

- **AIRE**, one of the Chicago's most sensational rooftop decks, is located at 100 W. Monroe on the 24th floor of Hyatt Centric The Loop Chicago. With its central location, dramatic 360-degree view and contemporary décor, guests can enjoy the open-air and unwind in luxury over artisan drinks and small bites. Taking into account Chicago's unpredictable weather, AIRE features open fireplaces for cool nights spent high above the city streets and umbrellas for shade on sunny summer days. AIRE is also available for private events.
- A glamorous escape set 27 stories above the hustle and bustle of the vibrant city streets, **Roof on theWit**, located at 201 N State, has proven itself as the hottest nightlife destination in Chicago. With a panoramic skyline and breathtaking views, Roof on theWit has earned international praise for its stunning design, private event spaces and entertainment programming. Rated one of the "Top 3 Rooftop Bars in the World" by Travel+Leisure. The 7,000-sf indoor/outdoor venue features a retractable roof and a space that is climate controlled, making the destination accessible all year-round. In addition to sweeping views of Millennium Park, the Chicago River and spectacular architectural icons, guests can enjoy a large outdoor projection screen, floor-to-ceiling windows and a high-quality telescope that can see for miles, all while sipping on handcrafted cocktails and enjoying savory small plates from Roof's full-service kitchen.

Louisville Tourism Emerges



LOUISVILLE, KY — As the Louisville Convention & Visitors Bureau celebrates a 50-year milestone of marketing the city, the organization is also looking towards the future with a name change to Louisville Tourism.

The new name coincides with unprecedented tourism development. An expanded downtown convention center, ongoing hotel development and renovations, a growing bourbon district and new attractions are meeting the demands of the more than 16.4 million visitors coming to Louisville.

Louisville Tourism is launching two new website features to enhance local tourism efforts. A new jobs portal will curate hospitality industry openings and career path information for the tourism professional. Another portal will offer complimentary speakers to groups on topics from hosting a family reunion to how to utilize visitor resources. Both are available at www.gotolouisville.com.

Memphis Tourism Announced as New Organization Name

MEMPHIS, TN — The Memphis Convention & Visitors Bureau has re-branded and is now known as Memphis Tourism. Data driven research, stakeholder interviews and audience testing drove the effort that led to the name change, along with a refresh of the organization's music inspired logo and tagline. The Memphis Tourism brand focuses on music at its core, and the strong connection it makes with visitors from all over the world.



Memphis Tourism debuts new logo

Long known as the "Home of the Blues, Birthplace of Rock 'n' Roll," the new tagline for the destination embraces soul music that came out of STAX and Royal recording studios.

In 2017, Memphis welcomed 11.7 million visitors, nearly a half million increase from the previous year. The local tourism industry generates \$3.3 billion in direct visitor spending and over \$260 million annually in state and local taxes.

Mandarin Oriental Hotel Group Will Manage a Luxury Resort and Residences on Grand Cayman

HONG KONG, CHINA — Currently scheduled to open in 2021, Mandarin Oriental, Grand Cayman will be an exclusive 100-room beachfront resort with 89 branded Residences at Mandarin Oriental. Located 15 minutes from the airport, the resort will be situated on 67 acres at St. James Point, on the southern shore of the island. The site benefits from an elevated position overlooking its own secluded white-sand beach and offers guests and residents a truly private luxury retreat. The spacious, contemporary rooms and suites will all face the sea.

A range of flexible meeting and banqueting facilities, including outdoor areas, will provide ample space for destination weddings, social and business events.

GBTA Announces Safety & Security Panel at 2018 Convention

ALEXANDRIA, VA — The Global Business Travel Association (GBTA) announced a new panel in an exciting line-up of Center Stage content for the 50th edition of the GBTA Convention, held August 11-15, 2018 in San Diego: The Challenges of Security in Today's Volatile World.

Moderated by GBTA Executive Director & COO Michael W. McCormick, the panel will feature top security officials discussing their roles in keeping a country's borders and infrastructure safe and secure. For the first time together on-stage, the leaders of CBP and TSA will discuss challenges in balancing security and passenger facilitation while integrating innovative new technologies that could revolutionize the traveler experience.



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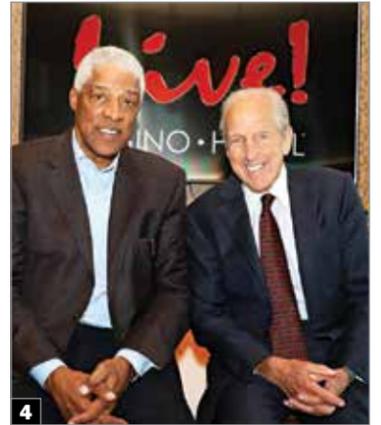
1 (L-R) At Destinations International Annual Meeting Tourism Australia's Eleanor Wilkie, Mary Ann McDonald, Lisa Verbeck and Jason Thomas. **2** Also at DI Louisville Tourism President and CEO Karen Williams-Goetz. **3 & 9** Attendees at the 2018 PCMA Education Conference in Cleveland, OH. **4** (L-R) NBA legend "Dr. J" Julius Erving with David S. Cordish, Chairman of The Cordish Companies at the grand opening celebration of the world's first Live! Hotel. The addition of a luxury hotel, spa and 4,000 seat event center to Live! Casino & Hotel in Hanover, MD. **5** (L-R) MPI's President and CEO Paul Van Deventer with Helms Briscoe Executive Vice President Richard Harper. **6** (L-R) Bill Peeper and President and CEO George Aguel, Visit Orlando. **7** President of Hospitality for Caesars Entertainment Bob Morse. **8** Ground-breaking ceremony for Caesars Forum, Las Vegas.



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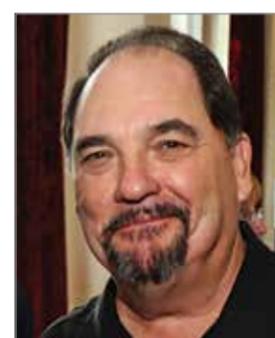


The sixth annual Hosts Global Forum welcomed more than 200 clients and hospitality industry professionals. This invitation-only event took place at the Europa Hotel in Belfast, Northern Ireland from June 21–24, 2018. Attendees participated in educational sessions, networking events and memorable destination-specific activities.

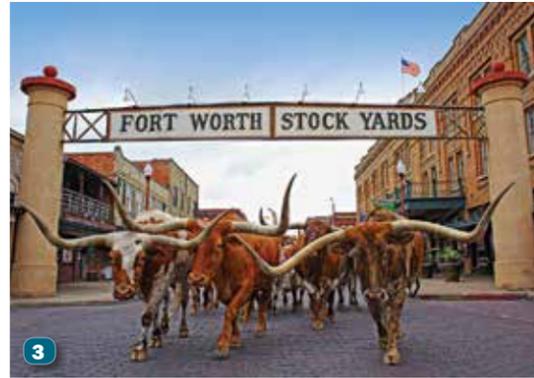
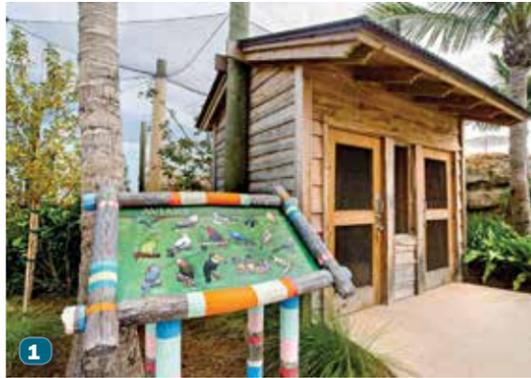
The forum was a showcase for unique events. These included a grand reception at Belfast City Hall. As attendees arrived there, they stepped through a large wardrobe, and into the fantastical land of C.S. Lewis' *Narnia*.

All attendees also participated in a corporate social responsibility program that contributed to a local nonprofit, The Wave Trauma Centre, which supports people injured or traumatized as a result of violence in Northern Ireland, also known as "The Troubles".

C&IT



Experiential Meetings



The Top 10 Animal Encounters for Groups

More than half of meeting planners look for adventurous teambuilding and networking activities, according to a Destination Hotels meeting trends survey. To give attendees a one-of-a-kind experience, Destination Hotels are creating dedicated programming for groups to get up close and personal to native animal species, from iguana feeding in Puerto Rico to cattle herding in Texas.

1 Bird Watching in Costa Rica

Set on a 1,100-acre rainforest, Los Sueños Marriott Ocean & Golf Resort launched a half-day bird-watching package for meeting attendees to discover and identify species in their native habitat. Groups will spot 40-60 different indigenous species in nearby Carara National Park while expert guides explain the ecology of birds as well as the physical environment that surrounds them.

2 Iguana Feeding in Puerto Rico

Home to a myriad of sunbathing iguanas, the Wyndham Grand Rio Mar Beach Resort & Spa encourages meeting attendees to interact with the resort's native reptiles and take

part in daily iguana feedings before heading to the Iguana's Pub for traditional Puerto Rican fare.

3 Cattle-herding in Texas

Those looking to get a unique taste of Texas heritage for their meeting breakouts can take in The Fort Worth Herd, the world's only twice-daily cattle drive that takes place in Fort Worth's Stockyards Historic District. Composed of 16 Texas longhorn steers, each representing one decade from Fort Worth's diverse past, the herd is led by a team of drovers outfitted in authentic 19th-century clothing to transport viewers back to the Old West.

4 Whale Watching in Hawaii

Sitting along volcanic coastline on Hawaii Island, Hilton Waikoloa Village offers groups sunset catamaran rides for a one-of-a-kind offsite experience. From November to May, groups setting sail will have the chance to spot humpback whales in their natural habitat.

5 Sea Turtle Treks in South Florida

Fort Lauderdale Marriott Harbor Beach in South Florida features Sea Turtle Treks where groups can learn about sea turtle conservation and witness turtles safely being rescued on the private beach's shore.

6 Flamingo Sanctuary in The Bahamas

The Bahamas' newest luxury resort, Grand Hyatt Baha Mar, boasts a variety of animal interactions for groups, including exotic birds at the Flamingo Sanctuary, turtle feedings on the beach and a sea life sanctuary filled with adopted nurse sharks, stingrays and tropical fish.

7 Horse Country in Kentucky

Meeting groups in Lexington, Kentucky (known as the "Horse Capital of the World") can meet the city's famed championship thoroughbreds — an experience that was previously unavailable to the public. Through the newly created Visit Horse Country, visitors can make group tour reservations at famed horse farms, including Ashford Stud (home to Triple Crown winner American Pharoah) and Taylor Made farm (where California Chrome resides).

8 Macaws in Mexico

Sandos Caracol Eco Resort in Playa del Carmen, Mexico of-

fers guests the chance to come face-to-face with local animals through their Animal Keepers program. With three vets onsite to lead the program, visitors have the opportunity to feed, bathe and care for endangered and rescued animals including macaws, donkeys and white-tailed deer. The resort is also home to "cat cafés," where guests can feed and interact with native cats found on the property.

9 Marine Life in France

Hotel Metropole Monte-Carlo's newest "Just For You" experience brings groups by private speedboat to the Pelagos Marine Sanctuary, where they can learn about marine life conservation from an animal specialist while catching glimpses of humpback whales, sperm whales and dolphins swimming in the Mediterranean Sea.

10 Farm Animals in New York

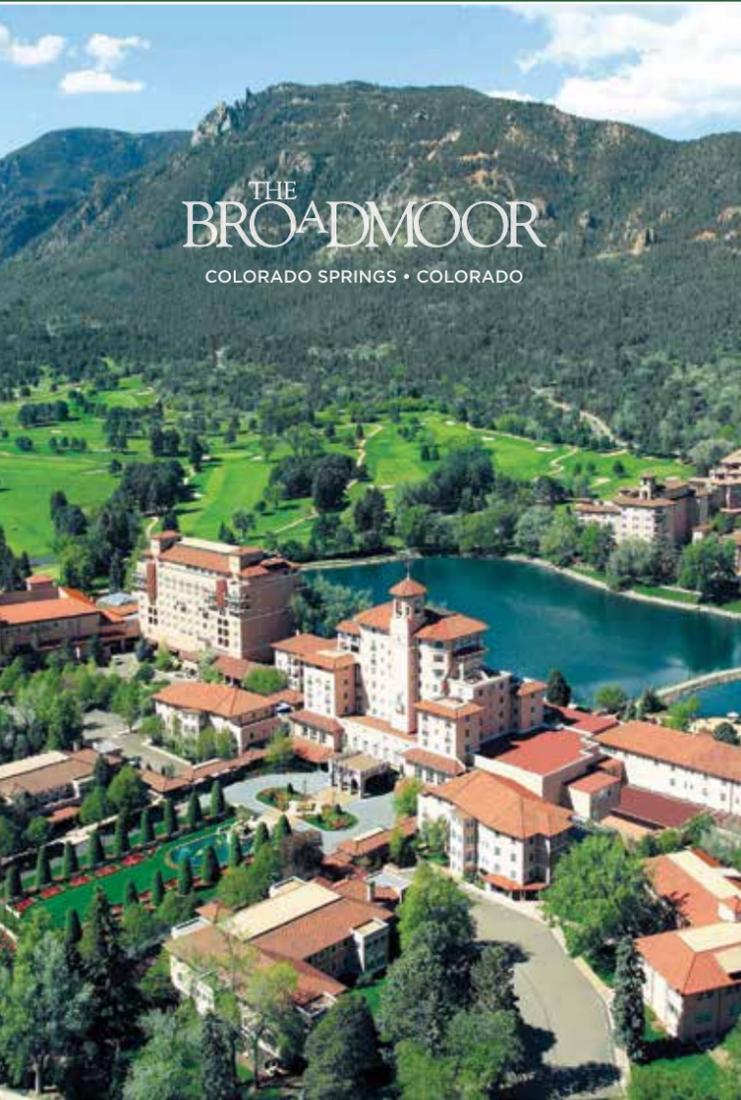
Nestled in the Finger Lakes Region of Central New York, Farm Sanctuary's 175-acre animal haven houses more than 500 rescued animals from industrial farming sites across the country. With newly upgraded spacious onsite cabins, Farm Sanctuary Bed & Breakfast allows groups to volunteer together to learn about animal issues while providing a helping hand to the animals on the farm.

C&IT

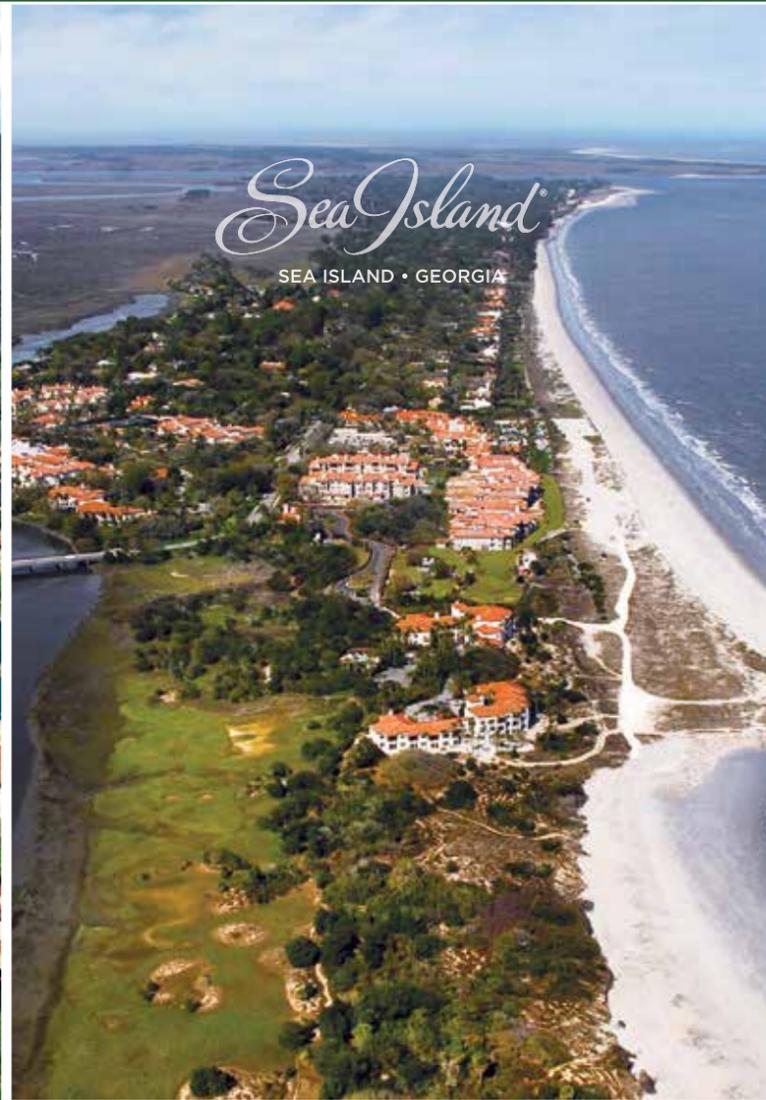


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Accommodations— Variety

The 784 guest rooms, suites, cottages, brownstones, and The Broadmoor Estate House feature the elegant touches and amenities at the main campus. Provide adventure at one of the three Broadmoor Wilderness Experiences: Cloud Camp, The Ranch at Emerald Valley, and The Broadmoor Fly Fishing Camp.



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Activities— Variety

Sea Island provides an extensive array of options for your meeting attendees including customized team building activities, outdoor experiences such as fishing, water sports, shooting school and falconry, a 65,000-square-foot spa and fitness center, three championship golf courses, and the nation's finest Golf Performance Center.



Accommodations— Choice

Our 390 rooms and suites ensure we have a room type to meet your needs from The Cloister, nestled between the Black Banks River and the Atlantic Ocean to The Lodge, surrounded by two of our golf courses to The Inn, our select-service property. Or for those seeking outdoor adventure, we offer Broadfield, our 5,800-acre sporting club.

By Scott Steinberg

How to Build an Online Community Around Your Event

Call it a community, tribe or target market: in all cases, building and maintaining an audience for your event is key to keeping a competitive edge. What's more, according to The National Bureau of Economic Research, the amount of time that we spend online has been on the rise, making it imperative that you put a focus on finding clever ways to connect with and engage potential clients via the internet and social networks. As researchers also note, when it comes to connecting with businesses and brands in the digital space, most people simply log on and log off of online platforms at will — unless they have an incentive to stick around. Luckily, time spent amongst others with shared interests (aka, the community) often qualifies as just such an incentive. But before audiences can be encouraged to interact and communicate through your event's various virtual channels, it's vital to find more effective ways to captivate and engage them.

Engaging Users

Consider that event-based online communities fill a unique space in the business world, being keyed to highly specific topics, themes and areas of interest. Your methods of growing these platforms will therefore be largely content-driven — and have to be equally differentiated, as well as original. Learning to scale is vital too: People-based platforms only grow when enough people participate within them, and your community won't expand exponentially until user activity reaches critical mass. This chicken-and-egg dilemma means that you've got to consistently be providing unique insights and information (e.g., research, white papers, one-of-a-kind opinions, videos with industry thought leaders, exclusive behind-the-scenes access, etc.) that audiences can't get anywhere else.

Furthermore, your first users also must be convinced to become active contributors and evangelists. Regular call-and-response tactics asking for articles, videos, graphics and other contributions, (e.g., suggestions, stories, comments and feedback) can help. That's because initial community members are likely to polarize, becoming heavy users of your site or actively avoiding it — and those who do decide to get involved are likelier to directly attract and draw (and/or be directly connected) to each successive wave of community members.

Ready to Get Started?

Because you're looking to gather and galvanize others around shared interests, it often helps to picture your online presence as a separate, self-contained event unto itself. Rather than simply post advertisements and teasers, it's instead wiser to use online outposts as digital extensions of your event brand, where unique stories, infographics, reports, presentations, interviews and other pieces of context coexist. An essential draw for any meeting or special occasion is program content. Treat online channels as a forum through which to spark discussion and present preludes to, additions on or extensions of live, onsite programming, and you'll find ample reason for audiences to tune in and keep coming back. Archives should further be supplemented by material culled from the special occasion itself. If you're not livestreaming or recording sessions, recapping presentations and offering downloadable handouts online, you should be. But by and large, online platforms should serve as a standalone launching point for further insights and dialogue, and a central hub for material related to your program that prompts regular conversation and comment.

A few simple, cost-effective ways to build out your collection:

- Ask speakers for articles, videos and similar contributions.
- Provide daily or weekly recaps of trending news stories related to your topic.
- Post op-eds and commentary from event staff and partners.
- Run contests asking your community to contribute stories, photos or videos.
- Transform research into infographics and visual elements.
- Hold free webinars and online chats around your featured topic.
- Tape podcasts and audio interviews that you can share online.
- Compile smaller pieces of content, such as blog posts, into eBooks and white papers.
- Break larger pieces of content, such as reports and findings, into small blog posts and articles.
- Partner with event sponsors to promote content across their online and social channels.

Social media is also one of the most powerful tools you can use to encourage people to join, stay and interact with your community — and it allows you to do so by sharing news, opinions and thought leadership, as well as fostering dialogue and discussion.

Don't Leave It to Chance

You absolutely need to have someone at the wheel of efforts focused around communicating via social networks, though. Consider that all major airlines now have nearly 24/7

networking events and other easily orchestrated extensions of your event brand.

And remember: the most important step to creating success with an online community is to define some simple objectives and rules from the outset. The goal could be to galvanize around virtually any topic as defined by your event. The key metrics used to determine success for the program could be based on variables such as the number of attendees, sponsorships sold or amount of user engagement. In any event, all goals you're shooting for should be measur-

“Today, **audience expectations** when it comes to both engagement and response times **are sky-high.**”

social media responders on call to handle customer inquiries, as do many quick-service restaurants — and that their online communities often don't technically exist outside of actual social media accounts. Today, audience expectations when it comes to both engagement and response times are sky-high — appoint a community manager for your event to handle these tasks.

Likewise, it often can work to the benefit of an online community to help encourage real-world interaction — through live events and programming — that meet more frequently than annual or quarterly get-togethers. Consider that many industries, such as technology and media, are highly regional and the larger your platform, the more likely groups of users also will be physically present in the same city or region. Former Etsy community strategist Morgan Evans notes that the key to successful community management is proactively cultivating grassroots connections. Like a political campaign, the broadest possible message succeeds when it is repeated in small, intimate pockets — pockets which can take the form of salons, happy hours, classes, mixers, panels,

able and objective. **To get started defining your vision and approach, professionals recommend asking exploratory questions such as:**

- How do you define engagement?
- How quickly do you hope to increase engagement?
- What level of engagement increase will you consider a success?

Next Steps

Defining a clear vision and purpose; creating a profile of audience members you specifically wish to attract; providing content that's too good to ignore; consistently sparking dialogue and audience input; and adhering to meaningful metrics will help you stay focused as you build your online platform. Remember, humans are many things, but seldom predictable. However, the more you can incentivize them to take part in your event's online community — whether by sharing their thoughts, asking questions, uploading videos, connecting with thought leaders or otherwise — the more you'll watch your community (and event) thrive and grow. **C&IT**



Scott Steinberg

is an award-winning professional speaker and bestselling expert on leadership and innovation, and the author of *Make Change Work for You: 10 Ways to Future-Proof Yourself, Fearlessly Innovate, and Succeed Despite Uncertainty* (TarcherPerigee, 2016). Among today's leading providers of keynote speeches, workshops and seminars for Fortune 500 firms, his website is www.AKeynoteSpeaker.com.

All-Inclusive Resorts

Premier Properties That Cater to Groups — and ROI

By Patrick Simms

Given the prominence of tech trends in the meetings industry, mention of the “AI” acronym will often bring artificial intelligence to mind. But longtime planners, particularly in the incentive space, may well think “all-inclusive” instead. These kinds of properties, which were relatively rare in the ‘80s, have become the norm in many destinations across the Caribbean and Mexico, and continue to beckon groups with a convenient pricing structure and slew of recreational amenities.

Credits: Edgardo Contreras



The Barceló Maya Palace stage (above) and the Barceló Maya Colonial (below) are just parts of the Barceló Maya Grand Resort's extensive acreage



IRF's Annual Incentive Invitational at The Grand at Moon Palace Cancun.

"Over the last five years, AIs have increased in popularity for incentive trips because the corporate budget owner enjoys knowing that their budget is fixed and that it won't vary depending on how long the bar is open and how many drinks people consume," observes Mike May, president of Brightspot, a meeting and incentive travel company based in Irving, Texas.

While all AI resorts afford this budgetary advantage, not all cater equally well to the group market. May, who is also the 2018 Chairman of the Incentive Research Foundation (IRF), notes that "some brands really focus on leisure trav-

"(UNICO 20°87° Hotel Riviera Maya) expanded the definition of AI to include complimentary spa services, beauty salon services and activities."

Mike May, President Brightspot, Irving, TX



elers and the honeymoon market, and there are others that put a greater focus on meetings and corporate incentives. That's indicated by whether they have a corporate sales department, exhibit at IMEX," and so on. There is also significant variance in the price point, from a moderately priced brand such as Hard Rock Hotels to the five-star properties under the Grand Velas flag. And there is variance in the AI packages that resorts offer.

"Your basic AIs include rooms, all meals, alcohol and Wi-Fi," says Doug Fields, president of The Fields Group Inc., a meeting and incentive travel company based in Carmel, Indiana. "Then a step up would include all that, plus any setup fees for events."

Naturally, it is the latter kind of package that is more desirable for groups, and those properties that are focused on the meetings market tend to add

more meetings-related items in their AI pricing, such as meal breaks. Per-person setup charges are typically not included, however. "You may be able to ask that the service charges be waived," May advises, and depending on the location of the break and labor involved, the property may agree to do so. Indeed, a planner's accepting an AI package does not preclude further negotiation. Fields has negotiated for complimentary site visits, discounted room rates for staff, suite upgrades for VIPs and more.

When it comes to meal packages, an offer that sounds great initially may be limited in certain ways that are important to bear in mind. First, the selection of onsite restaurants may be lacking in variety.

"If a hotel is built from the ground up as an AI, they usually have more restaurant outlets that are smaller footprints, whereas an EP (European property, with a la carte pricing) hotel that adds an AI service usually has fewer

restaurants," May explains. "So from an attendee experience standpoint, I think that's an important distinction, because if I'm at an EP hotel and they say it's AI, I might go back to the same central restaurant multiple times, which may not be as interesting as if I'm at an AI hotel that has an Italian restaurant, a Mexican restaurant, Caribbean restaurant," and so on. Second, May points out that the meal package may not include drinks and snacks consumed outside of the restaurants, or it will include them, but only while the restaurants are open. These limitations are important to note, as they can impact the bottom line for the event.

Fortunately for planners, the booking options within AI spaces are growing, making it more likely that the right combination of quality and pricing can be found. May cites The Grand at Moon

Palace, a 1,326-room AI resort in Cancun, and the nearly 450-room UNICO 20°87° Hotel Riviera Maya as examples of attractive new entrants into the market. Clearly focused on the meetings market, The Grand recently hosted the IRF invitational for about 200 meeting planners, both third party and corporate. UNICO 20°87°, says May, has "expanded the definition of AI to include complimentary spa services, beauty salon services and activities. We did a Brightspot client retreat there last fall, and it was very well received."

Following is an overview of major hoteliers in the AI space that cater to meeting groups in addition to the leisure market, including some of the latest developments that keep these brands at the forefront of the AI marketplace.

Barceló Hotel Group

Established in Palma de Mallorca, Spain in 1931, Barceló owns or manages more than 109 properties and 33,000 rooms in 20 countries. The company has a strong meetings focus and has established *MeetBarcelo.com* as a one-stop shop for all planning needs, including detailed property information.

An exemplary AI resort under the company's Occidental Hotels & Resorts brand is Occidental at Xcaret Destination, located in Cancun, the popular Playa del Carmen and the Xcaret Eco-Archaeological Park. The resort recently completed an \$11 million renovation on all 765 guest rooms, the front desk, the sports bar, Le Buffet, Royal Level and Convention Center. The 3,350-sf Convention Center is complemented by



Hacienda pool — beachside — at the Hard Rock Hotel Riviera Maya, Mexico.

an 1,100-capacity ballroom and intriguing outdoor function spaces such as the oceanfront Lighthouse — a Mayan ruin structure. Meeting packages at Occidental at Xcaret Destination include numerous concessions, such as private group check-in with welcome beverage; one comp room for every 25 rooms booked; one room upgrade for every 40 rooms booked; meeting space according to group size and basic coffee break; and one dinner including two hours for an international open bar, for groups with more than 51 rooms.

Another Barceló property with formidable meeting facilities is Barceló Bávaro Grand Resort, located in Punta Cana, Dominican Republic. The 1,991-room complex is home to one of the Dominican



Elegant event setup at the Hyatt Ziva Rose Hall in Montego Bay, Jamaica.

Republic's largest conference centers at more than 50,000 sf, comprising 13 flexible meeting spaces. Property highlights include a PGA-rated, 18-hole golf course, a water park, four swimming pools, a 24-hour casino and a Las Vegas-style theater. From an F&B perspective, there is much variety here: 11 specialty restaurants, including Japanese, Mexican and Dominican cuisines.

For groups partial to Mexico's Riviera Maya, the Barceló Maya Grand Resort is an ideal choice. Located near Cancun International Airport, the 2,700-plus-room property is comprised of the all-suite, AAA Four Diamond Barceló Maya Palace, the Barceló Maya Colonial & Tropical and the Barceló Maya Beach & Caribe. Fourteen new meeting spaces were recently added, giving the property a total of 70,000

sf of function space and 39 meeting rooms. Free-time diversions are plentiful, with 22 restaurants, three theaters, three water parks, shopping center and more onsite. Distinctive group experiences include Spanish language classes and Mayan coffee-making demonstrations.

Hard Rock Hotels

Hard Rock Hotels entered the AI market with the debut of the Hard Rock Hotel & Casino Punta Cana in the Dominican Republic. The All Inclusive Collection continues to grow today with the 639-room Hard Rock Hotel Los Cabos set to open next spring. The resort will offer 46,000 sf of meeting space along with six restaurants, five pools and various brand offerings such as a Rock Spa and a Body Rock fitness center.

Three Hard Rock Hotels AI properties were featured in Brightspot's Meeting Planner Review of All-Inclusive Resorts, a listing of the staff's preferred properties in the AI space. They include the Hard Rock Hotel Cancun, the Hard Rock Hotel Riviera Maya and the Hard Rock Hotel & Casino Punta Cana.

Sandals Resorts

With 16 properties on the beaches of the Caribbean, Sandals offers groups a variety of AI experiences to choose from. The brand is particularly well represented in Saint Lucia, an Eastern Caribbean island nation known for its volcanic beaches, reef-diving sites and rainforest. A fourth Sandals Resort broke ground this spring in St. Lucia. The property will feature 380 suites and joins the Sandals Regency La



"Your basic AIs include rooms, all meals, alcohol and Wi-Fi. Then a step up would include all that plus any setup fees for events."

Doug Fields, President The Fields Group Inc., Carmel, IN

Toc, Sandals Grande St. Lucian and Sandals Halcyon Beach.

Also noteworthy are the six new luxury suite categories at Sandals Royal Bahamian, in Nassau, The Bahamas, which debuted in March. Amenities in-



Sandals Royal Bahamian's Balmoral Pool in Nassau, The Bahamas, has easy beach access.

clude private patios and balconies, HD smart TVs, tranquility soaking tubs and even an English Guild-trained personal butler. This European-style AI property offers its own offshore island, 10 restaurants, a Red Lane Spa and Rolls Royce or Mercedes-Benz airport transfers for VIPs. Groups have an onsite conference center at their disposal.

Playa Hotels & Resorts

Playa's emphasis on the meetings market is evidenced by the packages offered by the Hyatt Ziva Rose Hall and the Hyatt Zilara Rose Hall, both in Montego Bay, Jamaica. Items include: a private one-hour cocktail reception; private three-hour reception dinner with open bar; private group check-in with signature cocktail; meeting room rental for general sessions, breakout rooms and an event space; VIP amenities; complimentary rooms based upon group size; complimentary upgrades; discounts on spa services and golf course green fees; and special rates for staff rooms.

Fields has been bringing sales incentives to Playa Hotels & Resorts properties for nearly three years. "With Playa I think the F&B and room product is a step above some of the other (AI brands)," he



Credit: Club Med Punta Cana

Spa by L'Occitane at Club Med Punta Cana, Dominican Republic, offers private couples treatments — a great offering for spouses.

The 277-room Hyatt Ziva Rose Hall and 344-room (adults only) Hyatt Zilara Rose Hall each offer 50,000 sf of indoor and outdoor function space, as well as a voluntourism opportunity at Granville All-Ages School. Located approximately 45 minutes from the resort town of Montego Bay in the Mountains of St. James, Granville enrolls approximately 400 students and can benefit from various charitable activities. Recently, four different group clients came to help build the school's new library by bringing suitcases of books.



“...We were provided with a celebrity-style tasting and pairing dinner with the chef (at El Mangroove) cooking at a ‘secret’ outdoor location.”

Joe Lipman, President
Summit Management Services, Cedar Grove, NJ

At the Hyatt Ziva Cancun, a 547-suite property with 16,000 sf of meeting space, groups can enjoy a craft beer tasting session at Tres Cerveza's Brewery and take chocolate-making classes at Pasteles, the on-property dessert parlor. Such options demonstrate the creativity that the brand brings to their meetings business.

Club Med

Founded in 1950, Club Med spearheaded the AI resorts industry and has been developing offers specific to the group market. One example is the Group Advantage Program, which gives planners a choice of booking anything from a small to midsize group all the way up to a full resort buyout. In addition to Club Med's AI package — which includes various types of accommodations, amenities, meals, beverages, land and water sports, entertainment and more — the Meeting Advantage program includes a complimentary meeting room, AV and flipchart. The program also allows conference centers, meeting rooms, cocktail areas, designated res-

taurant areas and special lounges to be reserved for groups to provide a customizable experience. Club Med also boasts some conference center-like features such as the Energy Wall (which includes device charging stations), Working Wall (interactive digital wall screens groups can use for presentations or on which to handwrite notes), movable bar carts and customizable brainstorming and networking areas.

Club Med's portfolio of 70 resorts across 30 countries is growing and improving. In March, Club Med's Global CEO and President, Henri Giscard D'Estaing, states that the company aims to open five new resorts per year,

on average, over the next five years. The company also plans to conduct five major renovations to its current resorts per year.

The All-Inclusive Road Less Traveled

For many planners, brands such as Barceló and Hard Rock Hotels are the “go to” AI options. But the AI concept is certainly not limited to the major players. To give just one example, El Mangroove, a Marriott Autograph Collection hotel in Guanacaste, Costa Rica, offers an AI option that includes breakfast, lunch and dinner, snacks, in-room dining, a selection of premium alcoholic beverages and more for \$100/night per person. Group bookings can benefit from this package, not to mention the 85-room resort's 40,000 sf of indoor and outdoor space, including 3,500 sf of devoted high-tech meeting space.

Joe Lipman, president of Cedar Grove, New Jersey-based Summit Management Services, recently brought an incentive group from Union, New Jersey-based Jaeger Lumber to El Mangroove. “The

all-inclusive booking option allowed our group of 150 persons the convenience and flexibility to really stretch their incentive dollar and ensure the best value,” Lipman says. “The management team worked tirelessly and ensured our guests enjoyed the culinary part of the vacation. At the same time our client did not have to worry about the individual costs for everyone's selections.”

The culinary aspect was a particular attraction. “There are other fully inclusive resorts in Costa Rica, but we selected El Mangroove because of an excellent menu of fresh fish, ceviche and fine meats,” he says. “The chef, on special occasions, will offer a tasting menu, and

for our group we were provided with a celebrity-style tasting and pairing dinner with the chef cooking at a ‘secret’ outdoor location in front of the guests. He did the tasting on four nights for 12 persons at each.”

When AI resorts combine imaginative group services with their consider-



Credit: El Mangroove

Bare feet in the sand is “on the menu” at El Mangroove in Guanacaste, Costa Rica.

able culinary and recreational offerings, the results can truly impress attendees. For incentives and client-facing meetings, that effect is certainly a return on investment. And thanks to the AI pricing, the investment itself is nicely managed. **C&IT**



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Negotiating Hotel Contracts

Mediating Force Majeure,
Cancellation Clauses and
Attrition with Authority

By Derek Reveron

Negotiating with hotels isn't a planner's favorite activity even during a buyer's market. However, the task is even tougher in the current seller's market.

That's why it's crucial to have the savvy needed to strike good deals. Still, experts say, many planners have fair-to-middling negotiation abilities that lead to higher costs.

Terri Woodin, CMP

V.P., Marketing and Global Meeting Services
Meeting Sites Resources
Irvine, CA



“Say the hotel is charging meeting space rental they might not charge for in a down market... Ask if you increase the F&B minimum... will they waive the rental fee. Now you are getting F&B for a minimum you would meet anyway, and the hotel is getting their margins.”

Planners too often accept contract conditions without asking questions or seeking concessions. One reason for that, experts say, stems from a disdain for the often tricky negotiation process that can involve posturing, posing, pretense and confrontation.

Nevertheless, it’s important to have the skills needed to get the best deals from hoteliers who believe they hold all the cards.

Seek Clarity

Being a good negotiator includes ensuring that every hotel contract term is understandable. “The best advice I heard from an industry expert is have the contract written clearly enough that it can stand alone and be implemented

by people not directly involved in the contracting process,” says Genny Castleberry, director of sourcing, at Irving, Texas-based Brightspot Incentives & Events.

Castleberry adds, “Language should be specific and list dates, calculations and amounts so that both parties clearly understand any liability. Hotels tend to include language that protects only them and puts all the liability on the client. Be sure to thoroughly review all clauses and ensure both hotel and client share the same risk.”

The most important clauses to succinctly clarify include attrition, cancellation and force majeure (acts of God). “Because each of these clauses has financial repercussions, my first piece of advice is to know what you can afford,” says Joan Eisenstodt, founder of Washington, DC-based meeting consulting firm Eisenstodt Associates.

According to Eisenstodt, “No one goes into a contract thinking they will cancel or underperform, but it happens. Run the numbers and figure out if it is even financially feasible to enter into the contract. If not, have other options or mitigate the risk by buying event cancellation insurance, which can offset financial losses for a full or partial force majeure situation.”

Cancellation by Hotel

Hotels try to avoid cancelling because it’s bad for business. But it happens. Planners should prevent or minimize the loss of deposit and payment in the unlikely event of cancellation.

Most hotels have a cancellation clause written to protect the property. Typically, planners either agree to the hotel’s cancellation terms or negotiate changes. Either way, the result is one mutually agreed upon clause.

Eisenstodt suggests a different approach. “I prefer to negotiate dual — not mutual — cancellation clauses that include each party’s responsibility if there is a cancellation,” she says. “In a dual clause, damages suffered will not be the same for each party. Too often

dual clauses are...neglected entirely for expediency.”

Experts suggest negotiating the following into cancellation clauses:

- Mutually acceptable dates for holding the same or another meeting at the property within a certain time frame.
- A sliding scale that allows room costs to be lower the further the new meeting is from the cancellation date.
- A reduced cancellation fee to be paid along with a substitute meeting.
- Alternatively, ask the hotel to help find a comparable property and pay the difference in cost.

Use Meeting History

Proving that a group is a dependable source of revenue can be an effective bargaining tool. Don’t start negotiations with a property without knowing the financial value of a group to a hotel.

According to Terri Woodin, CMP, vice president, marketing and global meet-

Tyra Hilliard, CMP

Associate Professor
Restaurant, Hotel & Meetings Management
University of Alabama
Tuscaloosa, AL

“The more specific the force majeure clause is when it comes to dates, dollars and percentages, the more understood it will be. ...Those signing the contract may not actually be the ones responsible for executing the meeting, so you want a good foundation.”

ing services, Orange County, California-based Meeting Sites Resources, “Understanding the history of your meeting and demonstrating it in your RFP increases the value of your meeting to the hotel and will likely get you a positive response.”

Provide at least two years of meeting history that includes total attendee hotel spending. “Strong food and beverage spend increases the overall value,” says Woodin. “Ancillary spending, including spa, golf, gift shop, bar, etc., may be the difference for the hotel to say yes to your RFP over another in this high demand and limited availability market.”

Castleberry offers examples of possible bargaining chips to use based on meeting history: “Offer to include a higher food and beverage minimum in the contract if your group’s history attests to a higher consumption — especially when open bar is offered during your event,” says Castleberry. “Push (the) attrition deadline further out for a higher attrition allowance ratio if your group pick up is aligned with what you contracted in the past. History can be your best ally.”

Meeting history can be especially effective if there is a track record of providing profitable events within the same chain or destination. In addition, history can be a bargaining tool if other areas of an RFP aren’t particularly strong.

“For example, you might have a meeting that does not have the best rooms-to-space ratio and individual hotels are turning your RFP down due for this reason,” Woodin says. “Contacting your hotel chain or city CVB and discussing the total value of your account to the property or the destination could help you get a yes on RFP.”

Tricky Attrition

Attrition is one of the stickiest negotiation points because penalties can vary widely, and planners lack control over how many attendees book sleeping rooms.

Typical attrition clauses state that a

planner will guarantee that guests will book a certain percentage of rooms in a reserved block or pay a penalty for unbooked rooms. Experts say that attrition rates typically start at 10 to 15 percent, which means that a group must book 85 to 90 percent of a room block to forego penalties.

It may be possible to negotiate the attrition rate down to 20 or 30 percent, depending on the event’s total value

Joan Eisenstodt

Founder
Eisenstodt Associates
Washington, DC



“No one goes into a contract thinking they will cancel or underperform, but it happens. Run the numbers and figure out if it is even financially feasible to enter into the contract. If not, have other options ...which can offset financial losses.”

and how the property calculates attrition rates. However, Tyra Hilliard, CMP, associate professor of restaurant, hotel and meetings management, University of Alabama, says it’s tough to negotiate attrition rates because it’s a seller’s market.

According to Hilliard, “I’m noticing that hotels are beginning to throw everything but the kitchen sink into this calculation,” says Hilliard. “If a group underperforms or cancels, the hotel’s calculation of damages includes not just what was contracted for — sleeping rooms, catered food and beverage, maybe meeting room rental — but also ancillary spend (guest expenditures in the bar, restaurant, gift shop, golf, etc.) that hotels forecast for each occupied room. My stance has always been that if we aren’t contracting for it, I don’t want it in the damages calculation.”

Experts offer the following advice on negotiating attrition rates:

- Ask for a date by which you can increase or reduce room block size without penalty.
- Try to have total room nights, not rooms per night, serve as the basis of attrition.
- Strike an agreement with the property to perform a post-meeting audit to determine the number of attendees who ended up booking with the hotel but outside the room block.

Be Flexible

Using flexibility strategically at the right point in negotiations can help.

Woodin offers an example: “Say the hotel is charging meeting space rental they might not charge for in a down market, and you aren’t getting any consideration for it. Ask if you increase the food and beverage minimum (within reason of your expected spend based on their average menu prices) will they waive the rental fee. Now you are getting food and beverage for a minimum you would meet anyway, and the hotel is getting their margins.”

Hotels want to fill open dates that may not be in high demand. That’s why some properties offer concessions and lower pricing in exchange for flexibility. At the right point in negotiations, say something like, “I might be willing to consider other dates if you offer the right incentives.”

On one hand, flexibility is crucial because hotel inventory for group business is stagnant while the demand is increasing, making it now more challenging for planners to find space than a few years ago.

On the other hand, according to Eisenstodt, flexibility is not always realistic. "If moving the meeting by a day or two will get the parties more of what they've detailed as critical to them, look at it," she says. "But beware of spring and fall dates that are offered as alternatives. They may conflict with religious, national or state holidays that may cause fewer people to attend or (they may) have other conflicts."

Force Majeure (Acts of God)

This clause specifies each party's responsibility if the event can't take place due to something out of anyone's control. Make sure the clause includes disasters, government regulations, civil disorders, terrorism, epidemics, disease, strikes, suddenly-occurring travel restrictions and incapacitated travel facilities. Force majeure usually isn't part of many standard international hotel contracts, so make sure it is included.

Experts recommend seeking legal advice for force majeure clauses. "I highly recommend a lawyer, preferably someone familiar with hospitality law versus in-house counsel who may know contracts but not hotel or other vendor contracts," says Hilliard. "Talk with them about what needs to be included and what doesn't, and what your organization requires and doesn't."

Hilliard adds, "The more specific the force majeure clause is when it comes to dates, dollars and percentages, the more understood it will be. Remember: those signing the contract may not actually be the ones responsible for executing the meeting, so you want a good foundation (in case anything goes wrong).

Ask Key Questions

Offer flexibility, but be willing to walk away if it's not reciprocated. An-

Genny Castleberry

Director of Sourcing
Brightspot Incentives & Events
Irving, TX

"Language should be specific... Hotels tend to include language that protects only them and puts all the liability on the client. Be sure to thoroughly review all clauses and ensure both hotel and client share the same risk."

swers to the following questions can help determine a property's willingness to be flexible.

"Do you know that competitors are charging less?" Ask this question only if you are willing to walk away if you don't get the deal you want. The question demonstrates that you have done research and have good alternatives.

"How much flexibility is there in the room rate?" Don't ask, "Is the room rate flexible," because the response will likely be yes or no.

"Is there any interest in building a long-term relationship?" This question is most effective for large meetings with a record of providing profits for a hotel.

"Why don't we split the difference?" If you are going back and forth over say, food and beverage, make the suggestion with an eye toward a figure that is good for you and still allows the hotel to make a profit.

Other Tips

Don't reveal the event budget during negotiations because the property will probably offer its standard or top rates. Share budget figures at the appropriate point to help get better rates. However,

sharing budgets at the start may help if you have a good relationship with the property and have received value before.

Don't be intimidated by hardline sales lines including, "We have another group looking to book the same space during the same time." Or, "It's difficult to lower prices because our hotel is in such high demand."

Leverage repeat business. Properties like predictable revenue and are typically more flexible with groups they know will return consecutive years or on a rotating basis. Negotiating a multi-year contract can give value and perks.

Send the RFP to several comparable hotels, including some you may not be seriously considering. Compare costs and use competing offers to drive down costs during negotiations.

Include a clause that prevents a change in meeting rooms without sufficient notice.

Use food and beverage expenses as leverage. This area is the second largest profit area after guest rooms. The more you spend on food and beverage, the greater the leverage in other areas.

Reserve the option to choose audiovisual vendors. Don't get locked into a clause that requires you to use an AV supplier associated with the hotel because costs may be higher.

Seek as many concessions as possible. If the property won't budge on rates, request perks such as room upgrades, complimentary receptions, free conference rooms, suites, lower resort fees and free gym admission.

Never accept the first offer. Hotels are willing to negotiate most of the time. Remember that properties want meetings, especially large ones, because they represent a sure profit.

Don't relinquish bargaining power up front. According to Hilliard, "The biggest thing planners do to shoot themselves in the foot is going into a negotiation with their mind already made up that the meeting will be held in that hotel. As soon as they do that, they've lost all leverage." **C&IT**



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Planners Are 'Pushing the Envelope' for Memorable Experiences

By John Buchanan

For more than a half-century, a corporate meeting was a fairly standard undertaking. Attendees traveled to the destination that offered the best bottom-line value and/or geographical convenience, participated in meeting sessions in hotel meeting rooms, and ate most of their meals on-site. For many companies, it would be difficult for attendees, after the fact, to differentiate Chicago from Cleveland based on their experiences. Today, however, a more creative approach to planning meetings is changing the long-standing paradigm.

The 'Experiential' Meeting

The overarching trend that is redefining how meetings are conceived and

planned is a growing focus on "experiential" meetings, says Karen Shackman, president of Shackman Associates New York, a meeting/event planning and destination management company in New York City.

In other words, she says, it's no longer enough for attendees to simply show up for three days in a destination, attend sessions, eat meals in a hotel and go home. The meeting must, in some way, be exciting and memorable.

"And in a very important way, an 'experiential' strategy is also a way of better engaging attendees for a more successful meeting,"

Shackman says. "That's why it's now becoming a mainstream trend. We're just at the beginning of it now. But what you're seeing is planners looking at just how far they can push the envelope to create experiences that attendees will really remember."



Credit: Miami Culinary Tours/www.miamiculinarytours.com

John Knob, director, sourcing and proposal development, at La Jolla, California-based meeting planning and managed travel company Cadence Travel, agrees that a growing trend toward experiential meetings is driving most of the areas of specific change in how meetings are conceived.

"The factor that is really driving meetings now is how the line between your personal and professional lives is becoming blurred," Knob says. "So it's only natural that you start to see that reality affecting meetings and how companies relate to their audiences. And what we're seeing today is that attendees now do not just want to go to a meeting. They want an experience. They want an opportunity to engage in something on a personal level, not just a business level." Although the trend toward experiential meetings was largely triggered by millennials, Knob says, it has now spread to all attendees from all generations. "Everybody," he says, "is buying into it now."

Sarah Sebastian, owner and creative director at Miami-based meeting and event planning company Rose Gold Collective, agrees that the most important factor impacting her role today is that meetings, over and above their business purpose, must now be bona fide experiences that are memorable and motivational. "And any meeting planner who does not see that now," Sebastian says, "is kind of missing the boat." As a result of the trend, Rose Gold

Collective markets itself as an "experiential event agency."

The Destination

One of the pillars of an experiential meeting is the destination.

"That's the starting point if you really want to create a unique experience," Knob says. "And then, once you decide on a destination, it's no longer about just picking any meeting hotel in the destination. It's about finding a



Karen Shackman, President
Shackman Associates, New York, NY

"...What you're seeing is planners looking at just how far they can push the envelope to create experiences that attendees will really remember."

hotel that really captures the uniqueness and character of the destination. People no longer want to just go to a hotel that's 'in' the city. They want a hotel that is (illustrative) 'of' the city, that is part of the unique experience you'll have in the destination."

Sebastian agrees that destination selection is critical to the design of an experiential meeting. "And part of doing it successfully," she says, "is choosing destinations that are more 'aspirational,' rather than just the same old type of destination the company has always gone to."

As a result of the changes in the market, convention and visitors bureaus are now starting to sell their des-

tinuations as unique experiences rather than places on a map to prospective meeting hosts. "That's more true in the luxury market so far," Knob says, "but I'm now seeing it trickle down into the broader market. And you also see the same approach from innovative hotel brands like Kimpton, who understand that you're no longer just selling a hotel. You're selling an experience. And so brands like Kimpton now sell the destination itself, and not just the hotel, to include experiential elements."

Shackman notes that the key to success is what she calls a "hyper-local" focus on the destination in order to capitalize on its uniqueness and most interesting opportunities to create something new, different and memorable.

Venues

In keeping with the theme of meetings that deliver unique experiences, Shackman says that another trend is the use of singular local offsite venues. In New York, one example is the new Pier 17 dining-entertainment complex, located on the East River in the Seaport District of southern Manhattan and now making its much-anticipated debut. "A venue like that allows you to



Credit: Cadence Meetings + Incentive Travel



Credit: Meeting Professionals International



The Destination Lounge in the Orange County Convention Center, Orlando, Florida.

envision entirely new ways of staging a meeting," Shackman says, "because, for example, you can use things like the spectacular New York City skyline as a design element."

Shackman sees more and more corporate meetings moving away from the traditional meeting space in hotels and toward what she calls "evocative" spaces, such as historic and restored New York City bank buildings, art galleries, lofts or yachts.

That, in turn, is changing the fundamental physical aspects of meeting sessions.

"Historically," Shackman says, "you always saw things like classroom-style seating that was very structured. What's happening now is that you're seeing much more a 'lounge' style of environment being created, which allows attendees and presenters or speakers to be much more relaxed and creative in the ways they think and perform. That new kind of environment also means the session is more interactive."

Knob also sees more clients moving away from the traditional hotel model, for both meeting space and food-and-beverage. "But budget is still a huge driver of how those kinds of decisions are made," he says. "So one of the challenges of taking a meeting outside the hotel is that you usually have to bring in everything that you need, which would just be there if you were in the hotel. But as a result of that, we are also

now seeing day-rental offsite meeting spaces opening up more and more in major destinations. But all of the details of that have not quite been figured out yet, so that's something that's still evolving. Yet it is true that we're seeing more and more clients who are open to that kind of possibility."

A related trend he is seeing, when it comes to venues, is the use of more interesting offsite settings for events such as opening night receptions or closing night banquets. "That used to be more

related to incentive programs, but now we're seeing more meeting clients who want to take their opening night reception to a local venue like a museum," he says. "And that's just another example of the things companies are doing to deliver a real experience and not just a meeting. And to do that, the idea of getting outside the hotel is increasingly important. It's absolutely a trend now."

Sebastian agrees there is a strong trend toward the use of more creative offsite function spaces. "In making a venue choice, of course you're influenced by the type of content you'll be presenting," she says. "But today, you should also pay attention to the kind of mood and vibe you want to bring to the session. So that's another reason why more and more companies are moving away from the standard hotel venues."

Another element of innovative venue selection and use is what Sebastian calls "teambuilding within the room." And that's related to how people interact and brainstorm together in small groups. "When you have people collaborate in small groups, then come back together, you get a better level of conversation and feedback," she says. "And one thing I've found that contrib-



The new 26,000-sf Statue of Liberty Museum (rendering above) is set to open May 2019.

utes to that is more of a 'lounge' setting, or more casual seating. That means you can move your chairs around and get more intimate with people. You can be more collaborative. You're not just sitting there classroom-style. That kind of alternative won't work in some more serious meetings, where a lot of very formal or technical content has to be presented. But it's also true, in general, that people want to be more relaxed and comfortable. So you have to be able to find that balance."

Yet another kind of innovation Knob has started to observe and promote is the use of aromatherapy or meditation in the meeting room. "That's happening because clients now want to deliver a multi-sensory experience," he says. "Another example of that would be more interesting and calming lighting to create a better environment."

Food & Beverage

Yet another change that has become a genuine trend is the use of more creative menu planning that leverages offsite dining opportunities. "The F&B element is also becoming an important piece of the 'hyper-local' strategy," Shackman says. "And that is meaning, more frequently, seeking out top local chefs or celebrity chefs. And often, doing something unique and wonderful is no more expensive than doing the meal in the hotel. But even if you're doing your meals in the hotel, you have to be able to come up with something new and different, because that's what attendees want and expect now. And that is especially true of younger attendees."

Knob concurs that the time-honored and tired model of standard hotel banquet fare is giving way more frequently to farm-to-table treatment and celebrity chefs, as well as leveraging local cuisines such as Cajun food in New Orleans.

"Another thing that's interesting is that the underlying trend that is really driving food choices is interest in wellness," Knob



F&B offerings include encouraging healthier eating at meetings and conferences. Shown above, Hilton's Meet With Purpose (wellness program) "cut and create" salad setup.

says. "That continues to be a major trend. In every survey we conduct, wellness continues to be most important to attendees. And if you're looking at wellness, as a planner, food and beverage is the easiest thing to dive into. We're seeing the results of that now with more interest in organic food and locally-sourced farm-to-table."

Companies and meeting stakeholders and planners, he says, also now comprehend that a healthily fed attendee is going to be more attentive and capable of learning than someone consuming a less healthy diet.

A focus on wellness is no longer just a trend, Sebastian says. "It's mainstream these days. And it's not just about healthier food. It's about things like offering yoga classes in the morning

or meditation before a sessions starts. And instead of traditional snack foods, now you see healthier options like smoothie stations for breaks. And all of those kinds of things are happening because more and more companies want to take better care of their employees, and that includes at meetings, because it makes attendees more attentive."

Another example of effective food-related activities, Knob says, is cooking classes, where attendees eat a meal they have prepared. "Cooking classes are great," he says, "because they make your F&B experience participatory and interactive."

Technology Tricks

The innovative use of technology is now also a critical factor in how effective meetings are executed.



"...Innovative hotel brands...understand that you're no longer just selling a hotel. You're selling an experience. And so brands like Kimpton now sell the destination itself, and not just the hotel!"

John Knob, Director, Sourcing and Proposal Development
Cadence Travel, La Jolla, CA



Some companies are including 'gamification' in their meeting apps to engage attendees.

"Social media now offers a huge opportunity for meeting planners and stakeholders to reach out to their audience long before a meeting," Knob says. "And most companies today are creating apps for their meetings. And the apps we're seeing today aren't just related to things like the agenda. They include elements like the capability for live polling during sessions and social walls or gamification. Those kinds of things are now all part of the 'standard'

the most people at the meeting. They also gave the most points to people who actually shared information related to the objectives of the meeting. Then, at the awards dinner, they gave out awards for those who were most engaged with the app."

Given its popularity and impact, gamification is also evolving into more creative applications of its unique power. "And as the apps become smarter and

"In making a venue choice, of course you're influenced by the type of content you'll be presenting. But today, you should also pay attention to the kind of mood and vibe you want to bring to the session."



**Sarah Sebastian, Owner and Creative Director
Rose Gold Collective, Miami, FL**

app you're seeing at meetings now. And everyone is using them."

Gamification is arguably the most impactful tool today, Knob says. "And it's not just being used before the meeting, it's being used during the meeting, as well. I just attended a conference where, on the event app, at the beginning of the meeting they set up a game that rewarded the attendees who connected and interacted with

more customizable, that allows planners to apply more creativity to how gamification is done," Knob says. "For example, it isn't just about games anymore. It's also about tracking your business goals with regard to what's going on at the meeting."

Shackman notes that social media is also being deployed in more innovative ways, in order to engage attendees before, during and after the meeting.

"That is becoming increasingly important," Shackman says. "And more and more, that social media activity is focused precisely on the purpose of the meeting and the message that is going to be communicated via the meeting. And if that social media engagement is done well, it becomes one of the overriding experiential aspects of the meeting. It has been used in bits and pieces for years. For example, a lot of companies just used it to build excitement for the meeting before people arrived in the destination. But what we're seeing now is a much more integrated and comprehensive approach to using social media."

Until fairly recently, she says, Facebook and Twitter were the primary tools used to reach attendees. Today, there is an ever-growing roster of social media tools available, such as Instagram and Snapchat. "And right now," Shackman says, "that is confusing a lot of planners, because they don't always know which is the best to use for their audience."

The Central Message

At the core of any informed discussion of the ways in which meetings are changing and evolving are the issues of

how innovation and originality are directly related to the mission of the meeting.

"At least in my world," Sebastian says, "companies today are more and more looking for something unique. And they're looking for unique experiences and unique moments that are part of the meeting. So I always tell clients to think outside the box, shake things up. The point is to get people excited."

Shackman observes that given the numerous ways in which the design or creation and execution of meetings are evolving, she offers a simple guideline for companies that aspire to be on the leading edge of the revolution.

"Everybody now wants to do something that has never been done before," she says. "It's all about creating unique experiences and a whole new level of the wow factor." **C&IT**

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Ground Transportation Do's & Don'ts

By
Derek
Reveron

Credit: AWG Ambassador

Don't Let Drive-Time Snafus Kick Your Meeting to the Curb

No one congratulates planners when ground transportation runs smoothly. But suppose a bus on its way to pick up attendees has an accident, gets stuck in heavy traffic, breaks down or becomes lost?

Such mishaps can ruin an entire meeting or, at the very least, aggravate attendees. Transportation is an attendee's first and last event experience, so a bad start can curb enthusiasm for the upcoming event, and a mishap at the end can leave negative memories.

It's difficult for even the best meeting experience to make up for transportation snafus, but with the right planning, attention to detail and transportation partners, everything can run smoothly.

Set Expectations

According to Jessica Niblett, CMP, national sales manager, AlliedPRA Orange County/Los

Angeles, many common problems are preventable if planners set expectations ahead of time with transportation vendors.

Start with the site visit. Planner and provider should together walk through what the transportation experience will look like for guests. This can help planners decide if they need additional staff, signage or perhaps heaters if guests will be waiting outside for a shuttle, Niblett explains.

"When conducting a site visit at a hotel or offsite meeting location, I always make a point to show clients exactly where the buses would pull in, where the guests would queue and what needs to be done in order to ensure that transportation can run smoothly, including traffic officers, cones, staff, permits, etc.," says Niblett.

In addition, she says, "A planner of a group that expects vehicles to be staged and ready 15 minutes or more prior to departure should

communicate it to the transportation partner. If guests tend to arrive early or late, let the partner know."

Even when planners do everything right, glitches occur and one of the biggest is traffic.

Traffic Nightmares

It's a problem that Niblett knows all too well. "Operating programs in Los Angeles, we always have to account for traffic," she says. "It can take 30 minutes to go 1.5 miles in downtown during rush hour. The best way to handle this is to be upfront with clients about what backup plans there are if any routes become too congested. Pretending traffic is not an issue will result in unhappy guests."

Karen Shackman, president, Shackman Associates, a New York City DMC specializing in domestic and international corporate meetings and incentives, offers the following advice on traffic:

"Never underestimate rush hour and potential bottlenecks around special events," says Shackman. "This sounds like common sense, but even the best planned events requiring transportation of groups can take wildly varying amounts of time if held in a major urban area. I recommend finding unique transportation staging areas that are close to the gala or major event."

Plan alternate routes and make sure the transportation provider is proficient with the latest traffic apps. According to Shackman, "GPS-enabled transportation may not be adequate if you are transporting a group during peak rush hour. We understand how data on apps can change quickly in New York, so local expertise in anticipating problem areas before they turn red on the app provides a huge advantage in major destination meeting cities."

Negotiation Tips

Planners typically face the challenge of getting the best ground transportation possible on a tight budget. That requires knowledgeable, savvy and mistake-free negotiating.

According to Frank Macaluso, director of transportation, AlliedPRA Las Vegas, "The biggest mistake in negotiating ground transportation is allowing budgets and lowest-cost options to be a determining factor in the decision-making process. This short-sighted approach saves on budget at times, but often to the participants' detriment. There are ways to negotiate price based on volume, season, etc."

"Be upfront with clients about what **backup plans** there are if any routes become too congested."

Jessica Niblett, CMP

National Sales Manager, Allied PRA Orange County Los Angeles

Experts offer the following tips on negotiating transportation contracts:

- **Expect providers to design a customized plan geared to a meeting's goals and budget, not just provide transportation.** To that end, spell out transportation needs as specifically as possible. Identify how many of what types of vehicles are needed (buses, minibuses, vans, town cars, SUVs). Explain how the vehicles will be used (airport transfer, executive transfer, sightseeing, etc.)
- **Provide specific information about pickup and drop-off locations.** Determine who will be responsible for getting permission to park vehicles at pickup and drop-off sites. This is especially important for big meetings with many vehicles. Many hotels and venues have a problem with lots of vehicles (especially buses) showing up without prior permission.

Choosing a Provider

Work with a transportation provider early in the planning process. Don't create your own

AWG Ambassador is your go-to Las Vegas limousine service for private tours, corporate charters, airport shuttles and transportation services in and around Las Vegas. AWG was a much smaller company 10 years ago, but throughout their growth over the past decade they have remained customer service-oriented. The vice president of transportation, Daniela Chan, has never failed her clients. In Las Vegas, AWG stands out but never stands still.



Credit: AWG Ambassador

transportation plan and then ask companies to implement them, because you may overlook key details.

Decide whether it's best to hire a destination management company (DMC) or go directly to a transportation company. The latter provides a coordinator to manage logistics, and planners bill the company directly. A DMC contracts with ground transportation companies to provide services for planners at a pre-negotiated percentage of the bill. Whether as a DMC or planner, make sure to get quotes from a handful of companies.

Determine whether the supplier knows the difference between "ground transportation" and "event ground transportation management." The former simply provides buses or vans to transport groups from one place to another; the latter offers ground transportation services for large groups encompassing numerous and complex movements of attendees from one site to another.

"The two are very different animals," says Macaluso. "Transportation providers offer ba-

management, a DMC would be recommended," she adds. "This would provide management of the arrival and departure manifest, meet-and-greet staff, handling changes, communicating routing to vehicles and the management of all staff and drivers. Once en route, they can make announcements to guests and are also the primary contact if an accident occurs."

Vetting Potential Partners

Meetings with many moving parts require experienced and reliable transportation partners who can manage different types of vehicles transporting attendees to multiple venues in a congested urban destination.

Macaluso says that checking references is key. "Client references and testimonials from similar-sized programs are always a good gauge of a provider's competency," he says. "What processes did the provider use to meet the group's needs. It is also important to get an idea of how well the provider has worked with properties and airports."

Other Questions to Ask

How does the provider select, screen and train drivers? "A high-end transportation company will tell you that their drivers, no matter what size vehicle they drive, are professionally trained 'chauffeurs,' not just 'bus drivers,'" says Niblett. "The result of this is that, even if your guests travel in a motorcoach, the driver would show the same professionalism and customer service as a VIP sedan transfer. The chauffeurs trained in these programs take pride in their job and it shows to planners and attendees."

How do the providers' dispatch and reservation systems operate? "Transportation companies that specialize in corporate groups usually will have a separate group reservation department and possibly even a group dispatcher during peak times," says Niblett. "This shows a planner that the company understands group transportation and not just individual transfers."

What are the providers' safety and security policies? Ask about contingency plans for challenges such as bad weather, accidents, special needs, VIP needs and security threats. Choose a provider with a proven track record for handling the unexpected.

Here's more to ask:

- What is the size and variety of the provider's transportation fleet?
- Will they have vehicles to replace any that

sic equipment and drivers. Ground transportation management involves everything from the preplanning process, communication, routes, dispatch, lead staff and ground staff."

Choose an event ground transportation management provider when possible. "I would say that a client who goes directly to a company for group transportation is going to get just buses and drivers," says Niblett.

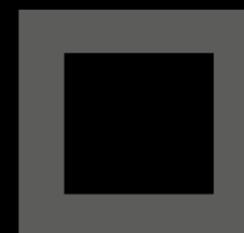
"For a client looking for true transportation

"The biggest mistake in negotiating ground transportation is allowing budgets and lowest-cost options to be a determining factor in the decision-making process."

Frank Macaluso

Director of Transportation, Allied PRA Las Vegas

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break down? Will they have a service truck nearby on standby?

- If they use out of state vehicles, where will they come from, when will they arrive and where?
- Will you get drivers' names and cell numbers the night before or the morning of the event?
- Do drivers have the proper tags to enter the airport?
- How will addresses and directions be communicated to drivers?
- Does the provider offer onsite transportation coordinators for large meetings that last several days?
- Which types of vehicles provide Wi-Fi access?
- What are the drivers' standard uniforms? Are they easily identifiable?

Consider Rehearsing

Should planners rehearse transportation maneuvers? "It depends," says Don Bontemps, senior event producer, AlliedPRA South Florida.

"That would depend on the maneuver, how many vehicles are involved, the number of routes, how many people, etc.," says Bontemps. "We are working on a citywide group, which has 12-hour daily shuttle service between the convention center and nine hotels. We created four separate routes. We plan on having the drivers be familiar with each route in the event we need to swap them out with other vehicles and drivers. I would also hold dry runs for any drivers who are still unsure of the exact route."

Experts suggest the following do's and don'ts when planning ground transportation:

The Do's

Plan early. It can help lock in good prices and vehicles required. Provide information about dates, times of departure, locations and number of attendees for each transportation even before a contract is signed. Don't wait until the last minute to request transportation because it may require more flexibility on the types of vehicles, pickup times, costs and other factors.

Know where attendees should meet drivers and the type of signage they will display. Let attendees know whom to call if their arrival time changes. Determine how the transportation company should handle flight cancellations and delays.

Ask who is responsible for making signs. Be specific about what should be on signs

including font size, color and logos. Avoid fancy fonts. Signage should clearly direct attendees to vehicles.

Have backup plans. Don't expect everything to go as planned. Know what obstacles might occur and plan accordingly.

Know how far vehicles will park from a venue. How long will it take vehicles to go from where they are parked to the pickup site in traffic.

Keep a vehicle on standby. In case an executive unexpectedly requests a vehicle transfer, have one ready.

Special needs. Know beforehand how many attendees will require access to a special needs vehicle.

The Don'ts

"Don't assume that the front drive of a hotel or venue will be available for drop-off and pickup," says Macaluso. "You need to communicate closely with the hotel contacts, and then with your client and their lead trip staff."

Don't be surprised by hidden fees. It's a mistake that many planners make, says Alton Hagen, CMP, DMCP, and general manager of Agenda: USA, a Mission, Kansas-based DMC. "Have the provider describe in their quote all possible additional fees or surcharges that may be applied — airport access fees; wait time surcharges; late reservation additions; change or cancellation fees; early morning or late evening surcharges; fuel surcharges; manifest preparation fees; 'convenience fee' for credit card payments; and gratuities."

Don't complicate things unnecessarily. Remember that the meeting begins at the airport. "Even if your attendees are arriving from diverse points of origin, when transportation from the airport to the hotel becomes chaotic and too individually customized, it can detract from early-stage networking and delay events," says Shackman.

Don't forget amenities. What are the requirements to receive complimentary airport transfer and in-vehicle amenities for VIPs or top staff? The leverage for acquiring such extras increases with large, complex transportation needs.

Transportation logistics, especially for large meetings spread over several hotels and venues, is the thread that holds the event together. Attendees must get to where they want to go on time and without major headaches. If that happens — and the rest of the meeting goes well — planners will have satisfied attendees. **C&IT**



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Emerging Destinations

Why These Newly Discovered Meetings Cities Deserve a Second Thought

By Ron Bernthal

Emerging destinations aren't necessarily undiscovered places — perhaps a more fitting description would be newly discovered. Sometimes called second-tier cities, there is nothing "second" about them, except that they have less traffic, are less expensive and have less attitude than their more famous big sister cities.

Listed below (in alpha order) are our choices for domestic cities that are benefiting from a newfound popularity among U.S. and international corporate meeting planners. It may have started with a new convention hotel or new and better airlift or a noted chef who

has returned home to open an award-winning farm-to-fork restaurant.

What these destinations all have in common are vibrant, business-friendly downtowns, efficient and affordable deluxe accommodations and meeting spaces, and CVBs that are more than ready to assist planners with organizing large or small conferences, meetings, events and offsite experiences.

Asheville, North Carolina

The 513-room Omni Grove Park Inn unveiled its new Seely Pavilion this year. The arts-and-crafts-inspired venue offers more than 3,200 sf of function

space and overlooks the property's golf course and Blue Ridge Mountains. The pavilion features exposed trusses, reclaimed wood and a stacked hearth around a large fireplace, polished concrete flooring and floor-to-ceiling doors and windows. Other amenities include a subterranean spa, a Donald Ross-designed golf course, four locally sourced restaurants, an outdoor pool and indoor and outdoor tennis courts. The property offers 86,852 sf of meeting and event space, including 31 meeting rooms, two ballrooms, outdoor terraces and patios, and an 18,000-sf grand ballroom for up to 1,800 guests.

Biltmore, America's largest private home, is a 250-room mansion built by George W. Vanderbilt in 1895. There are extensive gardens and winery on the 8,000-acre estate. There are many group experiences available; from the Land Rover Driving Experience to fly-fishing to team cook-offs and customized tours. Opening this fall, the Amherst Ballroom will be Biltmore's largest event venue with 11,000 sf of meeting and exhibit space.

Newly opened properties downtown include the AC Hotel, with 132 rooms, a 325-space parking garage and 2,000 sf of meeting space. The rooftop restaurant and bar "Capella on 9" offers views of downtown and the surrounding mountains. The Cambria Downtown Asheville has 136 rooms, and 7,440 sf of meeting and event space.

The Asheville Foundry Inn, part of Hilton's upscale Curio Collection, is set to open later this year with 3,000 sf of functional meeting and event space on The Block, a progressive and multicultural hub, as well as the historic heart and soul of the African-American community.

"We organize an annual employee appreciation event for a corporate client that runs a chain of convenience stores," says Kelly Dickinson, meeting and event manager for the Michigan-based Special D Events. "The two-day annual event draws about 300 attendees; the most recent took place in July of this year. We are working on contracting with the same property, Crowne Plaza Asheville, for 2019 and 2020.

"The client is headquartered in Penn-

"Even if we were not based in Omaha, I sincerely feel that the city offers great quality and value, and some of the best F&B in the nation."

Rob Helling
Vice President, Creative Development
Sonburst Communication
Omaha, NE



Old state capitol in Baton Rouge, Louisiana.

sylvania, and this event started out being held at the Seven Springs Mountain Resort in that state," says Dickinson. "But after 40 years the company had grown so much that they needed to add a Southern location. Asheville was the perfect fit for the group because it offered a similar vibe, a family-style mountain destination, with golf and lots of other activity options, so there is always a Northern (Pennsylvania) and a Southern event (North Carolina)."

Dickinson says that group activities included a Biltmore tour, a New Belgium Brewery tour, bingo, arts and crafts, zip-lining, chair massages and other events. They also did cocktail receptions, entertainment (usually a comedian), fireworks and an after-party. "There's just so much to do in Asheville, and the western North Carolina mountain hospitality can't be beat," she says.

Baton Rouge, Louisiana

The city has a number of exciting annual events including their own Mardi Gras, culinary and music events and Louisiana State University (LSU) football. New venues include White Star Market, opened May 2018, a contemporary urban gourmet food hall located in the Mid-City neighborhood, showcasing some of the most unique food and drink offerings in the city. With 10 noted local vendors, and more to come, the new venue is on the ground floor of Square 46, Baton Rouge's newest and most exciting mixed-use development.

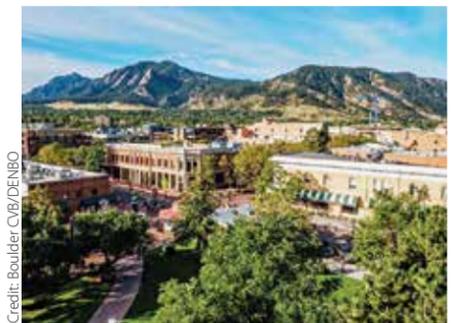
The big attraction for planners considering Baton Rouge is the completion of the 299-room Baton Rouge Marriott's \$28 million renovation, which finished this spring. The renovations involved expanding guest rooms and bathrooms,

in addition to the remodeling of the hotel lobby, restaurant and meeting areas. Expanded meeting space, now 29,979 sf, includes 25 event rooms (largest capacity 1,000) and 19 breakout rooms. The 20th floor of the 22-story Marriott includes an expanded concierge lounge for gold and platinum members. Stinky's Fish Camp, which already has a popular Florida location in Santa Rosa Beach, opened on the ground floor of the hotel, specializing in fresh fish and seafood.

The city's downtown 290-room Hilton Baton Rouge Capitol Center is adjacent to the Shaw Center and the River Center Convention Center, less than five minutes to the Louisiana State Capitol and three miles from LSU. It offers 20,000 sf of flexible meeting and banquet space, and specializes in large scale corporate and catering events.

Boulder, Colorado

Boulder is enriched with natural beauty, hip urban culture and vibrant outdoor adventures. TripAdvisor recently named it one of the "Top 25 Destinations in the U.S." and one of the "Top 100



A view of downtown Boulder, Colorado, at the base of the Rocky Mountains.

Destinations in the World." It is located at the base of Colorado's Rocky Mountains, has only 103,000 residents, and a compact, business-friendly downtown.

"I think Boulder has a phenomenal growth strategy, we're surrounded by 45,000 acres of wide open spaces, land that we call Open Space," says Kim Farin, director of marketing for the Boulder CVB. "Land that the citizens own and can't ever be developed. Developments in Boulder can't sprawl because of the Open Space plan, and they can't grow

up because of the height restrictions. This is what makes Boulder a great town for corporate groups: because it's condensed, everything is right here."

Columbia, South Carolina

Columbia's CVB, known as Experience Columbia, is getting a stream of queries from corporate planners who love what they are hearing about the city's growing reputation as more than a pleasant and friendly college town. As the state capital of South Carolina, it's a business-friendly city that offers affordable meeting venues and great Southern charm.

The 221-room Hilton Columbia Center property is next to the Columbia Metropolitan Convention Center (CMCC).

"The combination of... (Hotel Marina del Rey's) location, excellent food and a remarkable staff are perfect for creating an intimate and nurturing environment."

Barbara Englis, LCSW
Program Manager
Paras and Associates
Emeryville, CA

The Hilton offers 5,956 sf of flexible function space, while the Sheraton Columbia and the Columbia Marriott are both within walking distance of the CMCC. Built in 2004, the downtown CMCC is a modern and architecturally significant 142,500-sf facility that includes a 17,135-sf ballroom, 15,145 sf of meeting space and a 24,700-sf exhibit hall.

Lexington, Kentucky

Lexington's first-class facilities and unique attractions make it an appealing destination for meetings and incentive groups. Lexington's Blue Grass Airport is just 10 minutes from downtown, and the city offers close proximity to more than 7,900 affordable hotel rooms. The Lexington Center offers 66,000 sf of exhibition space, 40,000 sf of meeting rooms



Group enjoying an outdoor, farm-to-table dinner, in Columbia, South Carolina.

and an additional 25,000 sf of prefunction spaces. In the heart of downtown, the Lexington Center complex includes the famous 23,000-seat Rupp Arena.

Meetings utilizing the convention center, plus the adjoining Hyatt and Hilton hotels, have 169,000 total sf of flexible meeting and exhibit space under one roof, with more than 100 restaurants and bars within walking distance.

Marina del Rey, California

Located in the heart of the Los Angeles coastline and only four miles from LAX, Marina del Rey offers more than 100,000 sf of waterfront meeting space and 1,100 hotel guest rooms. Long known as an eclectic beach destination, all five of the city's main hotels have undergone renovations in the past few years, and the number of corporate meetings and events has grown tremendously in that time.

The 370-room Marina del Rey Marriott has recently renovated all meeting and public spaces, including the California Ballroom, the hotel's largest space at 6,072 sf, and the 4,264-sf penthouse-level Bayview Ballroom, in which floor-to-ceiling windows offer panoramic coastline views.

The 134-room Hilton Garden Inn Marina del Rey offers easy access to the area's amenities, as well as 7,245 sf of flexible meeting space. The Ritz-Carlton has updated its ballroom at 8,190 sf, and additional event spaces add 6,500 sf on the hotel's marina level.

Yacht rentals are popular for meetings and business programs, and the local CVB maintains a list of numerous skippered vessels available for charter. Hornblower Cruises & Events has been

updating its five local ships, including the Entertainer, with 6,600 sf of event space on three decks, accommodating up to 550 passengers. Two new Marina del Rey hotels, Courtyard Marriott and Residence Inn, broke ground in 2018, while the Pier 44 redevelopment project with new restaurants has an estimated 2019 completion.

"For our group of about 62 attendees we chose the Marina del Rey Hotel this past April for its location, on a lovely marina and close to LAX, its food, meaning the popular Salt restaurant responsible for the catering, and service," says Barbara Englis, LCSW, program manager for Paras and Associates, a provider of technology systems that enable immediate access to language interpreting via video and telephone. "The purpose of the meeting was to facilitate a productive exchange of information among managers from the Health Care Interpreter Network. We have organized this meeting of network members several times over the past decade at lovely, small hotels and at the Hotel Marina del Rey for the last three meetings. The combination of the hotel's location, excellent



Darby Dan Horse Farm near Lexington, Kentucky is available for corporate visits.

food and a remarkable staff are perfect for creating an intimate and nurturing environment.

"The meeting rooms at the property are exceptional," Englis continues. "We use one meeting room for the whole group; it has a lovely Marina view, fresh air and wonderful light, all amenities that make an event in Marina del Rey successful. There is a second, smaller room next to it that is perfect for shared meals. An early evening reception allows you to take full advantage of sunset over the marina."

Omaha, Nebraska

This year more than 40,000 shareholders attended Berkshire Hathaway's annual meeting at Omaha's CenturyLink Convention Center and other venues in the city. The average occupancy rate of greater Omaha's 15,000+ hotel rooms during the annual May event is 95 per-



Marina del Rey corporate yacht reception.

cent. Sure, most of the attendees are coming to hear, see and hopefully meet with CEO Warren Buffett, but also because they want to spend several days in Omaha, one of the most intriguing emerging destinations in the Midwest.

With more new hotels and dining venues opening each year, the city's Downtown Convention District is emerging as a very convenient and affordable destination for corporate meeting and event planners. The heart of the Convention District is located just 4.7 miles from Omaha's airport, and within walking distance of boutiques, galleries, restaurants and offsite venues.

The newest addition to the Downtown Convention District is the 333-room Capitol District Marriott, opened in 2017. The hotel includes 17,000 sf of flexible meeting space and is located directly across from the CenturyLink Convention Center, providing additional convenience for meeting groups. The Marriott is the first phase of a new \$205 million entertainment district that is quickly taking shape downtown. When complete, the Capitol District will include apartments, retailers, restaurants and an outdoor entertainment venue. The new property is within walking distance of TD Ameritrade Park and Omaha's Old Market Entertainment District.

CenturyLink Center Omaha is a hybrid facility that offers more than 346,000 sf of convention center space

with an 18,300-seat attached arena. The convention center consists of 194,000 sf of contiguous exhibition space, more than 63,000 sf of meeting space including 16 meeting rooms, a 30,996-sf ballroom and an extra 79,400 sf of prefunction space. A glass-enclosed skywalk links the convention center to the 600-room AAA Four Diamond Hilton Omaha with an additional 15 meeting rooms.

"In April of this year we organized our annual Home Instead Senior Care network meeting in Omaha," says Rob Helling, vice president of creative development for Omaha-based Sonburst Communication, a firm which does meeting planning, production and marketing for a number of clients. "We brought 1,500 franchise owners from Home Instead to the city for three nights of business and social events, using the CenturyLink Convention Center for our larger meetings and Hilton Omaha as our host hotel, where we booked every meeting room and guest room in the property."

Helling's group also used the new Capitol District Marriott, the Hilton Garden Inn and Hampton Inn as additional accommodations, and she believes that Omaha is emerging as one of the best destinations in the country for corporate meetings and events. "Even if we were not based in Omaha, I sincerely feel that the city offers great quality and value, and some of the best F&B in the nation," Helling says. "Most of our corporate meetings are cost-driven, and I would put Omaha up against any convention city in the country regarding affordability. CenturyLink is efficient and high quality, as



The CenturyLink Center Omaha offers more than 346,000 sf of meeting space.

are the hotel meeting facilities in the city. We have international groups that want to come to Omaha every year because of the ease of getting around the city, the great steak restaurants we have, and the friendly service they get everywhere they go. They enjoy it because Omaha is a cosmopolitan city, but not in a threatening way."

Portland, Oregon

In the past two years there have been a number of new hotel properties which have given meeting planners additional accommodations and space options, in various price categories, solidifying the city's new attractiveness as a meetings destination. The 204-room AC Hotel Portland Downtown opened



"Asheville was the perfect fit...because it offered...a family-style mountain destination, with golf and lots of other activity options."

Kelly Dickinson
Meeting and Event Manager
Special D Events
Detroit, MI

in 2017, and its five event rooms, totaling 1,675 sf, are suitable for smaller executive meetings.

Marriott's Hi-Lo Hotel Portland, part of its Autograph Collection, is a 120-room boutique property that occupies the historic Oregon Pioneer Building downtown, retaining Huber's Café, the city's oldest restaurant, within its modern interior. The Hi-Lo offers four eclectic meeting rooms, perfect for client presentations, board meetings, conferences and social events. The event spaces include brass light fixtures, marble countertops and artwork.

The 299-room Porter Hotel, part of Hilton's Curio Collection, opened in April 2018, offering more than 5,000 sf of event space. The Porter has large, outdoor covered terraces overlooking downtown Portland. Canopy by Hil-



Credit: Tim Jewett

Oregon's Portland Aerial Tram offers views of downtown Portland and Mt. St. Helens.

ton Portland Pearl District opened this summer, with 153 rooms, local craft beer and artisanal breakfasts. The property features 1,095 sf of collaborative meeting space, and is a short walk to the Oregon Convention Center.

Portland will become even more attractive to meeting planners when the new \$244 million Hyatt Regency Portland opens in December 2019. Located next door to the Oregon Convention Center, the 600-room hotel will feature 32,710 sf of meeting and event space, including a 12,655-sf ballroom.

New offsite activities for corporate groups and incentives include The Nightwood Society (opened 2017), a collaborative of women who are farmers, butchers and creatives working together to produce extraordinary experiences around food and wine. Revolution Hall's Roof Deck is a restored red brick-walled Washington High School that has been transformed into one of the city's top destinations for live entertainment. The Roof Deck offers 360-degree views of the city.

Downtown's Director Park is an intimate venue with an urban vibe and an artistic ambience, making it ideal for a variety of mid-size and smaller events. Located in the heart of downtown Portland, it is designed in the style of a European piazza with movable café tables and chairs. With a banquet capacity of 700; and reception of 1,200.

The Portland Art Museum includes

the modernist Belluschi Building, outdoor sculpture courts and the transformed Mark Building, featuring the Jubitz Center for Modern and Contemporary Art. The historic ballrooms at the core of the Mark Building are fully restored with updated lighting, air conditioning and state-of-the-art audiovisual equipment. More than 40,000 sf of event space includes 20,736 sf of meeting rooms, banquet capacity of 560, and a reception capacity of 1,000.

Richmond, Virginia

The Greater Richmond Convention Center maintains 180,000 sf of exhibition space in the heart of the city's downtown. Due to a number of new offsite meeting venues and new restaurants and hotels, the city is rapidly increasing its corporate meetings business.

Housed in an iconic new building designed by the renowned Steven Holl Architects, the Virginia Commonwealth University's Institute for Contemporary Art opened in April 2018, and presents the work of contemporary artists through exhibitions, performances, installations and interdisciplinary programs, while offering plenty of meeting space. The Dewey Gottwald Center at the Science Museum of Virginia is the museum's newest addition, opened in April 2017 and can seat 500 attendees.



Credit: Virginia Tourism Corporation

T. Tyler Potterfield Memorial Bridge in Richmond, Virginia sits atop a former hydroelectric dam.

"Our last sales conference occurred in February 2018 with about 1,000 participants," says Anna Taylor, event marketing manager at CoStar Group, Inc. CoStar conducts expansive, ongoing research to produce and maintain the largest and most comprehensive database of commercial real estate information. Head-

quartered in Washington, DC, CoStar maintains offices throughout the U.S., Canada and Europe with a staff of more than 4,100 people worldwide, including the industry's largest professional research organization. "We chose Richmond because CoStar Group opened a large research office in Richmond and wanted to bring the company together to celebrate the success of the local office," Taylor explains.

"Six local hotels were utilized for the sleeping rooms, and a welcome reception was held at The Jefferson, where we displayed local, Southern flair," she says. "The newly renovated Main Street Station was used for a large seated dinner followed by a concert with local clients. The last night was an awards ceremony held at the Altria Theatre."

After major renovations, the Crowne Plaza is now rebranded as Delta Hotels by Marriott Richmond Downtown, which is Marriott's newest upscale, full-service brand. The renovations included adding 2,000 sf of meeting space, updating the guest rooms, adding a restaurant and remodeling the ballroom. This is the brand's seventh location in the United States.

Richmond's Main Street Station project completed a \$92 million renovation in 2017. The project initially began in 1991, and the restoration of the 100,000-sf train shed was the third phase in this project. The station currently has four Amtrak trains running daily serving routes bound for Newport News and Washington, DC. The station has several event spaces, including The Main Street Station Train Shed, 47,000 sf of event space (capacity: 2,220+) and second-floor space with breathtaking views of Richmond.

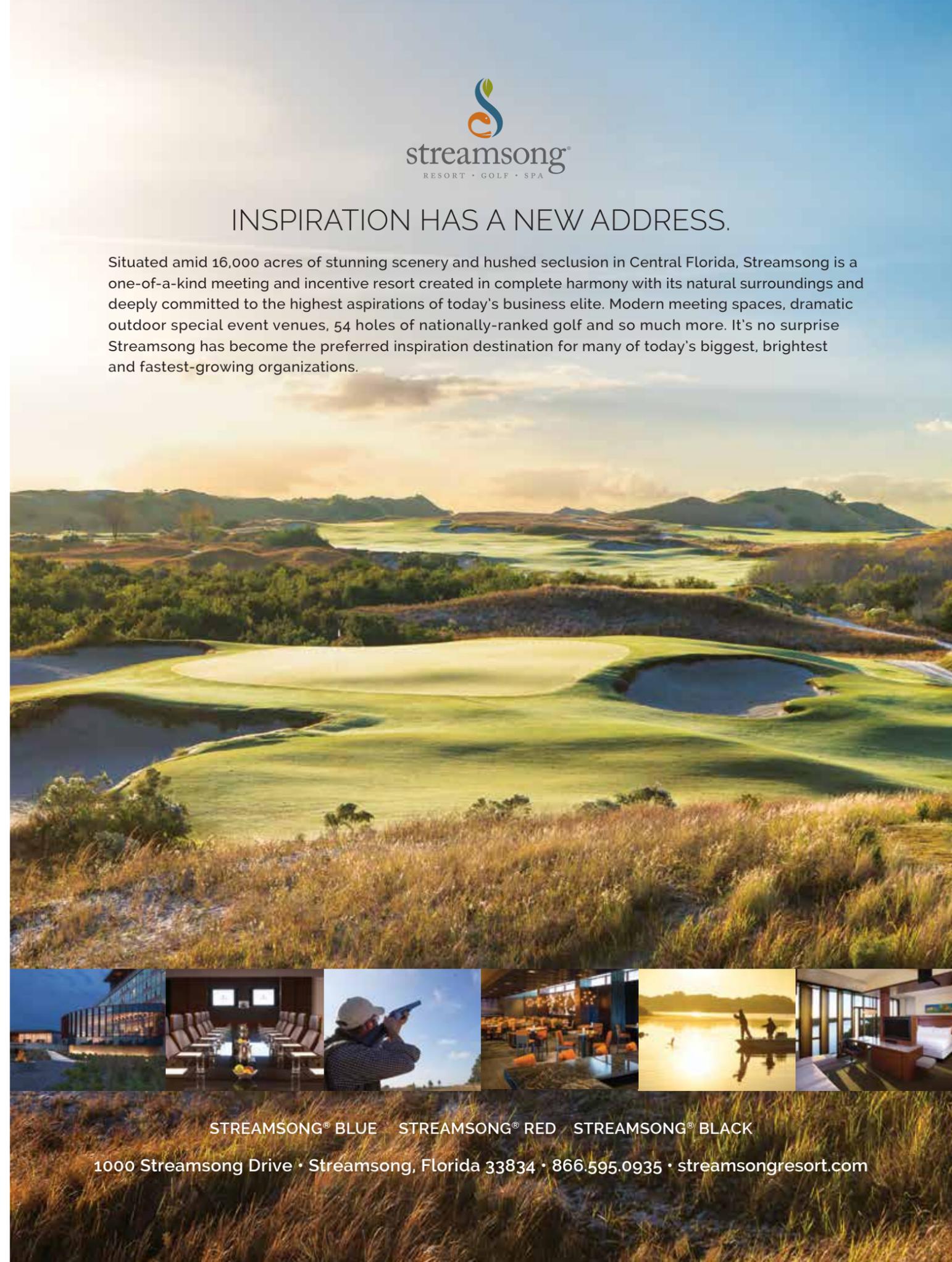
The clock-towered Main Street Station offers 10,000 sf of event space (capacity: 395 for seated dinner, 740 for cocktails) spanning two floors, and includes a loggia, balcony and grand hall. This space is a National Historic Landmark.

Once planners and attendees give these second-thought meetings destinations a chance, they'll soon understand why they'll never be rated second best. **C&IT**



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Working With CVBs and DMCs

How to Leverage the Relationship for Better Meeting Outcomes

By Derek Reveron

Planning a meeting, especially one that is large, complex or takes place in an unfamiliar location, can be a formidable task. Planners overwhelmed with stretching tight budgets and juggling multiple daily tasks may lack the time to handle every meeting detail.

That's why many planners seek help from CVBs and DMCs. But many of them, especially novices, aren't as familiar as they should be with how CVBs and DMCs function, and how to work with them to get the best assistance possible.

The two organizations have fundamental differences but serve overlapping functions.

DMCs are for-profit operational and logistical experts on destinations including properties, venues, vendor selection, themed events, ground transportation, team-building, group tours, Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) programs and entertainment. They typically have extensive local contacts and can save planners time but at a cost. Typically, DMCs charge either management fees for various services or a lump-sum fee, and require at least partial payment up front.

CVBs are free or low-cost destination marketing organizations charged with attracting meetings and visitors while providing information on everything a destination offers. CVBs organize site visits, filter and distribute RFPs, and encourage competing properties to work together to house groups large enough to require several hotels.

Some CVBs are funded by hotel taxes or other public funds. Other CVBs are fi-



nanced by its members, which can include hotels, DMCs and other suppliers. This latter type of CVB may tend to recommend only its members to planners.

Working With CVBs

Planners can benefit from the experiences of those who have worked successfully with CVBs, including two who worked with VisitCharlotte, a division of the Charlotte Regional Visitors Authority (CRVA).

Anita Palmer, project coordinator and meeting planner for Moorestown, New Jersey-based Bayada Home Health Care, worked with VisitCharlotte to hold a meeting in May 2018 at the Charlotte Convention Center (CCC) for 2,200 employees, directors and executives.

According to Palmer, VisitCharlotte helped plan the meeting in several ways.

"They were extremely helpful throughout the sales and contract process... They were all a joy to work with and... wanted our convention to be a success."

Elizabeth Ingram
Events Coordinator
Bojangles' Restaurants, Inc.
Charlotte, NC

"Based on my programs and needs, they helped select and coordinate all 11 hotels," says Palmer. They helped assign banquet rooms in the CCC for 18 awards

banquets based on my numbers. They helped arrange AV according to our basic AV package for each luncheon. They anticipated needs and were quick to respond to my questions and many requests. They referred décor and linen companies. They also sent me links and PDFs on happenings in Charlotte."

Palmer offers the following advice on the best strategy to use when working with CVBs.

"Clearly share who your group is and what you and they expect from the CVB, convention center and hotels," says Palmer. "Provide all of your information on meeting needs in writing, including schedule of events, food and beverage, AV, etc. Also anticipate and discuss concerns your attendees may have. Regarding communication with the CVBs, using the phone is sometimes quicker



Julie Rule, CMP

Manager, Events and
Community Relations
Servicemaster Global Holdings Inc.
Memphis, TN

“As with all CVBs, (New Orleans & Co.) allowed us to do our own negotiations, but were always a quick phone call or email away for us to ask for advice.”

than text or email. ...Keep it simple and to the point.”

In June, Charlotte-based Bojangles’ Restaurants, Inc. held its 40th anniversary convention at the CCC and The Westin Charlotte. The meeting included about 1,000 Bojangles’ employees, franchise owners and executives.

Indispensable Partners

VisitCharlotte and the CRVA were indispensable partners, says Elizabeth Ingram, events coordinator for Bojangles’ Restaurants, Inc. “They were extremely helpful throughout the sales and contract process following our selection of Charlotte as the destination,” she says. “They were all a joy to work with and truly wanted our convention to be a success.”

The CVB recommended offsite activity options for Bojangles’ attendees including kids’ programs available

throughout Uptown Charlotte. Other CVB recommendations that attendees enjoyed included the U.S. National Whitewater Center and Carowinds amusement park, an outdoor facility featuring rafting, biking, zip lines and live music. Attendees played golf at local courses and enjoyed a performance at the CCC by Needtobreathe, a Grammy-award-winning Christian band.

Charlotte’s CVB also helped Ingram work efficiently and obtain value. “Their ability to put me in touch with the right folks throughout Charlotte for our convention was extremely helpful in terms of saving time and money,” says Ingram. “They are very in tune to what happens around the city, so they can easily assist planners with all types of event details.”

Ingram’s advice on working with CVBs is simple: “Allow them to be a planning partner for your event. Utilize their expertise and experience working with various community businesses to help your event succeed.”

Planners who have never planned a meeting in a destination may find CVBs most helpful. But planners who are familiar with a destination also find CVBs useful.

Big Easy CVB Help

For example, Memphis, Tennessee-based Servicemaster Global Holdings Inc., a provider of residential and commercial services, has held several meetings in New Orleans. Servicemaster’s most recent events in New Orleans include a meeting at Ernest N. Morial Convention Center last year for about 2,500 attendees from the United States, United Kingdom and Canada. In January 2018, the company held a meeting for 250 attendees at the Hotel Monteleone.

According to Julie Rule, CMP, manager, events and community relations for Servicemaster, familiarity with New Orleans makes working with CVBs even more efficient.

“We may be familiar with many New Orleans properties, but CVBs provide the most up-to-date information on the latest in the hotel business. We work with the CVB staff to help them understand the profile of our attendees and

which features and benefits would be most important to me as the planner and for attendees. We’ve relied on their help for hotel sourcing, DMC selection, restaurant reservations, tours and activities and charitable give-back programs.”

Rule says that one of a CVB’s most valuable services involve helping planners select vendors. “Since we’re headquartered in Memphis, it’s difficult for us to know all there is to know about all the vendors in the New Orleans area,” says Rule.

New Orleans & Company (formerly the New Orleans Convention and Visitors Bureau) helped Rule narrow the list of suppliers quickly. “Their website and staff are professional,” says Rule. “As with all CVBs, they allowed us to do our own negotiations, but were always a quick phone call or email away for us to ask for advice or recommendations.”

Rule values the impartiality that New



Anita Palmer

Project Coordinator and Meeting
Planner
Bayada Home Health Care
Moorestown, NJ

“Based on my programs and needs, (VisitCharlotte) helped select and coordinate all 11 hotels. They anticipated needs and were quick to respond.”

Orleans & Company showed in recommending vendors and properties. “Their CVB does an amazing job at remaining neutral throughout the process, while at the same time pointing out the pros and cons for our attendees,” says Rule. “Not every property is right for every group, and not every group is right for every property. That’s something we firmly believe, and we appreciate their integrity and honesty.”

Rule’s advice: “Consult with your CVB from the very beginning. They’ve seen successful programs and can make recommendations to you of what works well. They’ve also seen what doesn’t work well and can steer you in the right direction.”

Tips on Using CVBs

Experts offer the following advice on how to get the most from working with CVBs.

- Contact the destination’s CVB before writing the RFP and selecting hotels. It’s the best way to familiarize the CVB with a meeting’s needs; it may also allow CVBs to get credit for room-night production in its reports, and that builds good will with CVBs for the future.
- Be up front about goals and budgets, and communicate with the CVB throughout the planning process.
- Include sufficient detail about hotel needs in RFPs given to CVBs for distribution to hotels.

Supplying detailed information in RFPs helps ensure that proposals returned to planners match their needs, and reduces the number of responses that must be screened. Once a list of possible hotels is selected, take advantage of a CVB’s knowledge of local properties to discuss pricing and availability challenges.

According to Robert Reso, vice president, convention sales, New Orleans & Company, CVBs want planners to do the following: “Provide as much information as possible so destination experts can help ensure you get complete responses for your RFP search,” says Reso. “This goes beyond dates, rates and space. Provide information on the type of meeting,



Marco Bloemendaal

Senior Vice President Sales
VisitMilwaukee
Milwaukee, WI

“Be sure to check out any CVB website, as their online identity should give you a feel for the destination as a whole.”

a rough profile of attendees and the overall objectives for your event.”

Reso adds that planners should always indicate whether hotel specifications are flexible. “Sometimes, adjusting some programming or timing can make all the difference in the world, and hotels once thought to not be the right fit may actually be the best option,” says Reso.

Explain the Purpose

It’s also crucial for planners to describe the purpose of a meeting. Here’s an example, from a CVB perspective, of how knowing the purpose can help a planner:

A planner was searching for a location in New Orleans for a very sensitive meeting. When CVB officials asked about the purpose of the meeting, they learned that it involved the acquisition of another organization and consolidation of about 25 percent of its sales force.

According to Reso, “By explaining

the purpose of the meeting, we were able to help hotels tailor a proposal to focus less on the festive atmosphere of the city and more on the business aspects of hosting a meeting at its hotels. The hotels were able to offer space that was more private, as opposed to space that may have been in more visible areas of the hotel.”

A CVB’s intimate knowledge of a destination also can help planners find popular types of teambuilding activities that aren’t well known. For example, VisitCharlotte helped Professional Trade Publications Inc., which specializes in home décor, find a CSR activity during its Concrete Décor Spring Training Show. Visit Charlotte connected the company to the Men’s Shelter of Charlotte which, due to budgetary restrictions, could not pursue improvements to its facility. “Attendees interacted with shelter residents and assisted in constructing a new patio.”

Know Online Tools

Planners and CVB officials agree that it’s crucial to thoroughly explore a CVB’s online tools. “Be sure to check out any CVB website, as their online identity should give you a feel for the destination as a whole, and it will get you started on learning more about the CVB, how it works and who to contact,” says Marco Bloemendaal, senior vice president sales, VisitMilwaukee.

The vast majority of CVBs in large and small destinations are constantly improving their websites and offering more ways to research destinations and venues, market meetings and build attendance. For example, VisitMilwaukee’s reimagined website now has 1,500 pages of content and 5,000 photos and videos.

The websites continue to become more planner-friendly, increasingly mobile-compatible and easier to navigate. New tools improve the ability to build customized itineraries, share via social media, book hotels and perform other tasks.

Some CVBs offer tailored online marketing campaigns to help promote meetings across various social media

channels. Services can include customized welcome videos, print and video blogs, and customized microsites.

CVBs also are launching more specialty sites in areas such as medical tourism, local chefs and golf. Also check online customer testimonials from other planners.

While CVB online resources offer valuable information about destinations, nothing beats phone and face-to-face contacts for establishing relationships with CVB officials.

Tips on Using DMCs

Planners should consider using a Destination Management Company for meetings that are large, complex or take place in an unfamiliar destination — if they have the budget for a DMCs services.

Some planners hesitate to hire DMCs because they are on tight budgets, want to do everything single-handedly or feel that outside help is unnecessary. However, planners who can afford it can take advantage of DMCs' relationships with local vendors and buying power due to the volume and frequency of purchases.

Planners also can save time. According to Candace Bisconte, partner, Orange County Access Destination Services, "Some find time saving as most valuable, some crave creative input and event design and others enjoy the security of knowing they have a partner

"...Some (planners) crave creative input and event design, and others enjoy the security of knowing they have a (supportive) partner."

Candace Bisconte
Partner
Orange County Access
Destination Services
Irvine, CA

to support in the planning and execution of the meeting once onsite."

Much of the time savings DMCs offer include the work they do compiling price summaries and comparisons for the many activities and events that make up most meetings, especially large ones. "Collecting quotes from each vendor and considering the additional costs for labor, delivery, staffing and miscellaneous charges attached to each offering must be done correctly and within the budget parameters of the meeting," says Bisconte. "A substantial amount of time is spent on this."

Planners also should take advantage of a DMCs detailed knowledge about local venues and restaurants. Suppose a planner seeks a restaurant for a dinner seating 15 top executives, with the following requirements: the atmosphere, décor and menu must represent the company's corporate culture; the chairs and table must be wooden, ornate and high-backed; the reception area must be separate from the dining room and allow a free and easy flow between the two spaces. Few are better in assisting to make this happen than a DMC.

Is it Worth It?

The bottom line: Planners must determine whether the expense of a DMC is worth the time saved and other advantages. Using a DMC, especially for the first time, can be challenging. Here's some advice on hiring and working with a DMC to get the greatest bang for the buck.

- Decide whether to contact a DMC early in the planning process.
- Choose a DMC with a track record for achieving good results for similar events.
- Be straightforward about budget requirements.
- Share which parts of the event will be handled by other vendors outside of the local DMC.
- Determine an event logistics and production timeline, and communicate expectations for meeting deadlines.
- Screen two or three DMCs. Ask for references from vendors and clients that have worked with them.



Robert Reso
Vice President, Convention Sales
New Orleans & Company
New Orleans, LA

"...We were able to help hotels tailor a proposal to focus less on the festive atmosphere of the city and more on the business aspects of hosting a meeting at their hotels."

- Find a DMC with a record for negotiating good deals with vendors for upgrades, add-ons, etc.
- Choose DMCs that can provide fast service because meetings have shorter turnaround times.
- Request a breakdown of all fees and commissions. Some planners have had the perception that some DMC costs may be unnecessary. DMCs believe there is no justification at all for such a perception. Still, get a detailed accounting of all costs.
- Consider negotiating a long-term, discounted contract, with a DMC located in a frequently visited destination; one that delivers good service within budget.

Although CVBs and DMCs are different organizations with different purposes, both have one thing in common — making life easier for planners. **C&IT**



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The California Factor



Meeting Success Is Almost Guaranteed in the 31st State Because Attendees Want to Be There

By Christine Loomis

Perhaps no state in the union has the allure of the aptly named Golden State. And though every region of California has its own appeal, the state's more than 1,200-mile coastline is in a class of its own.

It has starred in some of Hollywood's most famous movies, celebrated in literature and in evocative ads, and it has drawn dreamers and doers to its shores since before California formalized statehood in 1850. It's no surprise that many of the meeting destinations below are set along California's Pacific coast, bays, marinas and beaches.

San Francisco

The city and bay have been immortalized in literature and song, but that alone would not be enough to bring savvy planners to San Francisco. With nearly 34,000 hotel rooms

and more on the way, diverse culture, an inherent romance, renowned attractions, excellent transportation and meeting space galore, the city is a natural for meetings.

"Downtown San Francisco is a great place for international events due to location and airlift for attendees coming from all over the world," says Stefanie Ordoveza, global events manager with OSISOFT LLC, a California-based software company.

In April 2018, 2,600 attendees participated in the company's PI World 2018 event. "With our event at the Hilton San Francisco Union Square, it's an easy BART (Bay Area Rapid Transit) ride from local airports and is located in an area with plentiful entertainment options for those interested in exploring one of the most beautiful cities in the world," Ordoveza says. "It also provides many options for you to grow your group in the space. We started with 1,000. Now we are over 2,500!"

San Francisco, she adds, "offers a wide range of options depending on what is important to you and your meeting, especially in terms of size, cost and atmosphere. The Hilton San Francisco Union Square is the largest hotel in the city that can accommodate our room block as well as meeting space needed to host our 2,600+ attendee conference without having to move to a convention center. Not to mention that its sister property, the Parc 55, allows us to do even more while providing the same quality service and feel."

Like other planners, Ordoveza notes

that it is people that make the real difference. "What we love most about hosting our event at the Hilton is the hotel's team. The event services team is truly top-notch and each individual on that team becomes an extension of our own leading up to the event and onsite, making our lives a little bit easier

when the event gets going. It's always nice to see familiar faces who know pieces of our program as well as we do," she says. "And that team continues to deliver exceptional results without forgetting a touch of hospitality or service. That goes a long way once the conference is in full swing and you're running on fumes."

For those who may not know the hotel as well, Ordoveza notes it's important to be strategic. "The hotel has many different spaces in different locations, so it is important to share your ground plans with the hotel staff well in advance to ensure that you're using the space in the most effective manner for your attendees."

Sacramento

Affordable and accessible, with more than 2,000 hotel rooms within walking distance of the city center and a convention center currently being expanded, along with other meeting-friendly transformations in the works, Sacramento is an excellent option for meeting planners.

Mike Testa, president and CEO of Visit Sacramento, puts

"You will be blown away at how high your meeting attendance will be due to being at Paradise Point in San Diego! We're already looking forward to going back in 2020!"

GRETA BARKER, Global Communications
Ben & Jerry's, South Burlington, VT

it this way. "Sacramento has undergone a major transformation in the past few years. The Golden 1 Center, the cornerstone of the city's downtown redevelopment, opened in 2016. The new Kimpton property, the Sawyer, was completed in 2017 adjacent to the arena. The new home of the NBA's Sac-

ramento Kings is the most technologically advanced arena in the country and sources 90 percent of its food within 150 miles — a given in America's farm-to-fork capital."

In addition to sports, he points out, "the arena showcases concerts, theater and meetings. And adjacent to the Golden 1 Center is Downtown Commons, nicknamed DOCO, a three-acre outdoor plaza featuring concerts, entertainment, innovative restaurants, boutiques and a stunning \$8 million Jeff Koons sculpture. Large murals brighten outdoor spaces in the central city and visitors sample and relax at the many craft breweries, coffee bars and wine-tasting rooms. And *Money* magazine recently ranked Sacramento International Airport (SMF) fourth among the top 80 U.S. airports."

Santa Monica

When it comes to Santa Monica, it's hard to beat its accessibility to one of the world's busiest airports while simultaneously providing "away-from-it-all beach-town" appeal.

Misti Kerns, CEO and president of Santa Monica Travel & Tourism, describes the town's dual personality.

"The Hilton San Francisco Union Square...is located in an area with plentiful entertainment options for those interested in exploring one of the most beautiful cities in the world."

STEFANIE ORDOVEZA, Global Events Manager
OSISOFT LLC, San Leandro, CA





Credits: Visit Sacramento

(Top) A Jeff Koons sculpture at the Golden 1 Center in downtown Sacramento. (Above) Hornblower Cruise on the Sacramento River.

“With fresh ocean breezes, 300-plus days of sunshine, with iconic beach vibes and 40 hotels, Santa Monica offers corporate meeting attendees the perfect balance between meet and play. They will want to extend their stay. Our charming seaside town is full of unique venues and beautiful beachfront settings. It’s home to more than 100,000 sf of creative and unique event space and nearly 500 restaurants. All that,” she says, “and we’re located just eight non-freeway miles north of Los Angeles International Airport and well-connected to the greater Los Angeles area, making Santa Monica an ideal Southern California base for corporate meetings.”

Marina del Rey

Marina del Rey sits just south of Santa Monica, and though it’s tiny — less than two square miles — it’s a highly valuable piece of real estate in Los Angeles County and a superb meeting destination. It’s home to the largest man-made small craft harbor in the world, among other assets.

Debby DuBose, CEO and event spe-



“The Marina del Rey CVB offers a lot of incentives to planners looking to save money, and the value at the hotels is much better compared to a lot of other cities.”

DEBBY DuBOSE, CEO and Event Specialist
Conference Solutions International, Los Angeles, CA

cialist with Los Angeles-based Conference Solutions International, worked with a group of 260 for a meeting in Marina del Rey in December 2017.

“Marina del Rey is a unique destination as it’s within close proximity to the airport and is also near the beach,” DuBose says. “And there are lots of offsite activities close by, such as bike rentals, parasailing and paddleboard.”

The group was based at The Ritz-Carlton, Marina del Rey, which DuBose calls “a beautiful property located right on the marina surrounded by yachts. They have great meeting space with natural light and one of the best club lounges I’ve ever seen. The rooms are very spacious with balconies providing incredible views of Los Angeles. The meeting space is very private and has a nice flow for prefunction and meeting rooms.”

The group did not use meeting or function space outside of the hotel, and DuBose adds that in addition to multiple food options and incredible views, the club level at the hotel has “an amazing staff.”

If planners are looking at beach destinations such as Santa Monica and Laguna Beach, DuBose encourages them to “add Marina del Rey to the list. The Marina del Rey CVB offers a lot of incentives to planners looking to save money, and the value at the hotels is much better compared to a lot of other cities.”

Newport Beach

According to Visit Newport Beach, the town’s convention and visitors bureau, “A big reason to host a meeting or convention in a destination location is that when you remove yourself from your everyday surroundings, magic happens.”

That magic is augmented by more than 200,000 sf of flexible space and a diverse selection of hotels to choose from.

Experian chose Fashion Island Hotel for its EITS Annual Leadership Conference in June 2018. Patricia Trimarco, executive assistant to the CFO, and Yvette Ferencik, executive assistant to the CIO, worked together on planning the conference.

Ferencik says proximity to both John Wayne Airport and LAX were among the reasons for booking Fashion Island Hotel, but not the only reasons.

“They also offer recommendations for car transfer service,



Besides its 245 acres of sandy beaches, Santa Monica is home to 40 hotels, nearly 500 restaurants and more than 100,000 sf of event space.

first-class rooming accommodations at competitive rates, a restaurant with a top-rated chef, spa service and a variety of meeting rooms and catering service on- and offsite. Also, the hotel is located within walking distance to the renowned Fashion Island Shopping Center. Fashion Island,” she adds, “provides an all-inclusive destination, which is critical to any conference.”

Trimarco notes that there was no need to book conference

or function space outside of the hotel because, “Fashion Island Hotel has a variety of room sizes to accommodate every need.” In addition, she says, “We gave the hotel event coordinator our idea of doing ‘The Great Gatsby.’ He took our vision and brought it to life. He showed us a venue that was so perfect for our event. It was amazing. Our team is still raving about it. Job well done!”

But this wasn’t the first time the hotel came through for



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Busy Newport Harbor in Newport Beach.

Credit: Visit Newport Beach

the Experian team. “We had our prior year’s conference at the Fashion Island Hotel and we were blown away by how they exceeded in all areas. It was a no-brainer to choose them again,” Trimarco says.

“We were very impressed with the sales team; they listened to what we wanted and made sure they delivered what was promised. We were introduced to the lead for each area of the hotel and they all exceeded our expectations. The view was spectacular and the hotel was very clean. We were impressed with the amazing food, service and accommodations.”

Ferencik agrees. “Our three-day conference encompassed all areas of the hotel, from dinners, meeting space, AV, cater-

ing, offsite special events and overnight accommodations for 100 people. The Fashion Island Hotel team worked closely with us on every detail and executed with perfection.”

The hotel, she adds, “offers a destination that includes all requirements for a high-level conference, which enables meeting planners to coordinate with ease.”

All in all, it amounted to “excellent service provided by delightful employees,” Trimarco says. “There were no challenges and every detail was met.”

San Diego

Like much of California’s southern coast, San Diego offers exquisite beaches, sailing opportunities and year-round idyllic weather, making it a destination for any month

of the year. It’s a city where attendees and planners want to be, a place with attractions that draw visitors from around the world and that easily augment a conference schedule for groups of all kinds. Among its extensive selection of hotels are historic properties, beachside hotels, golf and tennis resorts and boutique options for smaller groups. According to the San Diego Tourism Authority, there are more than 135 conference hotels to choose from.

Additionally, the San Diego Convention Center features 2.6 million sf and is within walking distance to 11,000 hotel rooms as well as excellent restaurants and shopping, and the airport is a mere three miles away.



The Ritz-Carlton, Marina del Rey where the accommodations overlook the marina.

Credit: The Ritz-Carlton, Marina Del Rey

When the Ben & Jerry’s team from Vermont was looking for a spot for Ben & Jerry’s Global Franchise Meeting, January 2018, they chose Paradise Point Resort & Spa, set on a 44-acre island in Mission Bay.

“There was so much we loved about Paradise Point, but what stood out the most for our group was the lush island feel of the resort,” says Greta Barker, with Ben & Jerry’s global communications team. “The ideally located casitas were a great break from a 40-plus-story hotel. The beach bonfires were a great way for our group to continue networking after our official events.”

All of the company’s meeting events were held at Paradise Point, which features 80,000 sf of space.

There was one off-property event, a one-day community project in San Diego, which Barker says was to “help give back to the local community.”

Barker calls the San Diego meeting “one of our highest attended and rated events ever. We can attribute that to an affordable hotel rate, a lot of flight options, ease of transportation from the airport and to the fact that it’s a family friendly resort with many tourist attractions nearby.”

Barker says she initially met with Paradise Point representatives several years ago. “I had met one of their sales agents at a Connect Market Place conference. At the time, they didn’t

have enough large ballroom space to fit all of our events, but we continued to stay in touch. We had received a contract for another hotel out of the country for our 2018 Global Franchise Meeting, but even with the contract in hand we weren’t excited about returning to a

venue we had previously been. We figured if we weren’t excited our attendees wouldn’t be either, so we picked up the phone and called Paradise Point out of the blue. Our sales rep informed us that they had just added a new pavilion space and that we would now be able to fit all of our large events. The rest is history.”

From the start, the planning process was a positive one. “Leading up to the event, we had very positive experiences with our meeting planner and the reservation teams,” Barker says. “Onsite, we were very pleased at the flow of our events due to the layout of the conference center. Our group is also made up of a lot of foodies, and the chef and his team really delivered! It was the best conference center food we have ever had.”

Barker worked with the in-house PSAV team for au-



Paradise Point Resort & Spa is set on a 44-acre island in Mission Bay.

Credit: Paradise Point Resort & Spa

dio-visual needs. “They really knew the space and best options to maximize our look and feel but still stay within our budget,” she notes.

To other groups considering Paradise Point, Barker says, “Make sure you have enough rooms in your block since you will be blown away at how high your meeting attendance will be due to being at Paradise Point in San Diego! We’re already looking forward to going back in 2020!”

In terms of challenges, there was just one — not surprising when construction and renovation come into play — but

Barker says the hotel rose to the occasion. “They only issue we had was that the planned renovation fell behind schedule a bit and not all the rooms in our block were updated prior to our arrival. But the team did an outstanding job of making sure our group was all in

renovated rooms once people checked in.”

Barker credits the San Diego Tourism Authority with getting things started on the right track from the beginning.

“We worked closely with the San Diego Tourism Authority when originally looking at the San Diego market. They were fantastic at scheduling visits to the hotels, tourist attractions and alternative venue options for special events. It really helped our planning process to understand the area. It also helped confirm that we were on the right track of picking the right hotel for our group.”

Wherever you look in California, there’s a destination that offers a sublime mix of views, attractions, service and an enviable choice of hotel and meeting options. In addition, it likely also offers that quintessential something that only the Golden State has, and that attendees and planners want. **C&IT**

“Fashion Island provides an all-inclusive destination, which is critical to any conference.”

YVETTE FERENCIK, Executive Assistant to the CIO
Experian, Costa Mesa, CA

Las Vegas

Hitting the Mark for Value and Experience



The 3,044-room Mirage features The Beatles Love by Cirque Du Soleil.

The numbers don't lie. With 950 flights arriving daily at McCarran International Airport, and more than 150,000 hotel rooms on offer — most of them dedicated to the meetings and conventions market — it's not hard to understand the appeal of Las Vegas as one of the world's top conference and incentive destinations.

By David Swanson

Las Vegas for over 10 years," adds Hardy. "We have confidence their team will work seamlessly with ours. Together, we have provided exceptional value, executed top-notch experiences and delivered huge ROI for clients again and again."

The MGM Resorts-owned casino, which cost a record-breaking \$620 million (in 1989 dollars) for Steve Wynn to build, was a game-changer for The Strip, replete with an erupting volcano that stopped traffic on Las Vegas Boulevard. It broadened the gaming-focused revenue base for hotels to encompass dining and entertainment, and Wynn lured illusionists Siegfried and Roy with a \$50 million contract. The success of The Mirage launched a two-decade building boom for the city, as one hotel after another was built, each aiming to cash in on or eclipse Wynn's winning streak.

Some of them did, but three decades later The Mirage still occupies a prime position near the center of The Strip action, and continues to shine as one of the leading "second-tier" properties on The Strip, maximizing bling for buck.

Rewarding Experience

"Las Vegas offers an amazing opportunity to hit our clients' experiential and financial targets for their customer audiences," says Colleen Hardy, vice president, sales and marketing for RT Travel & Incentives (RTTI), a San Juan Capistrano, California-based meeting planner. "We steered our client Golden Harvest toward Las Vegas, because of the tremendous value in luxury accommodations, airlift and entertainment it affords."

For a rewards trip offered by Golden Harvest to its seed advisors, RTTI selected The Mirage to host the 350 attendees last February.

"RTTI has shared a successful partnership with The Mirage in

"Our group didn't have especially unique requirements," says Hardy. "But we do feel The Mirage offered opportunities for enhancing the audience experience, such as an exclusive buyout at 1 Oak nightclub for the welcome party, and access to The Beatles Love by Cirque Du Soleil for the final night. For both, the hotel offered ways to customize with group signage and dedicated desks for greeting attendees. These were unique touches to truly set the audience apart from other guests at the hotel and make them feel special, which both the client and the attendees just loved."

The 3,044-room Mirage has ample meeting space for all but the largest groups, including an 89,400-sf Events Center and the 40,000-sf Grand Ballroom, along with a variety of breakout rooms.

RT Travel & Incentives did schedule one offsite activity at Topgolf. "It elicited a huge response from both the client and their attendees," recalls Hardy. "Given the venue's beautiful layout and exposure to the outdoors, fabulous weather helped with this event's success, but not enough could be said about

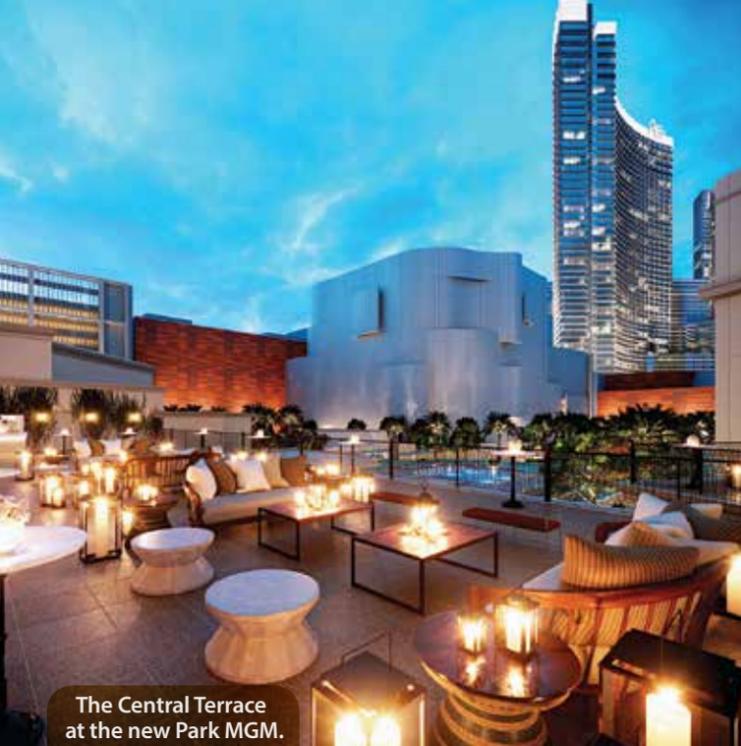


"Las Vegas offers an amazing opportunity to hit our clients' experiential and financial targets for their customer audiences."

Colleen Hardy, V.P. Sales & Marketing
Golden Harvest, San Juan Capistrano, CA

the outstanding service and overall quality of experience that was received.

"Hello Las Vegas was also key to the success of this event, especially as it relates to transportation," she continues. "Their team made the logistics of group movement a breeze with excellent service and knowledgeable staff. They provided a breadth of unique, offsite activity options, such as Red Rock excursions and helicopter tours for small group experiences, which received rave reviews from attendees."



The Central Terrace at the new Park MGM.

Credit: Park MGM

tainebateau structure will be recast as The Drew Las Vegas — with almost 4,000 hotel rooms along with more than 500,000 sf of convention and meeting space. The Drew will be Marriott's first Edition brand hotel in Las Vegas and the tower also will include The Strip's first JW Marriott.

Other projects planned for the north end of The Strip include an \$860 million expansion of the Las Vegas Convention Center (taking over the former Riviera land); the Chinese-owned Resorts World project, slated to open in 2020; Wynn West, a 2,000- to 3,000-room project penciled for the land opposite the current Wynn hotels; and \$1.5 billion Paradise Park, a 47-story hotel tower that began construction in January behind Wynn-Encore.

The Cushman Center, an exhibition space near downtown Las Vegas, was shuttered at the end of 2017. However, the *Las Vegas Review-Journal* reports that plans are afoot to build another expo center downtown — this time, next door to the existing World Market Center, the large building immediately next to the I-15 freeway, heading north into downtown. The expo center will spread 350,000 sf and represents the largest construction project downtown for several years.

In May, Caesars Entertainment revealed completion of a \$125 million redesign of the 2,052 guest rooms at Bally's Las Vegas. Nearly every guest room at the 2,800-unit property has been renovated within the last four years. Measuring more than 440 sf, Bally's guest rooms are already slightly larger than



"The associates were excited to come to train on new techniques while also feeling rewarded by staying at one of the nicest properties in Las Vegas."

Lauren Andrews, Director of Site Selection and Contract Services, Meeting Expectations, Atlanta, GA



is standard on The Strip. And, as part of Caesars' Code Green initiative, which aims to reduce landfill waste, the company donated a majority of the furniture from the renovation — more than 2,000 rooms' worth — to charitable organizations such as Habitat for Humanity Las Vegas and the hurricane relief efforts in Houston, Texas.

New residency acts have been announced by Caesars Entertainment, including multi-platinum recording artist Gwen Stefani at Planet Hollywood's Zappos Theater. The new show, "Gwen Stefani — Just a Girl," opened June 27 and is currently scheduled to run through March, 2019. And Mariah Carey is winging into Vegas with her all-new show, "The Butterfly Returns," opening July 5 at The Colosseum at Caesars Palace. Also at Caesars Palace, the adults-only, tented show "Absinthe" has extended its run, with a long-term deal in place through 2028.

Just down the road, Caesars Entertainment also revealed plans for a new, Southeast Asian-themed entertainment zone called Kind Heaven, a partnership between Caesars, Lollapalooza founder Perry Farrell, and the team behind Hollywood



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Rendering of the Forest Courtyard in Kind Heaven, a Southeast Asian-themed entertainment zone opening in 2019.

Credit: Caesars Entertainment

Las Vegas to stay competitive with other destinations. Such was the case for Lauren Andrews, director of site selection and contract services for Atlanta-based event management firm Meeting Expectations. Andrews booked a 600-person event for Encore at the Wynn Las Vegas for a Bay Area software company.

"Typically, this event is hosted near the client's headquarters in San Francisco, however, we found there was a cost savings by hosting the event in Las Vegas," Andrews explains. The software company chose Encore for its January 2018 gathering in part due to the availability of the resort's theater for a general session. The 2,034-room Encore also has a 20,650-sf ballroom, along with the usual breakout rooms, totaling 60,000 sf overall.

"Generally, we spend a good portion of our budget on general session production. Fortunately, Encore has a built-in theater for high-end entertainment, equipped with the lighting and staging necessary for this part of the program. There was a rental fee per day for the theater but it was a significant cost savings compared to what we spent in previous years, which included the buildout of the stage and lighting within a hotel ballroom.

"Encore is considered one of the top resorts in Las Vegas," Andrews adds. "Keep in mind, we were coming from a city where it was a cost savings to move the event to Las Vegas and Encore. However, if you are coming from another first-tier city where the prices are not as high, be prepared to think through your AV, food and beverage, and other major line items.

"The Encore Theater was the base for our general session and it elevated the event to the next level. It felt like a true production. While most would think, 'Wow, this cost a lot of extra money,' in fact, we saved on budget by hosting the event outside the company's headquarters city.

"From the quality of sleeping rooms and meeting space, to the food and beverage provided by the banquet staff and in-house restaurants and the entertainment — everything was under one roof with a consistent, well-maintained feel. We did not need to pay to transport our team offsite — everything our client needed was under one roof.

"We liked having the option of having an offsite venue onsite," says Andrews. "There are two nightclubs at Wynn En-



The Marquee Night Club at The Cosmopolitan of Las Vegas.

Credit: The Cosmopolitan of Las Vegas

franchises such as "Star Wars" and "Indiana Jones." Set to open in 2019, the \$100 million project will be located across the street from Caesars, between Harrah's and the Flamingo and connected to the Linq Promenade. Guests will wear devices to track food and drink purchases and the multiple themed areas will include virtual games, a faux forest and stages where bands will perform. The venue will be open to all during the day, but segues to adults-only after 8 p.m.

Located immediately behind (east) Linq, a groundbreaking for Caesars Forum is taking place this month. The \$375 million project will build a LEED Silver-certified conference center featuring 300,000 sf of flexible meeting space, including two 108,000-sf ballrooms. A 100,000-sf outdoor plaza will connect directly to the Linq Promenade and to the Las Vegas Monorail. Caesars Forum is set to open in 2020.

Later this year, the 3,027-room Cosmopolitan will complete its year-long project to renovate most of its guest rooms, emphasizing modern design and comfort. Wraparound terrace suites and city rooms emulate the feel of an urban penthouse, with neutral colors and splashes of bright accents. All rooms will have a virtual concierge to book dining reservations, purchase show tickets or automate the lighting and temperature, and groups will be able to utilize iPads to alert guests to plans and events.

The Cosmopolitan is also getting a refresh on dining and entertainment, including this summer's debut of Red Plate, featuring a sophisticated, modern take on Cantonese cuisine. And this fall, Block 16 Urban Eatery & Bar is set to open and will offer six distinct food experiences, including District: Donuts Sliders Brew, a New Orleans-based chain renowned for its breakfast sandwiches; the Southern chicken joint Hattie B's Hot Chicken; and Tekka Bar, a Japanese handroll and sake concept that originated in Las Vegas. Other recently opened dining options at Cosmopolitan include the first West Coast outpost for noodle bar Momofuku; the New York dining destination Blue Ribbon; and the Southern California hot spot Eggslut.

Built-in Value

Meeting costs can add up, but many planners find that some expenses — airfare, entertainment, transfers — allow

core that we had the option of using for breakfast, lunch or reception-dinner-after party. We did use one of them for an evening function and our attendees appreciated not having to take transportation to and from the locale — instead they could walk up to their room whenever they desired. In addition, the venue was already themed so no additional décor was needed. Our evening event was a big success."

Andrews did note there were some challenges during the contract negotiations, that the resort did not have much flexibility with the terms. But otherwise Encore delivered the needed components at a price the company could afford.

"The purpose of the Revenue Kick-Off Meeting is to motivate and educate the sales team, and Encore was a great fit to host this event," she explains. "The associates were excited to come to train on new techniques while also feeling rewarded by staying at one of the nicest properties in Las Vegas. In the end, the quality of the experience was that of a first-class event."

The Reno Alternative

While Las Vegas is the drawing card for corporate and incentive groups looking to set a meeting in a city with all the bells and whistles, planners with small and medium-sized events also should consider looking 400 miles north, to Reno and nearby Lake Tahoe. Sure, you'll trade a desert backdrop for one defined by the Sierra Nevada mountain range, but costs are usually less, and there are still gaming tables for those who want them.

"Reno has many options for team events, food venues and entertainment," suggests Kelli Cavallaro, marketing operations manager for Reno-based Hamilton Robotics. In April, the company held its 75-person Operations Meeting in Reno, hosting the event at the new Renaissance Reno Downtown Hotel.

The Renaissance is the year-old reincarnation of the former Siena Hotel. Set alongside the Truckee River, the 214-room Renaissance is the first non-gaming, branded, full-service luxury hotel in the city's history. Following an extensive renovation inside and out, the hotel now features upscale restaurants showcasing local flavors and offers 13,198 sf of event space, composed of eight rooms (the largest has a capacity of 650). The hotel also has a full-service spa, fitness center and pool, targeting both business and leisure guests.

"I wanted a non-casino hotel in Reno, and the location in the heart of downtown and the lodging was excellent," Cavallaro explains. "The Renaissance is for small to medium groups, making the experience more intimate. It offers state-of-the-art features and the guest rooms are beautiful — the décor is a nod to Reno history.

.....
"Reno has many options for team events, food venues and entertainment."

**Kelli Cavallaro, Marketing Operations Manager
 Hamilton Robotics, Reno, NV**

.....



Credit: Wynn Las Vegas

The Encore Beach Club was named 2018 Las Vegas Day Club of the Year by the Southern Nevada Hotel Concierge Association.

"The meeting rooms are all located on the same level, and they provided an excellent room layout with natural lighting. Catering was very good and the food was always on time, with a nice selection — they also customized menus for us." Cavallaro says the hotel's AV department was very responsive and that signage was adequate throughout the property. The hotel needed to accommodate several breakout groups, and Hamilton Robotics organized offsite events.



Credit: The Renaissance Reno Downtown Hotel

The hotel also has an unusual facility for receptions or teambuilding: an event space dedicated to Bundox Bocce, with seven indoor and two outdoor courts. The indoor space features a sports bar with dining and large screen TVs, shuffleboard and skeeball, while the outdoor courts are regulation size, 90 feet. The outdoor space also includes seating for dining and drinking, as well as fire pits with seating, darts and ping pong tables.

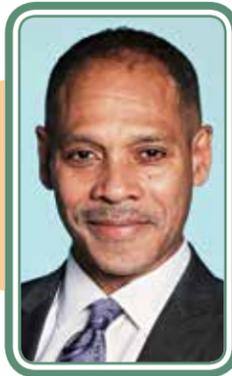
"They helped us plan a great teambuilding event here, including setting up a video gaming room," says Cavallaro. "All of the event staff went above and beyond to provide an excellent meeting experience and they were extremely responsive to any special requests and needs we had before and during the meeting.

"This hotel wants everyone to appreciate all that Reno has to offer and helped us plan and coordinate offsite events," she adds.

Planners who want to impress stakeholders with budget-friendly site selection and still give attendees something to write home about know Las Vegas and Reno will hit the mark every time.

C&IT

On The Move



KOLTHOFF



CHAMBERS



DE VINCENTIS



SCHULTE

Ishmael Kolthoff, CMP, was named director of sales, MICE USA for Global Hospitality Services (GHS) based in New York. He will represent a portfolio of mostly unique independent international hotels. Kolthoff most recently served as national account manager for Shelborne South Beach in Miami Beach, Florida.

Ben Chambers and **Chris De Vincentis** were named group sales managers at Sea Pines Resort. Chambers is joining the team as senior sales manager. He was previously associate director of sales at the Hilton Head Marriott Resort & Spa. De Vincentis was previously sales manager at The Westin Hilton Head.

The Resort at Pelican Hill in Newport Beach, California, has announced the appointments of **Jean Schulte** as director of incentive sales and **Simaan Hawa** as director of sales. Schulte most recently served in global sales roles for Montage International. Hawa returns to Pelican Hill after serving as director of sales for Southern California's Monarch Beach Resort.

Sean P. Reardon was named director of sales and marketing for the new Omni Boston Hotel at the Seaport, which will open in 2021. Most recently, Reardon headed his own hospitality sales and marketing consulting business, Sean P. Reardon Consulting LLC.

Julie Berry was named director of sales and marketing for the Chicago Marriott Lincolnshire Resort, based in Lincolnshire, Illinois. A 35-year veteran of the hospitality industry, Berry formerly was director of sales and marketing at Eaglewood Resort and Spa in Itasca, Illinois.

Pullman Miami Airport, Miami, Florida, has named **Adam Leon** as director of sales and marketing. He most recently served as sales and marketing director at Hotel Colonnade in Coral Gables, Florida.

Rachel Levy, CMP, has joined The Diplomat Beach Resort as director of national accounts, responsible for large corporate accounts in the Northeast market. She most recently served as complex senior sales manager at the Waldorf Astoria Chicago and Conrad Chicago. **C&IT**



REARDON



HAWA



LEVY



BERRY

Credit: Pelican Hill

Credit: Pelican Hill

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