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THE EXECUTIVE SOURCE FOR PLANNING MEETINGS & INCENTIVES

Private, Secure Meetings

Destinations That Offer Added
Protections for Sensitive Business
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INSURANCE & FINANCIAL MEETINGS MANAGEMENT

THE EXECUTIVE SOURCE FOR PLANNING MEETINGS & INCENTIVES

FEBRUARY 2018

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Publisher's Message

Doing What You Say

In a blog post for FICP, Sherri K. Lindenberg, senior vice president of marketing and communications for Crump Life Insurance Services and FICP board member, wrote, "The power of our products cannot be underestimated. Working in the financial services or insurance industry, we talk about insurance and risk management products day in and day out with our clients and their clients, but



are we behaving like the proverbial 'shoemaker's kids' when it comes to ourselves?" Lindenberg was speaking about risk management planning for event disruptions due to weather disasters, but a similar warning against a "do as I say, not as I do" inclination could apply when it comes to planners ensuring the same high level of privacy and confidentiality for their own meetings that their companies pledge to do when providing financial/insurance services for their clients. In our feature "Private, Secure Meetings" on page 22, discover select destinations that go the extra mile in providing enhanced security for sensitive meetings. For example, at Ocean Reef

Club in Key Largo, Florida, entry to the resort is tightly restricted, meeting rooms are guarded and monitored on a 24-hour basis, and the name of the meeting is not publicized. At Pebble Beach Resorts, groups are handled with an alias in the resort's system to avoid accidental identity leaks from hotel staff. Our story also details serious site selection tips and advice from planners and industry experts such as Lindenberg, who says concerns addressed in the contracting stage should include "making sure to exclude other similar organizations and competitors from being in-house at the same time and bringing any potential conflicts or concerns to the company's attention early on."

The "shoemaker's kids" proverb also applies when it comes to health and wellness. In our feature "Meeting Well" on page 28, Kayla T. Koeber, meeting planner and wealth management advisor for Voyager Wealth Advisors, says of her company, "Our key philosophy is, 'It's not about dying with the most money. It's about living the best life.' We cannot advocate our clients live their best lives if we are not committed to the same ourselves. Wellness, waking up each day feeling vibrant and optimistic, is a key component of living our best lives. In addition, a focus on personal wellness builds a sense of intimacy, rapport, support and commitment as we share personal challenges and goals." Read on to learn more about how to "walk the talk" by incorporating health and wellness components into your next meeting.

Harvey Grotsky

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The Top 10 Trends for Incentive Travel, Reward and Recognition Programs

WASHINGTON, DC — The Incentive Research Foundation recently released The IRF 2018 Trends Study, which highlights 10 key trends that will affect organizations, their products and services and the workforce in 2018. From market optimism to concerns about risk and safety, the study identifies key areas of change and their implications for workforce engagement, incentive travel and recognition.

The top 10 trends:

1. Building a brand-asset culture becomes a business imperative.
2. Market optimism leads to budget growth: The incentive travel industry's net optimism score for the economy is up almost 20 points from 2017.
3. Regulatory pressure drives changes: Over 70 percent of respondents said they had made changes in response to regulations.
4. Cost and time tensions continue: 60 percent of respondents said costs are rising faster than budgets.
5. Increased focus on managing risk and ensuring safety.
6. Expanding capability with increasingly predictive and intelligent technology.
7. Wellness hits a tipping point: expectations for comfort and healthy options.
8. Unique destinations gaining popularity: Planners are interested in new and different sub-destinations.
9. Merchandise awards move toward the meaningful: There is a strong desire in 2018 for more meaning.
10. Gift cards gain momentum.

theirf.org/research/irf-2018-trends-study/2390

Next Level Performance Names Dave Dittman as President

NEW BRUNSWICK, NJ — Next Level Performance announced the appointment of Dave Dittman as the new



DITTMAN

president of the company. As president, Dittman will have responsibility for all operating units. He takes over for Jim Dittman who remains as chairman.

A 30-year veteran

of Next Level Performance, Dave Dittman has worked closely with every business unit and has been a driving force behind the company's success. He has formed and maintained valuable relationships with clients, vendors and employees that allow the company to be a strategic and innovative partner to their customers.

He had a hand in developing best-in-class solutions for both recognition, rewards and incentive travel, most recently with the next generation online recognition solution, Applaudit. www.nxlperformance.com

SITE Crystal Awards Showcase Excellence in Incentive Travel



2017 SITE Crystal Award Winners, sponsored by IMEX Group.

CHICAGO, IL — Since 1980, the annual Society for Incentive Travel Excellence (SITE) Crystal Awards Recognition Program has brought industry acclaim to incentive travel companies. The winners are world-class organizations that excel in the design of unique, memorable group travel experiences that deliver measurable results for their clients.

The 2017 awards were presented at the SITE + MPI Global Forum, which took place January, 12-14 in Rome. Seven companies and their clients from around the globe were honored. The winning programs not only showcased excellence in design and execution, but also demonstrated how incentive travel can advance client values and brands and achieve important business objectives such as increased sales, higher employee engagement, and greater loyalty. To view videos and case studies of the winning programs, go to www.siteglobal.com/page/site-crystal-awards.

Wyndham Grand Rio Mar Puerto Rico Reopens

RIO GRANDE, PR — Wyndham Grand Rio Mar Puerto Rico Golf & Beach Resort has reopened following its brief closure after Hurricane Maria. At its unveiling, the lush oceanfront resort revealed a multimillion-dollar renovation and refreshed spaces including the lobby lounge. In addition, travelers are invited to celebrate the resort's commitment to the island's recovery: One dollar of every room night booked by all guests for March and April will be donated to the El Yunque Rainforest Restoration Fund, with the goal of raising \$10,000.

Executive chef Ramon Carillo showcased new culinary offerings at the following dining outlets during the resort's reopening: Caicu Rum Bar, featuring handcrafted, rum-based cocktails, including rare private reserve batches; and Marbella's \$1.2 million renovation debuts as the resort's modern restaurant, with a menu of traditional American favorites and Caribbean specialties.

Additional culinary offerings include: Palio, an intimate and elegant restaurant serving exquisitely prepared Italian cuisine; Hole in One, offering drinks and



bites served by the golf course; and 5 O'Clock Somewhere Bar & Grill.

Wyndham Grand Rio Mar offers secluded access to one mile of golden beaches, 7,000-sf Mandara Spa and fitness center, two championship 18-hole golf courses, premier casino, international tennis center, lounges and entertainment venues. www.wyndhamriomar.com

Latest MPI Meetings Outlook Report Predicts Continued Growth

Meeting Professionals International (MPI) has published its Meetings Outlook, 2018 Winter Edition. The latest installment of the quarterly report indicates planners are reporting an increased focus on personalizing the user experience through technology and data collection in a landscape of continued growth — and an increase in the perceived value of face-to-face meetings.

Key findings include the following:

- Despite slightly more people expressing pessimism, the overall statistical finding of respondents' professional outlook as it relates to President Donald Trump is slightly positive due to a high percentage of "firmly optimistic" (10.2 percent) responses.
- 62 percent of respondents predict favorable business conditions, with a 2.1 percent growth expected over the next year.
- 44.7 percent of respondents cite "most safe and secure" as the most important factor in destination or venue selection.
- Attendance at live and virtual events is expected to grow by 2.2 percent and 2.6 percent, respectively — revealing growth for live events over last quarter. www.mpiweb.org/meetingsoutlook

Aria Resort & Casino's Convention Center Expansion Opens

LAS VEGAS, NV — Aria Resort & Casino has opened an additional 200,000 sf of flexible meeting space across four stories for a new total of 500,000 sf. The approximately \$170 million expansion is highlighted by stunning indoor/open-air verandas with retractable windows and dramatic views of The Park and T-Mobile Arena.

The new space, seamlessly integrated with Aria's existing convention center, incorporates features such as outdoor offerings, views, additional natural light and non-traditional meeting areas. For those wanting an exclusive gathering area, the discreetly marked Cypress Executive Lounge is a Las Vegas first. The 3,000-sf space features a fully stocked pantry, three private suites for personal workspaces and one-on-one meetings, a conference room with flexible furniture setups for up to 30 and a beautiful study for toasting to a successful event. Also within the 200,000-sf expansion are ballrooms with built-in stages, versatile indoor-outdoor breakout rooms with floor-to-ceiling windows and ample prefunction spaces. The top floor is one of Las Vegas' most distinctive meeting venues: a vast ballroom with two impressive open-air verandas that can accommodate receptions for up to 2,000 attendees. www.aria.com



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The Drew Las Vegas Slated for 2020 Opening

BETHESDA, MD — Marriott International Inc. and global development firm Witkoff announced a plan to open a new resort at 2755 Las Vegas Boulevard South. The integrated resort and casino to be named The Drew Las Vegas will debut the Edition brand in Las Vegas and mark The Strip's first JW Marriott. Anticipated to open in late 2020, the resort will feature nearly 4,000 rooms and suites as well as more than 500,000 sf of convention and meeting space. Once open, the hotels will be managed by Marriott International.

Two Blackbirds Hospitality, led by renowned hotelier and former Cosmopolitan CEO John Unwin, will oversee the launch and operations of The Drew Las Vegas. As an integrated resort, The Drew Las Vegas will be home to a broad offering including a casino, luxury hotels, together with convention facilities, entertainment, nightlife, retail and dining curated into one cohesive guest experience. www.marriott.com

Harrah's Las Vegas Completes \$140 Million Transformation

LAS VEGAS, NV — Harrah's Las Vegas completed a \$140 million renovation, which includes 1,622 modern new guest rooms and suites in its Valley Tower, and a new lobby bar and casino floor. The new look comes as Harrah's celebrates 80 years as a premier gaming brand. This follows the renovation of 672 guest rooms and suites on the south side of the tower in 2016, resulting in a completely refreshed Valley Tower.

On the ground floor of the Valley Tower, the resort now offers a new lobby bar with a sleek design that features 12 gaming stations and seating with charging stations.

As part of Caesars Entertainment's Code Green initiative, which aims to reduce landfill waste by 50 percent by 2020, much of the furniture from the renovated guest rooms and suites was donated to charitable organizations in Las Vegas.

Harrah's Las Vegas offers free live entertainment seven days a week at multiple venues. www.caesarsmeansbusiness.com

The Ritz-Carlton, St. Louis Unveils Event Space Makeover



The upgraded amphitheater provides tiered seating for 140.

ST. LOUIS, MO — The Ritz-Carlton, St. Louis has officially completed the remastering of its 30,000 sf of event space. The renovation delivers tasteful, sophisticated new interiors along with enhanced group offerings and numerous technological upgrades. The most impactful upgrades include a technical makeover of the hotel's 3,300-sf amphitheater, while event themes and designs have been reimagined.

Updates include the hotel's new Blue Lounge evening experience, highlighted by a full-size bar crafted of sculptured ice. www.ritzcarlton.com

Anaheim Celebrates Fifth Record-Setting Year for Tourism

ANAHEIM, CA — Visit Anaheim announced that Anaheim welcomed 24.2 million tourists in 2017 — the fifth record-setting year in a row for visitation to the Southern California destination. Preliminary reports show that more than 1 million extra visitors visited Anaheim in 2017 compared to the previous year.

Anaheim has experienced a 31 percent growth in tourism since 2012. The local Orange County economy positively benefited from the record-setting year, seeing a 6.2 percent increase in spending by Anaheim visitors in 2017 compared to the previous year, totaling \$8.62 billion. Spending was spread across a number of sectors including hotel accommodations, which experienced a 1.7 percent increase in visitors.

Development projects have been on the rise in the

destination with several highly impactful projects underway to sustain tourism for years to come. In September 2017, the Anaheim Convention Center's seventh expansion, ACC North, was unveiled, adding 200,000 sf of flexible meeting space and cementing the Anaheim Convention Center as the largest convention center on the West Coast. ACC North allows meeting professionals the flexibility to design unique experiences for their attendees from education sessions, workshops, galas, marketplace connections and networking events. Additionally, many of Anaheim's annual conventions hit record attendance or grew in size in 2017, including NAMM, Natural Products Expo West, VidCon, California Dental Association, OC Auto Show and LuLaRoe. www.visitanaheim.org



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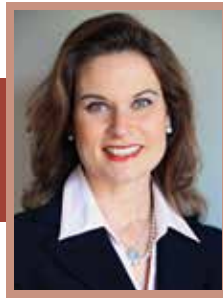


8

1-3 The 2018 FICP Winter Symposium was held January 21-23, at the newly renovated Revere Hotel Boston Common. More than 100 meetings professionals and hospitality partners gathered for two days of focused learning and networking including: lectures, yoga and performances. Keynote speakers Eric Rosenbach and Jon Picoult talked about trends in the financial tech industry and great customer service experiences, respectively. Attendees participated in an elegant evening of history and networking at the Edward M. Kennedy Institute for the United States Senate. **4-6** Attendees enjoying the 36th Caribbean Travel Marketplace Convention, held in San Juan, Puerto Rico. **7-8** Celebrity Cruises plants more than 30,000 new trees, on Santa Cruz Island in Los Gerelos, in partnership with the Galapagos National Park.

Regulations

By Melissa Van Dyke



How U.S. Regulations Impact Rewards & Recognition Programs

A new study by the Incentive Research Foundation examines how high awareness among U.S. program owners regarding the U.S. regulatory environment's requirements for non-cash reward and recognition programs does not always translate into deep knowledge of their implications. Insurance and financial services firms, in particular, struggle to develop a deep understanding of these regulations and vary on their practices for compliance.

The IRF's new report, "U.S. Federal Regulations and Non-Cash Awards," offers an overview of how major federal regulations are currently impacting non-cash reward and

sent a cross-section of U.S. business, nearly a quarter of respondents (106) worked in the insurance and financial services industry.

Respondents Are Aware and Confident, But Could Be More Knowledgeable

Overall, respondents indicated that they were highly aware of regulatory and tax codes, but less knowledgeable about how to comply with them. Not surprisingly, representatives from insurance and financial services firms indicated that they feel a little less confident than the general market in addressing the regulations — specifically regarding a detailed understanding of the requirements and the consequences of non-compliance. However, they are relatively confident they have identified the key impacting regulations and have adequate measures in place to remain compliant.

Certain regulations impacted this level of knowledge. The Department of Labor Fiduciary Rule states:

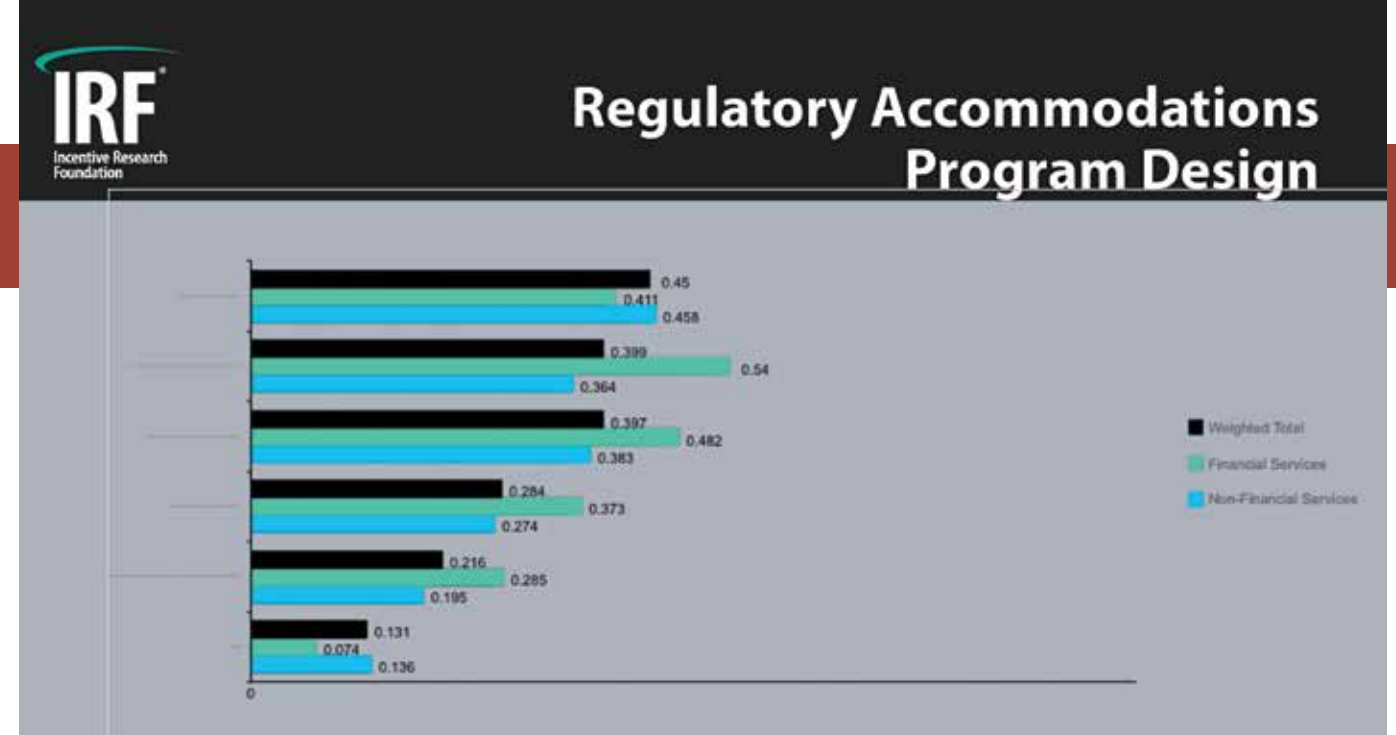
Companies may not create or continue to use incentives that allow financial advisors to act in a manner that is not in the best interest of their client, and they must disclose all conflicts of interest, including the use of such incentives.

Only half of insurance and financial services firms said they were completely clear on what they needed to do to comply with the Department of Labor Fiduciary Rule as it relates to non-cash award programs. An additional 45 percent were somewhat clear, but still find gray in the interpretation.

Shared Responsibility for Compliance

Compliance is a big job. While more than half of insurance and financial services respondents said they had ultimate responsibility to understand the regulations, more than a third shared this responsibility with their audit, compliance and/or legal team.

The measures in place to remain compliant take many forms. More than 50 percent of U.S. firms have clearly identified stakeholders. Additionally, over half have regular reviews by an audit or compliance team, while half also said they have an explicit, documented policy to guide design, approval and execution of non-cash reward pro-



grams. Conversely, less than half review material changes to their programs.

Changing Times

Reward and recognition programs are not static — 86 percent of U.S. businesses make some revision to their program on an annual basis. In 2017, 93 percent of insurance and financial services firms made at least one change to program design based on the regulatory environment. Half of U.S. businesses made eight or more changes for this reason.

The regulatory environment plays two roles in program design — it provides a potential impetus for revision of the program, and it informs the design and approval of those revisions. The most common design revisions are to general program design (87 percent of businesses) or program communications (85 percent). Insurance and financial services firms were more likely than non-financial institutions to make a number of changes to address regulations including:

- A complete redesign of the program.
- Changing the rewards mix.
- Changing the name or description of the program.
- Editing the language used to communicate the rules.
- Changing cash rewards to non-cash.
- Redesign of group incentive travel events.
- Increased program budgets to pay for these changes.
- Outright elimination of a program.
- Shift rewards from gift cards to other non-cash rewards.
- Shift rewards from cash or non-cash to other intangible rewards.
- Increased scrutiny on program outcomes, including ROI.
- Increased staff support to accommodate regulatory environment.

Over half of insurance and financial services firms have changed the entire design of their incentives and rewards program in response to regulations, for example moving

the focus of the program from rewarding sales to recognizing customer service. The greatest change, however, is in products, with 57 percent of insurance and financial services firms reporting changing the products included in their sales incentive programs. Over half have also changed the language they use to describe the rules of their program and the name or description of the program.

Insurance and financial services firms are also scrutinizing their programs at a higher rate, with over half saying the program statistics and accounting are under greater review. Close to half of insurance and financial services firms have changed who is eligible to receive awards in their program, shifted from cash programs to non-cash programs, or changed the design of their group travel incentive event, all in response to regulations.

A Case for Investment

Not surprisingly, over half of U.S. businesses have increased the dollars invested into programs to accommodate changes and close to half have increased staff support. We anticipate more and more resources will continue to be dedicated to understanding and accommodating regulatory requirements for non-cash awards programs, especially as these regulations themselves continue their refinement. The pace of these changes will only quicken as the program owners begin to move from not only aware, but deeply knowledgeable.

I&FMM

Melissa Van Dyke has been president of the Incentive Research Foundation for more than six years, during which time she has helped triple the organization's research and education footprint. The IRF funds and promotes research to advance the science and enhance the awareness and appropriate application of motivation and incentives in business and industry globally. Contact her at: www.theIRF.org.

Reward and recognition programs are not static — 86 percent of U.S. businesses make some revision to their program on an annual basis.

recognition programs. The study explores program owners' awareness and knowledge of these regulations and discusses how program owners are adjusting their programs to achieve or maintain compliance with these regulations.

The "U.S. Federal Regulations and Non-Cash Awards" study is based on data gathered from 419 decision-makers for non-cash rewards programs. The research examined program owners' understanding of the regulatory environment generally as well as in relation to six key regulations (DOL Fiduciary Rule, 274j, OSHA, FLSA, Fair Market Value, and Sweepstakes/Lottery). While the respondents repre-

2018 Incentive Travel Trends

Planners Offer Firsthand Perspective From the Field

By Christine Loomis

Welcome reception for channel incentive participants at Moon Palace Golf & Resort, Cancun, Mexico.



unknown impacts everything we do as we plan and execute programs. I think from a trending perspective, we face an ever-changing global landscape re: security and natural disasters in ways we never did previously. We have to be in tune with and have solid knowledge of all these things that are happening.”

Speaking to three of the trends, Heidi Stevenson, CIS, director, groups and incentives, and a certified incentive specialist with Utah-based Destinations Inc., says, “People seem to be planning things out further in advance again. They also seem to be planning more group activities per trip, thus budgets are bigger. And programs are being designed with more of an emphasis on experience.”

Responsibility is another word that comes up. “There’s more of a sense of responsibility in the programs,” Kun says, “maybe with different tiers focused on health, sustainability, conservation, global giving or a positive footprint, and destination choices based on eco-friendly environments and practices. People and corporations are more conscious and aware of being good stewards in the world.”

As for advanced planning, Kun says that’s good for everyone. “Longevity of contracts is a positive trend. Previously, groups were waiting longer to make decisions. Now we’re seeing companies planning further out and with that comes an increase in multiyear contracts, which is great for the industry, for planners and for companies. You can create better and more efficient programs and increase logistical creativity, all of which increases revenue. This solidifies supplier relationships as well. When you strike multiple contracts, you can leverage for better pricing, better availability and better choices of locations, among other things.”

About Programs

Who’s Planning Programs?

Nancy Nachman, CMM, CMP, owner of The Meetings Concierge in Scottsdale, Arizona, says, “It’s still typically financial and insurance customers planning incentives; however, we do have a couple

It used to be that change in the world came slowly. For decades at a time things remained relatively the same, giving even the most change-averse among us time to adjust. But that’s no longer the case. Things evolve at quantum speed these days, and nowhere is

that more true than in the travel, hospitality and meetings industries.

Airline and hotel brands come and go in a flash. Airline routes, seats and services evolve too quickly to keep up. Economies fluctuate rapidly, perspectives and opinions

change on a dime based on 140-character tweets, the status quo is fluid, information floods in 24/7, and true privacy is largely a thing of the past.

Trends? They come and go like one-day sales.

All of which makes nailing down trends or predicting their evolution a challenge. Still, we went to the experts, planners, to find out which, if any, trends are rising to the top and where incentives may be in the



Nancy Nachman, CMM, CMP, Owner
The Meetings Concierge, Scottsdale, AZ

“It’s not that clients are spending more to get more, but they have to spend more to get what they had in the past.”

next year. Additionally, we looked at the Travel Trends/Forecasts from the SITE Index 2018.

Not all of our sources agreed on every key point, but there were many commonalities.

Trends of the Moment

Among those noticed:

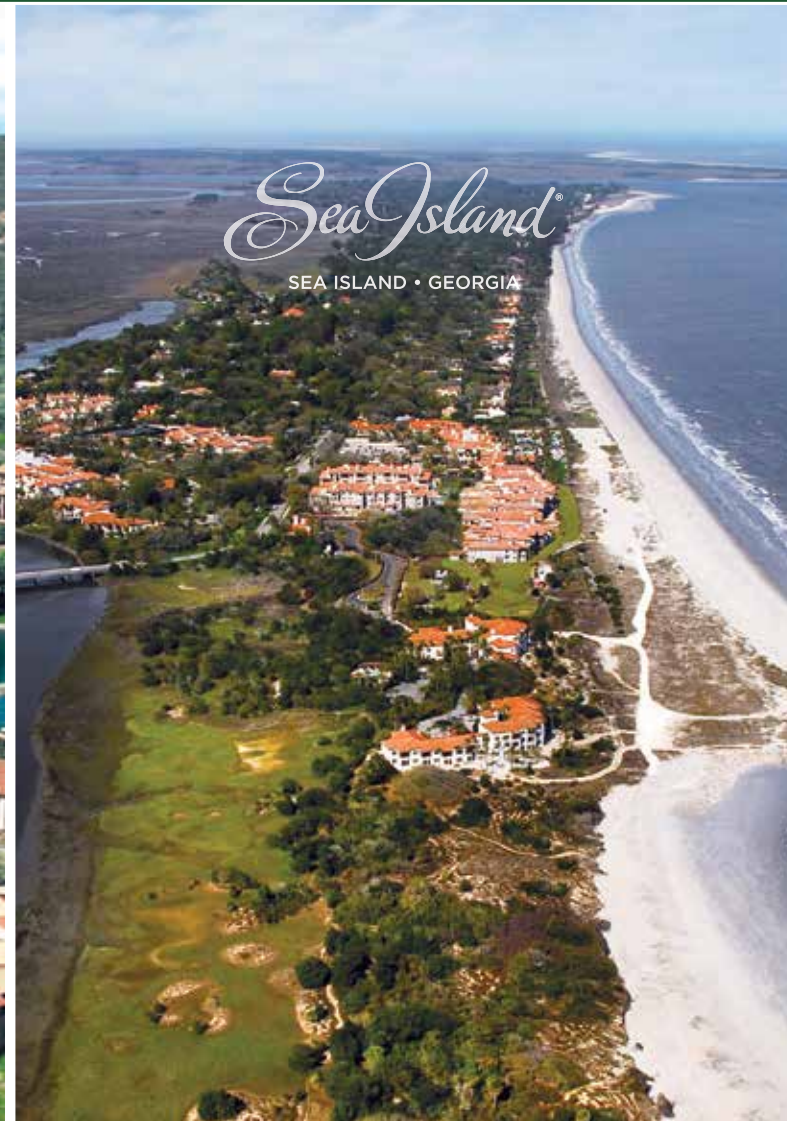
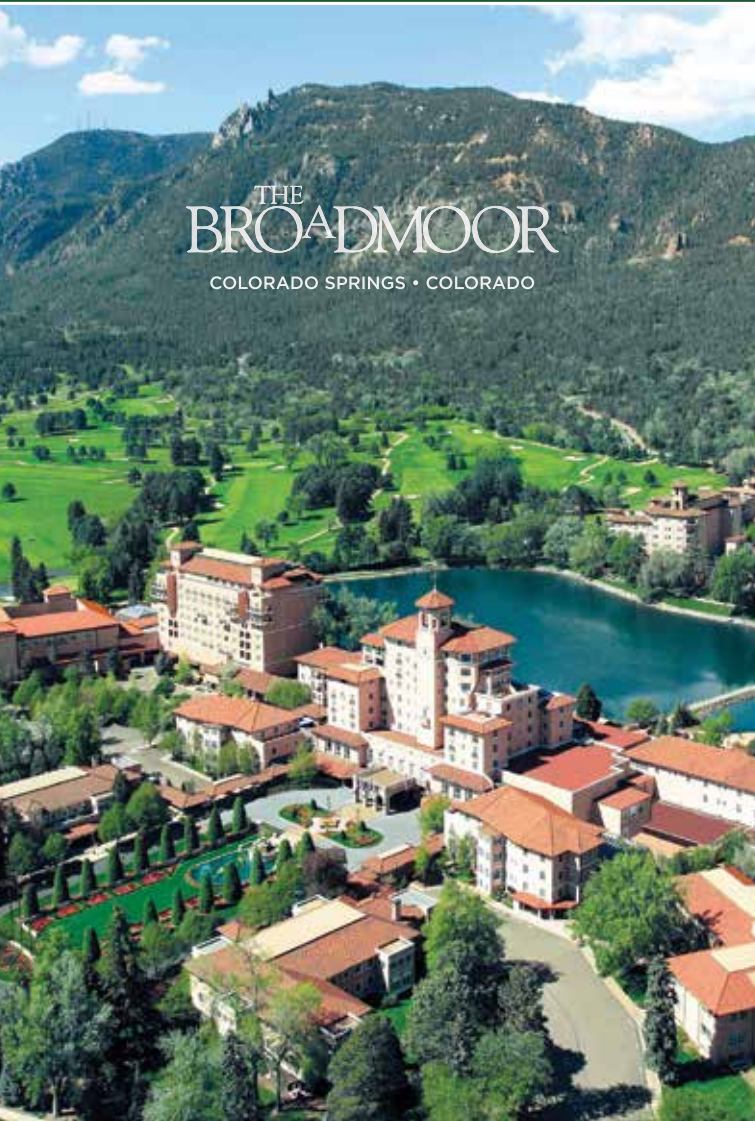
- An increase in experiential components of programs, particularly in how participants discover and interact with a destination.
- Greater emphasis on CSR and sustainability.

- Increased use and impact of technology.
- Companies planning programs further out and committing to multiyear contracts.
- Increased costs but companies willing to spend more to get the high-level incentive programs they want.

George Kun, founder and president of Ohio-based George Kun Travel & Incentives and a 30-plus-year veteran in the industry, adds another top trend to the mix. “Planners and attendees are facing the unknown in a way they never have before,” he says, “and the

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of technology companies in the Bay Area planning incentives for the first time.”

On the other hand, Nell Nicholas, senior director, global sales, HelmsBriscoe, says incentives for technology companies appear to be on the decrease.

Qualification of Participants

“Quotas to qualify are always going up, pushing people to perform above and beyond their goals,” Nachman says.

Kun agrees. “Qualification has edged up in terms of elevating what it takes to win the trip and be a participant. Elevating the bar should be part of incentives,” he says, “and it’s also a way of maximizing money.”

Nicholas is seeing fewer sales staff making their numbers at technology companies, which is one reason for the decrease in incentive programs she sees in that industry.

Budgets and Value

Stevenson notes that costs have gone up from vendors, but says, “Most clients appear to be willing to spend more money.”

“We face an ever-changing global landscape re: security and natural disasters. We have to be in tune with and have solid knowledge of all these things that are happening.”

George Kun, Founder and President
George Kun Travel & Incentives, Dublin, OH

Nachman puts it this way: “Costs have increased over the past few years simply due to costs rising everywhere with everything. It’s not that clients are spending more to get more, but they have to spend more to get what they had in the past. As we know,” she adds, “when travel budgets get cut, incentives are the first to go. That’s ironic as companies need incentives to generate more business, especially when opportunities lessen due to a downturn in the economy.”

Kun believes prices are steadily increasing but not skyrocketing. “I think programs are still decently priced, but any increase can challenge a company in terms of creating these programs. We as industry planners must be more savvy shoppers to get the best deals

that meet the quality, culture, activities, destination and level of service required.”

He says airlift is a detail that should be discussed earlier in the planning process to prevent it from negatively impacting budgets and other areas of a program. “Too often it’s not discussed much until it comes down to actually moving people. That no longer works. We need to know registrant numbers and participation further out in order to accurately project costs. And because airline seats and non-stop options are fewer for all passengers, we need to book earlier to get the flights and seats we need.”

Nicholas is seeing a trend in different types of cost containment and downsizing. “Less extravagant incentives are being executed with a simpler agenda, such as all-inclusives and one big awards

dinner and reception, leaving couples to plan their own agendas,” she says. “This is a cost saver.”

She’s also seeing other strategies for downsizing, noting that cutting incentive trips altogether is one current trend, with companies offering gift cards of up to \$5,000 instead. “This strategy is implemented in part because meeting-planning departments have been slashed to the point that there is simply not enough bandwidth for a single planner to execute a successful incentive along with his/her other planning responsibilities. As a cost-saving measure, however, it’s a fallacy that gift cards are less expensive than incentive trips. The feedback I’ve received is that a) an amazing incentive trip can be planned for \$5,000 or less per couple, and b) employees are looking for experiences vs. cash. Time spent with company colleagues and superiors outweighs cash in hand.”

Number, Size and Make-up of Programs

This area seems to be all over the spectrum, with no clear trend.

Nicholas says that running fewer trips is one option companies are choosing. “In non-technology-based companies, one trend I’m seeing is incentives run every other year. This way, companies can still spend extravagantly on a memorable incentive but the cost is cut in half vs. annual programs.”

With some companies, she says, programs aren’t canceling but, “they seem to be more petite, with 25 or fewer couples on the programs.”

Stevenson and Nachman say incentives overall are on the upswing.

“We’ve seen incentives grow in leaps and bounds over the past two to three years,” Nachman notes. “Even smaller companies we partner with are doing incentives. There’s just no better way to motivate and reward people than dangling an amazing trip in front of them.”

That said, there are shifts in what’s normal. Nachman says the annual trip is still the status quo with most

of her clients, but others are going a different route.

“One client is changing from one large incentive (150 couples) to three smaller programs. The smallest program of 10 couples will be the crème de la crème trip. The medium-sized one will be for 40



Heidi Stevenson, CIS, Director, Groups and Incentives
Destinations Inc., South Jordan, UT

couples, and they’re looking at all-inclusive resorts in Mexico or the Caribbean. The largest one, for 100 couples, is staying stateside, probably in Miami or San Diego.”

Kun is seeing the same thing and attributes it in part to companies being more flexible, as well as to acquisitions and mergers. “With acquisitions and mergers, the size and makeup of programs may change. Do we want a national program or bigger programs? Do we run more back-to-backs with smaller numbers? What’s a good size without losing sight of the ultimate goal? These are all considerations impacting who goes, including how many managers we take. The balance of management to key people in their departments is fluctuating with respect to incentive trips, so we’re seeing customization.”

“One way to handle this is with two-tiered programs or a pre- or post-trip that may be exclusively for a management team, for example. From a budget perspective, we have to balance all of that in terms of number of days and people. It forces us as meeting planners to become higher-level consultants to our clients on how to maximize and be creative. We’re not just planning travel.”

Kun says he’s running more back-to-backs to manage group size within a destination. “We ran a program at the Four Seasons Hotel Gresham Palace Budapest, an incredible property across from the famous Chain Bridge.

We caught it at exactly the right time when it was not so well known. It’s total world class but too small for our client’s normal group of 350. We couldn’t have made this work if the company didn’t have the flexibility to split the group into three. Given this destination and what it offered, we tested the flexibility component with the company, which

“People seem to be planning things out further in advance again. They also seem to be planning more group activities per trip, thus budgets are bigger.”

Components, Planning and Implementation of Programs

Incentive programs at core are about offering a memorable, often one-of-a-kind experience that participants could not duplicate on their own — something that truly impels employees to deliver their best work and achieve high-level success because they want to qualify for that trip. How planning and implementation are achieved varies.

In terms of pre-trip strategies, Nachman says she’s intrigued by what different companies do. “Some send out teaser puzzles and gifts promoting the destination. Others just talk about it without providing any visuals. It’s quite interesting from our perspective as independent meeting planners to ask and learn what our clients do to entice potential winners.”

She says unique experiences still rule. “A recent trip to London with Four Seasons gave the guests a private tour of the Crown Jewels before the Tower of London opened to the public and tea with the Queen’s cousin. Now that was memorable, special and unique.”

Kun says people want creativity but also simplicity. “They want an accessible destination and activities and



Forecast Highlights

Following are key points from the Travel Trends/Forecasts, SITE Index 2018. Trends fall into four groupings:

Business Impact

- Incentive travel is effective.
- Optimism is high, despite world events.
- There’s an increasing importance of sustainability.

Logistics

- The most-used destinations include North America, Western Europe, the Caribbean and South America.
- Areas that declined in use in 2017 include Eastern Europe, the Middle East/Africa, Australia and Pacific and Central Asia/India.

Budget

- Incentive travel budgets continue to grow.
- There’s a greater investment in technology.
- Buyers are intent on managing costs even as budgets grow.

Destination Selection

- Buyers and sellers have similar views on what’s important in selecting a destination, with appeal to participants, value and overall safety as critical.

In addition, the 2018 Index found that:

- Budgets are growing but there’s a correlating emphasis on cost containment and maximizing value.
- Greater creativity and innovation is required to provide greater value.
- Culture and local experiences top the list of what’s essential to a positive destination experience.

— CL

action but they want their experience to be stress-free.” He references a program in Montreux, Switzerland, that delivered on all fronts.

“Logistically, you don’t want to be too far from the airport — 30-45 minutes is good but over an hour and people start squirming. You can’t beat them up. We were close enough to the airport in Montreux and also right on the water and that made people happy. The Fairmont property is palatial and incentive worthy but also in the heart of the action where people want to be. There are buses and trains right there, giving participants diverse opportunities for simple transportation that doesn’t break the bank. Switzerland Tourism provided participants with a free card for transportation and other discounts, including local riverboats. That added simplicity.”

Stevenson is seeing CSR as an added or increased component within programs, not surprising given that it’s

“In non-technology-based companies, one trend I’m seeing is incentives run every other year. This way, companies can still spend extravagantly.”



Nell Nicholas, Senior Director, Global Sales
HelmsBriscoe, Cornwall, CT

among the top trends. And it’s no longer just a couple of hours of working on a quick project. “CSR is a big one,” Stevenson says. “We dedicated two days of service at a school for abused girls in Costa Rica last year as part of an incentive program.”

Some changes are not about program details and activities, especially for insurance and financial companies. Changes related to incentives in these industries have their origins in what happened back in 2008.

“In the AIG era, there became more of an awareness of accountability and that has stuck with the industry,” Kun says. “I think there’s more emphasis on the right product vs. planners simply selling a particular product because they like it. Planners have to be more accountable and more aware of not

burning money. That, of course, applies industry wide, but I think there may be less waste for insurance and financial companies as opposed to other industries. Financial accountability is very high when planning incentives for those industries, even while providing the wow factor.”

Current Go-to Destinations

Where are groups meeting these days? Pretty much everywhere.

“There are more programs looking at Europe, Africa and Asia than there previously had been,” Stevenson says.

Nicholas is still seeing the Caribbean as popular for incentive travel, though she says companies focused on cost savings are looking more at domestic incentives.

“Worldwide is where our clients’ incentives are taking place,” Nachman says. “Of course, beach trips are always front and center

to move into shoulder season, for example, or split groups to get the right pricing and availability.”

Looking to the Future

What are planners predicting?

“I think people will be spending more money,” Stevenson says. “It will be bigger, better. One concern is that the length of stay seems to be getting shorter — just three nights in Costa Rica, for example.”

Nicholas sees the same thing in terms of nights. “Companies are looking to decrease the number of nights on domestic incentive programs. Caribbean island destinations that are easy, affordable and safe are on a continuum.”

Nachman believes “wow” will remain the ultimate goal for incentives regardless of budget. “We will see more unique and special programs that no one could

do without the help and creativity of a DMC for the higher-end incentives,” she says. “Being able to do something and tell everyone that only you got to do it is something everyone wants.”

Kun predicts that planners will have to become more educated than ever before with less learning time. “Planners must be better educated and maximize their education on all fronts — pricing, trends, safety, everything. People are more demanding,” he says. “It’s an incredible world and there’s beauty everywhere, but you have to be careful not to step on a logistical landmine. It’s complex now and I think it’s going to become more complex — and yet we have an appeal of simplification and people want that.”

“We have to be in tune with what’s happening in the world,” Kun concludes.

“Our clients have instant communication and they’re sharp. But we are professionals in the industry. We have to know what we’re talking about so we can better protect and guide our clients. The better we understand the current complexities of the world, the more valuable we are to our clients and end-users. You can’t sit back. You have to be in the know and on top of things no matter how quickly they change.” **I&FMM**

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Private, Secure Meetings

Destinations That Offer Added Protections for Sensitive Business



Entry to the private Ocean Reef Club in Key Largo, Florida, is restricted to residents and registered guests.

Credit: Ocean Reef Club

It's a no-brainer nowadays that for any meeting, effective planning must address security. But in the insurance and financial services sector, the need to protect not only the participants but the information they share often takes matters to a higher level.

By Mark Rowh

"In today's environment, it's important to have a key focus on safety and security," says Michal Brower, a spokesperson for State Farm. "Our meeting planners work with venues to encourage them to openly share their security protocols with us, so that we can prepare an overall security plan that does

not interfere with that venue's internal processes."

Fortunately, there are select properties practiced at providing security and privacy — if planners know where to look and how to take full advantage of them.

"A major challenge is identifying venues that are off the beaten path but still easily accessible and of the appropriate caliber," says Sherri K. Lindenberg, senior vice president, marketing communications for Crump Life Insurance Services and FICP board member. In her event planning duties, she has found that it's best if such facilities offer a full comple-

ment of onsite services so attendees don't need to leave the property but will not end up feeling cooped up for an extended period of time.

Lindenberg recalls a conference where a hotel that was connected to a mass transit station had transient traffic easily walking through the event. Additional security staff were retained to monitor work rooms and meeting rooms, and cameras were staffed to secure technology in all the meeting rooms.

Another event was held in a hotel with a nightclub that brought large crowds and made the destination very

popular. However, the setting also brought increased security risks for a variety of criminal activities.

"Extra security personnel were able to address this, along with clear advance communication to company leadership and interaction with the hotel about the experience we wanted for our guests," Lindenberg says.

Kingsmill Resort

Richard Keurajian, vice president of sales and marketing at Virginia's Kingsmill Resort, says that for any organization needing enhanced security, major challenges include selecting a geographic location that is easily accessible for senior leaders, as well as locating a property within that destination that minimizes their exposure to other organizations, including the public.

Located inside a 2,900-acre gated community in Williamsburg, Kingsmill Resort has a solid track record in hosting secure meetings. The resort is situated on the shores of the James River where the Jamestown settlers first landed. Along with the attractiveness of local history, the resort features a 16,000-sf conference center with soundproof meeting rooms that ensure privacy.

Not only have groups from the financial and insurance sector held successful meetings there, but so have others with a wide range of privacy requirements. In 2012 the resort hosted former President Obama for a three-night stay while he used the resort's meeting space to prepare for the second of three presidential debates. The Republican National Committee and the Democratic National Committee also have held meetings at the resort.

For those charged with selecting secure destinations, Keurajian points to the importance of identifying how a given the property offers an exclusive meeting environment and ways in which the property layout lends itself to eliminating public access.

"Properties must also communicate to planners that they have conducted training for their staff regarding guest privacy policies," he says. "This should include implementation of a celebrity



Kingsmill Resort is located inside a 2,900-acre gated community on the James River.

Credit: Kingsmill Resort

policy should recognizable business or government leaders attend the meeting," he says. He adds that the property should promote all that can be done to place meetings in rooms that have hard walls for improved soundproofing, and also confirm that no other organizations will be in the same meeting space while they are present.

Ocean Reef Club

Barriers to access are an advantage at Ocean Reef Club in Key Largo, Florida, which has been operating as a private club for nearly 70 years. The club is accessible in just three ways: through the main channel marina, a private airport or a 24-hour manned front gate.

"Destinations that

"A major challenge is identifying venues that are off the beaten path but still easily accessible and of the appropriate caliber."



Sherri K. Lindenberg
S.V.P., Marketing and Communications
Crump Life Insurance Services
Parsippany, NJ

only allow entry to registered or expected guests naturally reduce the number of people wandering around meetings and event spaces," says Michelle Simpson, Ocean Reef's executive director of

conference sales. "When the meeting planner indicates that a meeting requires the utmost privacy, these types of hotels or resorts can limit access to where the meetings are being held."

Typically, the name of the meeting will not be publicized, and the doors to the meeting area will be guarded and monitored on a 24-hour basis. Meeting planners routinely meet with the head of security to discuss the group's privacy or security expectations, and then a plan is set in place for the length of the event.

"There are many variables that will always be out of our control," Simpson says. "But with experience and planning, we do our best to create the safest environment for meetings and events."

Winvian Farm

At Winvian Farm, a gated property in Morris, Connecticut, all employees sign a non-disclosure agreement and are trained to support privacy needs, according to Debbie Lupo, corporate sales manager.

Accommodating smaller groups, it offers a boardroom, which is a standalone building with secure entry, floor to ceiling windows, electric blinds, vaulted post-and-beam ceiling, all of which overlook the gardens.

"All of our corporate meetings are secure and private at all times throughout the property with a complete buyout," she says. "With our private dining rooms,

boardroom, cottages, and 113 acres of land, we insure that even with leisure guests staying with us, it is very unlikely that they will cross paths.”

Hilton Chicago

At the Hilton Chicago, which holds Financial & Insurance Conference Planners (FICP) membership events, meeting attendees benefit from 24-hour high-level security as well as access to 234,000 sf of meeting space. And considering the Hilton Chicago has hosted nearly every U.S. president since the hotel opened in 1927, they’ve got high-level security down to a science. The hotel has more than 1,500 guest rooms, and meeting facilities include rooms ranging from 336 to 39,000 sf.

Columbia, South Carolina

A number of properties in Columbia, South Carolina, go the extra mile in addressing security needs, according to Sarah Britt, director of sales at the Columbia Metropolitan Convention Center. The city is home to Colonial Life Insurance, Blue Cross Blue Shield of South Carolina and a division of Aflac, along with several software and technology companies that support these and other insurance companies.

“Venues in the Columbia region are accustomed to hosting their events and providing necessary security,” Britt says.

The convention center’s facilities include more than 535,000 sf of meeting space and a 142,500-sf convention center. Complementing the physical attributes, center staff maintain close contact with law enforcement when top-level security is needed.

Pebble Beach Resorts

For the ultimate in privacy, the range of Pebble Beach Resorts proper-



The Hilton Chicago’s 24-hour high-level security qualifies it to host high-level presidential meetings like this one with President Obama.

ties in Pebble Beach, California, allows group buyouts.

“We can close off the property to any outside guests so that the group can conduct meetings to discuss highly confidential information or products and know that they are protected,” says Ann McAuliffe, director of sales.

“We encourage folks to work with...hotel sales people and to be transparent about the level of confidentiality needed. A non-disclosure agreement is important, especially when content is highly sensitive.”

Michal Brower
Spokesperson
State Farm Insurance
Winter Haven, FL

Before setting foot on property at one of the resorts, guests must enter through one of the security gates. Once attendees are onsite, a security team handles privacy requests. For meetings where privacy and security are a top concern, groups are handled with an alias in the resort’s system so that only those who “need to know” are aware of the group’s identity.

“This keeps any line staff from accidentally leaking any information on a group as they are not even aware who the group is,” McAuliffe says. “The property is then closed to the public, and all employees working during the program park off-site and have one access point in and out of the property.”

Hilton Orlando

Laura Hartmann, assistant director of events at the Hilton Orlando, says it’s important for planners to determine who else is in-house during the dates of

any meeting and then consider hiring additional security. Her property, which frequently accommodates accounting and tax firms, offers a service where planners can hire additional security through the hotel directly. The property has convention space that is completely separate from the guest room towers to isolate meeting attendees and conference content from other guests.

“Understand that unless you have all of the space within a hotel, it can’t be guaranteed that there will not be other groups in-house during the same time,” Hartmann says. “Take precaution and hire security to check badges, patrol event space and for overnight needs.”

Directly connected to the Orange County Convention Center, the Hilton Orlando offers both indoor and outdoor meeting space. Facilities include three grand ballrooms, nine boardrooms and 42 meeting rooms, with a total of 236,000 sf of meeting and event space. A 1,500-sf meeting planner office and registration area is also available.

Hidden in Manhattan

Similarly, Karen Shackman of Shackman Associates in New York likes to use evocative venues that are private and “hidden,” but have high-level design elements that inspire collaboration among attendees.

“I am seeing more of them open in downtown Manhattan,” she says. “They provide a townhouse vibe while providing an opportunity to incorporate celebrity chefs for meeting breaks and lunch menus.”

She also suggests considering

small theater venues that can be found throughout New York and other major cities if the meeting includes presentations.

“Some of these venues can be found at boutique hotels like the Crosby Street Hotel in Soho and at multiple properties in Brooklyn,” Shackman says. “Overall, smaller venues are the key to holding private meetings and events that are productive, low-profile and memorable.”

Westin Mission Hills

Mark Courtney, account director at Westin Mission Hills Golf and Spa Resort in Rancho Mirage, California, says that the ideal location has a building designed just for meeting spaces, separate from the property, that facilitates the flow of the day without distractions and interruptions. That’s the case at Westin Mission Hills, which is able to house meetings in their own private meeting space without walk-through traffic.

“Groups appreciate owning the meeting space or buildings and not having to share this with other groups,” Courtney says. “We feature a stand-alone property in a more secluded area for especially sensitive meetings as well.”

The hotel has in place a security team and emergency procedures for a variety of possible threats, and all hotel staff are rehearsed to respond to incidents.

Courtney recalls a meeting held at his property by Cigna. The company hired security staff to assure its general session did not release any proprietary documents. Attendees were instructed not to remove these documents but rather view them via their internal sources. They also detailed their meeting space usage so it allowed for exclusivity with limited group overlays.

Serious Site Selection Considerations

“Most planners who have security concerns are usually looking for meeting space in a smaller, upscale hotel where they can be assured of exclusivity in the space,” says Tracy A. White, CMP, meeting planner, global meeting services for AIG. “For myself, I like to make sure the space is as contained to one area as possible, and it helps if the meeting

space is on a floor that no other hotel guests would have reason to go to.”

She adds that obviously this is not always possible, and if there is a situation where she and her team are forced to use a large property with less privacy, they like to make sure the space is as out of the way as possible, or in an area where they can do their best to create privacy. For high-level meetings, consultations are always held with a security team to ensure that all bases have been covered for safety and security.

White says that for most types of

properties that work well for sensitive meetings, staff are accustomed to working with VIP guests, so the property’s expectation that their staff is discreet is key.

“We will always go to a hotel where we have either experienced impeccable service, or if we have not been there, it is recommended with very high service levels,” she says. “We also include confidentiality clauses in contracts.”

According to White, best practices dictate that a site visit be conducted before signing a contract. For meetings

Other Secluded Sites



Collaborative spaces at Le Meridien Indianapolis.

- **Home rentals** in Colorado and California ranging up to 10,050 sf. The secluded locations allow for highly confidential conversations and transactions.
- **Le Meridien Indianapolis** is a boutique property with a European flavor offering small and secluded meeting spaces. Facilities include a rustic basement room, as well as meeting space for up to 100.
- **Lakeway Resort and Spa** in Texas, situated on the shore of Lake Travis 25 miles west of downtown Austin, offers a distinctive lake getaway. Its 24,000 sf of meeting and event space, which includes a glass building with vistas from every angle, is complemented by 100 acres of parkland and trails and nearly 500 acres of greenbelts.
- **Four Seasons** boasts an exclusive-use private island, Voavah, which offers a high level of privacy for groups. The five-acre island is located in a UNESCO biosphere in the Maldives, accessible only by boat or seaplane. The island can sleep up to 22.

—MR

and events where security is a priority, this is non-negotiable.

"If there isn't money in the budget for one, find it," she says. "Floor plans and brochures can never give the planner a true sense of what privacy and security issues can arise, so it's better to spend a bit of money to see the property in person than to risk having a bad situation arise onsite."

Lindenberg advises that the best measures to address for sensitive meetings with property staff start at the contracting stages.

"This includes making sure to exclude other similar organizations and competitors from being in-house at the same time and bringing any potential conflicts or concerns to the company's attention early on," she says. Next would be a willingness to work with a company on signage, onsite communications and staffing support to direct guests if signage is limited, which may depend in part on size and

"Floor plans and brochures can never give the planner a true sense of what privacy and security issues can arise, so it's better to spend a bit of money to see the property in person."



Tracy A. White, CMP
Meeting Planner
Global Meeting Services
AIG, New York, NY

nature of the event.

Another step is looking for a variety of onsite venues guests could use that could keep the program interesting while also as discreet or private as needed. Also important is a direct connection to onsite security to address specific security issues, including having regular briefings with the planning team and executives as needed. Ditto for clear communication from the property about likely risks based on past experience and how to mitigate.

"Review the contract to confirm all



The private retreat Inn at Spanish Bay is just one of four properties at Pebble Beach Resorts that offer group buyouts.

Credit: Pebble Beach Resorts

expected services are going to be available as shown and planned, including hours for F&B establishments, so the group can feel confident that early risers or late-night people will have what's needed onsite and not be tempted to go out on their own," Lindenberg says.

She also advises having the ability to permit a company's own security personnel to work collaboratively in the case of highly sensitive situations. Also needed: confirmation of onsite support for secure meeting rooms with appropriate keys, viewing of access reports, overnight security personnel monitoring meeting rooms and cleaning services, and the ability to view camera footage.

"We encourage folks to work with national account representatives or hotel sales people and to be transparent about the level of confidentiality needed," Brower says. "A non-disclosure agreement is important, especially when content is highly sensitive."

Courtney also encourages planning ahead to meet with security to provide the services required or to make arrangements to outsource security when needed. He also recommends obtaining a detailed diagram or map of the entire facility to check that all entrances and exits are secure.

"Having such a diagram makes it easier knowing where to go in case something does arise," he says.

For optimum security, he advises planners to consider a hotel with limited ability for walk-ins and non-hotel

guests. Also desirable are function spaces with no elevator access for extra privacy.

"We also encourage considering a resort with function space isolated from the rest of the hotel," Courtney says. "Having all of your meeting set in one building makes guests more comfortable and secures privacy, since you don't have people in that building unless they are a part of the conference."

Lupo suggests that meeting planners ask to see floor layouts of meeting and boardroom spaces, inquire about private entrances to and from public spaces, and receive a list of private rooms on property.

"Most importantly, send someone to complete a site inspection so they get the full lay of the land to determine whether a space will be secure and private," she says.

At all stages of planning, good communication with security staff is a must.

"It's important to have a great working relationship with your security team," White says. "Once there is a synergy there, you are able to anticipate what they will need or expect, and vice versa."

Online security is another important consideration, according to Britt.

"Order a private Wi-Fi connection for your event rather than encouraging attendees to use free service the venue offers," she says. "Free Wi-Fi is less secure, which is why many ports, such as VPN, may not be available through free service." She notes that a private, high-speed connection, accessible only by user name and password to event attendees, offers much higher levels of cybersecurity. **I&FMM**



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Meeting Well



Credits: Red Mountain Resort

Why It's More Important Than Ever to Add Health & Wellness Programming to the Agenda

By Maura Keller



Red Mountain Resort in Southwestern Utah offers specialized health and wellness programming for groups.

Incorporating health and wellness components into a meeting or event is becoming more important than ever for today's stressed and overworked employees who are seeking a more healthful balance in their lives. Kayla T. Koeber, meeting planner and wealth management advisor at Voyager Wealth Advisors Inc. understands this only too well.

At Voyager Wealth Advisors' team retreat last May at Red Mountain Resort in Ivins, Utah, participants experienced a cornucopia of options focused on enhancing well-being.

While Voyager's event was a working retreat with an emphasis on strengths assessment and future visioning, the overall theme was a celebration of Voyager Wealth Advisors' practice, their clients and each other.

"We offered a healthy breakfast and team activity with a leadership development consultant," Koeber says. "The event was low key, with relaxed dress and comfortable couches where

lounging was encouraged, in a very informal setting."

The group also engaged in a "walk and talk" activity using area hiking trails. Each group included only two people who hiked and discussed key topics assigned in advance of the retreat. At the team lunch, the Voyager Wealth Advisors' group discussed healthy lifestyles, including eating and exercise commitments, managing stress, sleeping enough, turning off electronics and focusing on life priorities. After lunch each team member received a personal massage, with time spent in a relaxation room before and after their spa treatments.

"Our key philosophy is, 'It's not about dying with the most money. It's about living the best life,'" Koeber says. "We cannot advocate our clients live their best lives if we are not committed to the same ourselves. Wellness, waking up each day feeling vibrant and optimistic, is a key component of living our best lives. In addition, a focus on personal

wellness builds a sense of intimacy, rapport, support and commitment as we share personal challenges and goals."

As owner of the company, Koeber understands and appreciates her team's challenges and strengths far better on both a work and personal level.

"The team members left understanding how committed I am to each of them, the challenges I face as well as the company leader and a strong sense that we are all in this together," Koeber says.

For more than 20 years, Red Mountain Resort, one of the nation's premier destination spa and wellness retreats set amidst Southwestern Utah's stunning red rock cliffs and canyons has specialized in health and wellness programming that addresses the physical and emotional needs of meeting and event attendees. From "mindful" and guided hikes through Snow Canyon State Park, to meditation and stress management classes and customized outdoor adventures, attendees have an array of options that encourage physi-

cal activity, self-reflection and overall self-care. Red Mountain Resort also offers complimentary stress reduction baskets placed in meeting rooms, stretch and breathe breaks, as well as nutritious smoothie bar options.

Showing the Company Cares

Walter Kinzie, CEO of Encore Live, a meeting and event production company, has helped both financial and insurance meeting planners and attendees put wellness on their agenda in a multitude of areas.

"When selecting a meeting site, we choose venues that have easy access to workout facilities," Kinzie says. "We also provide workout classes to our attendees — whether it be onsite or offsite. Lastly, we select fresh and healthy cuisine when planning our event menus and give attendees a variety of choices that adhere to all dietary restrictions. We want to take the stress out of travel and create a hassle-free experience for every attendee."

One of Encore Live's financial clients, who wished to not disclose the company name, recently orchestrated the company's annual sales meeting with 440 attendees. "Our firm brings all of its sales teams across the country to one location," says the financial company's meeting planner. "The event goes on for four days and includes trainings and fun employee appreciation events."

Prior to the event, the financial company sent an online registration form for attendees to fill out. The form asked if they had any food allergies and/or dietary restrictions.

"We worked with the hotel and restaurants to incorporate vegetarian, vegan and gluten-free options in every meal we provided," the meeting planner says. "We also offered whole fruit items like apples, oranges and bananas in attendees' rooms."



"We cannot advocate our clients live their best lives if we are not committed to the same ourselves. ...A focus on personal wellness builds a sense of intimacy, rapport, support and commitment as we share personal challenges and goals."

Kayla T. Koeber
Wealth Management Advisor
Voyager Wealth Advisors Inc.
St. George, UT

Because the meeting days are full, Encore Live made sure to incorporate frequent breaks throughout the day so attendees could go outside or go for a walk. They also organized pickup basketball games with the hotel.



Stress melts away the minute you step inside Acqualina Spa by ESPA in Sunny Isles Beach, Florida.

"Incorporating wellness components in our meeting shows our employees that we care and we listened to their feedback," the financial meeting planner says. "Listen to your attendees and pay attention to how they feel. When you're in 40 meetings and away from home, it's important to have healthy meal options and a balanced schedule. Going outside and taking a walk allows attendees to clear their minds and helps them to be more productive."

Kinzie and his team at Encore Live put a heavy emphasis on the overall happiness and well-being of the attendees. They strive to create environments where people are happy, less stressed, eating right and taking care of themselves.

"Health and wellness is a growing trend among corporations, and we expect it to continue," Kinzie says. "We are seeing more and more companies incorporate health and wellness options into their meetings. Companies are recognizing the connection between healthy activities and employee productivity."

A recent leadership conference planned by Encore Live included an afternoon devoted to fitness and community service. Participants were encouraged to take part in a variety of physical fitness activities including an

obstacle course, fun run, basketball tournament and Zumba class.

"We tied this afternoon into our client's charity where participants could give back to the community and assemble duffle bags for children entering foster care," Kinzie says. "We created a memorable afternoon where participants could feel good about their health and feel good about giving back to the community. For another client, we organized yoga on the beach. Participants were able to clear their heads and recharge before the meeting."

Stress-reducing Strategies

One key way that many planners incorporate healthful options into an event is by offering spa treatments to attendees. Perhaps the most popular treatment is massage therapy, which practitioners say can rejuvenate mind, body and spirit by reducing muscle tension, improving joint flexibility and promoting faster healing.

"Spa management is always available to assist the meeting planner with an array of suggestions and ideas to incorporate health and wellness into the meeting agenda," says Cynthia Bell, executive spa director of operations at Acqualina Spa located at Acqualina Resort & Spa in Sunny Isles Beach, Florida.

As an appreciation to attendees,

guests at Acqualina can experience their choice of a 50-minute treatment to include either a Swedish massage or skin radiance facial. In addition, the attendees are offered a welcoming Thai coconut drink available upon check-in or after their service to be enjoyed on the pool terrace.

"Most meeting planners are interested in stress reduction and wellness for their teams," Bell says. "Incorporating spa services with yoga is typically the best combination for most of our groups. Many attendees will work harder and more passionately knowing that their company cares enough to include their well-being into the meeting agenda."

Event director Teresa Blumberg with Blumberg Events recently helped plan a sales group meeting at Acqualina for 40 attendees from a financial company.

"In today's society, people run at 100 miles an hour so it's very refreshing for a group to have wellness incorporated into an event as this lightens the experience and allows them to concentrate and enjoy the experience better," Blumberg says.

At the recent sales group meeting, Blumberg offered early morning yoga on the beach followed by a light breakfast in the spa with a smoothie station. "We also offered gluten-free options on the menus that were served and a guided meditation to the group on how to de-stress after a long day — such as stretching exercises after each meeting session to allow for better focus," Blumberg says. "It created a breather between sessions and the healthy food options worked for people trying to be more healthy in their food choices. Attendees also appreciated that the company added some extra options to the event."

Such a holistic approach to stress reduction is the most effective way to restore mind-body equilibrium, enhance alertness and boost energy. The yoga component — in addition to increasing flexibility and muscle endurance — also can promote a deep sense of well-being.

The Westin Peachtree Plaza in Atlanta, Georgia, shows its commitment

to guests' well-being through a variety of wellness programs that help planners and attendees stay on top of their game.

As Ron Tarson, general manager of The Westin Peachtree Plaza explains, meeting attendees can embark on the "I Climbed The Peach" challenge, where small groups sign up to climb the 72 stories to the top of The Westin Peachtree Plaza. Once completed they receive an "I Climbed The Peach" t-shirt — a souvenir that doubles as bragging rights for conquering the Southeast's tallest hotel.

The hotel also offers "RunWestin," which entails a team of meeting attendees joining a concierge on a three-mile guided run around the city to sightsee while enjoying a physical activity. In 2016 the hotel launched Bike Concierge, a fitness alternative providing a fun, unique way for people to see the sites of Atlanta. Participants cycle with a trained guide, who takes meeting attendees through an eight-mile route to explore sites such as the BeltLine, Freedom Parkway, Jackson

Street Bridge and Martin Luther King Jr. National Historic Park.

"Meeting planners today are truly looking for it all," Tarson says. "Of course location, quality and accessibility are still very important, but another important factor is participant satisfaction. When a meeting planner can provide unique experiences to their attendees, like our teambuilding activities, unique fitness initiatives and items from our SuperFoodsRx menu, they seem to have the most success."

Healthy Eating

Shantel Bridges, director of event planning at The Marriott Magnificent Mile in Chicago, says that today's financial and insurance meeting planners are always looking for new ways to continue to offer sweet treats to the attendees, but making sure they also have the healthy items from which to choose.

"We really try to create some great items and breaks that are attractive to

"We are seeing more and more companies incorporate health and wellness options into their meetings. Companies are recognizing the connection between healthy activities and employee productivity."



Walter Kinzie
CEO
Encore Live
Fort Worth, TX

the attendees and don't just include boring greens," Bridges says. "Offering items like our "superfoods break," provides items such as freshly made smoothies, super grains and antioxidant shooters. For those that need a little sweet treat, we also offer cocoa nib bark that we make in-house"

The Marriott Magnificent Mile has a 95 percent scratch kitchen so their team is capable of tailoring any menu to ensure it fits the needs of the planner and their attendees.

"The other great thing about being a 95 percent scratch kitchen is that we are using fresh ingredients and the majority of them come from local farms," Bridges says. "Also we try to partner with our clients to intertwine our new fitness center and fitness lab along with great food options. So, if we have a group that wants to offer sunrise yoga for their attendees, we can set up some great healthy snack breaks for them to have afterward."

'Healthy' Hotels

With more than 90,000 room options, New York City hotels also have incorporated wellness options that include world-class spas with meditation components, wellness tracking throughout the hotels, customized airflow and sound to improve sleep and for corporate groups, meeting well-



Atlanta's Westin Peachtree Plaza offers the "RunWestin" program, in which a team of meeting attendees joins a concierge on a three-mile guided run around the city.



Frank Lipman, M.D. (center), shown with Hyatt chefs, has partnered with Hyatt to lead the Be Well program, which is designed to help attendees maintain their health routines while traveling.

ness programs. In 2018, the luxury gym Equinox will open its first U.S. hotel in Manhattan that will feature a 60,000-sf fitness center.

"We found a hotel spa option about 20 minutes north of Manhattan in a historic castle that offers attendees a customized menu of spa treatments such as steam, whirlpool, relaxation lounges and a private VIP treatment room," says Karen Shackman, owner of Shackman Associates New York. "And they can get their sweat on as a way to start the process in an even healthier way. Whether or not attendees opt for private health and fitness classes, the backdrop for the spa is a serene wooded landscape in a

sophisticated oasis that utilizes stone walls and minimal exterior openings to blend with its peaceful setting. You would never know you are so close to New York City."

A massive stone wall guides attendees through an opening into a sheltered interior courtyard. Meeting attendees can experience six hours of sweating, steaming and zoning out in a robe in the relaxation room, where attendees can sip organic teas on lounges while enjoying amazing views with floor-to-ceiling windows.

Another hotel making strides in their wellness offerings to meeting attendees is Airlie, located just 45 minutes outside of Washington, DC, in Warrenton, Virginia. A distraction-free oasis for meetings, Airlie is known as "the island of thought." This beautiful retreat sources produce from their own 20-acre organic garden and offers healthful breakout sessions as well as a myriad of fitness opportunities through bicycling, hiking, walking paths and yoga.

Because most corporate meeting planners and attendees are seeking these wellness components, hotels like Airlie and others must continually adapt to meet these changing needs.

Major hotel brands such as Marriott,

Hilton and Hyatt have established meeting programs with wellness in mind. For example, MGM and Marriott's Stay Well Meetings is a comprehensive wellness meetings experience featuring premier meeting spaces, state-of-the-art air purification, energizing lighting, nutritious menu options, soothing aromatherapy and other features designed to enhance productivity. The Hilton Meet With Purpose program, offered at 275 Hilton hotels, revolves around the three components of the program: Mindful Meeting (waste and resource tracking system); Mindful Eating (balanced menus and light activities); and Mindful Being (uplifting meeting activities). And Hilton's new Five Feet to Fitness room category brings more than 11 different fitness equipment and accessory options into the hotel room. Hyatt's Be Well program, a collaboration with integrative medicine pioneer Frank Lipman, M.D., is designed to help attendees maintain their health routines while traveling by offering increased fitness activities, expanded menu options and nutritious to-go alternatives.

With the ongoing frantic pace of work life, meeting and event planning professionals stress that the trend of incorporating wellness components into events is here to stay.

"By thinking outside the box, our team is bringing meetings into the future and giving planners a holistic experience that anticipates and answers meeting attendee's needs," Tarson says.

Bridges agrees. "This is definitely a trend that is growing. When planners come for site visits, they are asking about our fitness center and what we have to offer," she says. "When clients see our fitness center and fitness lab, they are blown away. When we have groups in-house, we see a trend of attendees making an effort to get to the gym either before or after their meetings. As we start to see the millennials become more of the business traveler, they want the fun options when it comes to food, but they still keep in mind healthy eating and fitness. It's definitely a work hard, play hard, stay balanced lifestyle."

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"Many attendees will work harder and more passionately knowing that their company cares enough to include their well-being into the meeting agenda."



Cynthia Bell
Executive Spa Director of Operations
Acqualina Spa by ESPA
Sunny Isles, FL

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It's no accident that Arizona has become, along with Florida and California, one of the most popular statewide meeting destinations in the U.S. In addition to its inviting climate, formidable airlift, and vast array of hotel product, Arizona also offers a range of unique options when it comes to local destinations.

Scottsdale

Along with nearby Phoenix, Scottsdale ranks as one of Arizona's two largest and most utilized meeting destinations. For the last three years, Lisa Livingstone, founder and owner of Golden, Colorado-based independent meeting planning firm Livingstone & Associates, has been bringing a group of 170 community bankers and guests to Scottsdale every October for their annual three-day, two-night educational conference. The group had already been going to Scottsdale for seven consecutive years before Livingstone inherited the meeting.

Why such loyalty to the destination? "The climate in Scottsdale is perfect in the fall when this meeting is held each year," Livingstone says. "That's a great time of year to be there. Another reason why my client and I like Scottsdale is its airlift and value in airfares from around the country. There is also a lot of variety in Scottsdale, in terms of hotel product and also in terms of things to do. It's also an upscale destination. It's very popular with our attendees because of things such as the golf courses and spas."

In particular, Livingstone says, one of the factors that makes Scottsdale so popular with meeting planners and their upscale clients is its range of hotel product. For her first meeting with her banker group in 2015, she chose

the JW Marriott Scottsdale Camelback Inn Resort & Spa. "Attendees loved the property and the history of it," Livingstone says. "It also has a lot of character. It's a very unique property."

For the 2016 meeting, the group used The Westin Kierland Resort & Spa Phoenix-Scottsdale. "One of the unique things about that property is its outdoor areas, especially the atrium area, which are very beautiful. But it's also an excellent meeting property."

Last year, Livingstone used the Hyatt Regency Scottsdale Resort & Spa at Gainey Ranch.

"This group always selects a four-star luxury property," she says. "And in this case, it was a resort property rather



"The setting was gorgeous. ...In terms of the meeting, we had a lot of room. Things weren't crowded or cramped. That was the best thing about this particular meeting."

**Lisa Livingstone, Founder and Owner
Livingstone & Associates, Golden, CO**

than a typical corporate/meeting style hotel. I call it tasteful elegance."

A key factor in the selection of the Hyatt Regency was budget. "The pricing they gave us for the room rate was really important," Livingstone says. "Another thing that is very important to this group is Wi-Fi availability in the meeting space at no cost. They also waived their resort fee."

Both Livingstone and her attendees gave the property high marks after the meeting. "The rooms are lovely," Livingstone says. "They are very bright and spacious. The bathrooms are updated and very modern. And most of the rooms had balconies."

All of the food and beverage for the meeting was done onsite. "The food and beverage was excellent," Livingstone says. "It was also very creative. It was also highly rated in our post-meeting survey."

A highlight of the meeting was an outdoor opening night reception with heavy hors d'oeuvres. "The setting was gorgeous," Livingstone says. "We had beautiful weather and it was a very successful event. It got rave reviews from attendees in our post-meeting survey."

The layout and configuration of the meeting space also worked very well, she said. "In my experience, Hyatt properties are very generous with their meeting space, so we used a lot of space, even though we only had 115

actual meeting attendees. The others were spouses and guests. So in terms of the meeting, we had a lot of room to move around in. Things weren't crowded or cramped. That was the best thing about this particular meeting. We did both general sessions and breakouts and nothing was uncomfortable. And the meeting space was just excellent."

Finally, she says, the level of service she and her client received at the Hyatt Regency were truly exemplary. "I am a fan of the Hyatt brand," she says. "In the case of Scottsdale, I have been to a number of the resort properties there with this group. And they are all excellent. But the Hyatt is my fa-

Arizona



Poco Diablo Resort Sedona is surrounded by a landscape of red rocks, where you will feel relaxed and at one with nature.

vorite, because most of the staff has been there for a very long time. They are very personable and there is a lot of attention to detail. For example, instead of just giving me an app to use when I needed to contact somebody or get something done, they assigned me a meeting concierge, who was always there at the ready. She just did a great job of taking care of me and the group. I could not have been happier with the service."

Because her client likes to move to a new hotel each year, Livingstone will not return to the Hyatt Regency this year. As of mid-January, the hotel had not yet been selected. But as for Scottsdale, her loyalty to the destination remains unshakable. "It's just a fantastic place to hold a meeting," she says.

Sedona

Most meeting planners are familiar with the intimate resort enclave of Sedona as a world-renowned wellness and spiritual center, famous

for its breathtaking landscape and "magical" aura.

For the last two years, Lisa Barot, executive assistant at Tempe, Arizona-based TruWest Credit Union, has used Sedona as the destination for the company's three-day, two-night annual top management executive conference for 20 attendees plus spouses and guests.

"Because of the nature of the attendees at our management conference, we always want a sophisticated and relaxing destination," Barot says. "Sedona meets that definition, but it is also very beautiful. Because of the landscape and things like the red rocks, there is no other place like it. It also has cooler weather in the summer than most of the rest of the state. It might still be 100 degrees, but that's still better than the 120 degrees down in the valley where Phoenix is."

Another factor in TruWest's embrace of Sedona two years ago was the value it offered. "That was one of the most important reasons why we chose

it," Barot says. "You get a lot for your money, and you also get the incredible beauty and serenity."

For both 2016 and last year, Barot and her top executives chose Poco Diablo Resort Sedona as their hotel. "It is a gorgeous property," Barot says. "It's also a very serene and relaxing place, which is also important to this group and also important to the meeting itself. It's surrounded by the red rocks and it also has a small nine-hole executive golf course. And golf is very important to this group."

One of the things that surprised Barot and her executives when they went to Sedona the first time in 2016 was the sophistication of its local dining scene. Two years ago and again last year, the group went offsite for a dinner in a private dining room at Cucina Rustica, which serves Italian food. "It's a phenomenal restaurant," Barot says. "And the service is also superb. Last year, they knew we were crunched for time because we had an

event scheduled back at the hotel, and they got us in and out according to our schedule. But even though they had to get us in and out very efficiently, the food and the service were just outstanding. Everybody loved the place. I just can't rave enough about it."

In 2016, Barot planned a second offsite dinner at Mariposa, a high-end Latin grill. "That was another wonderful experience," Barot says. "The food there is also exceptional."

After dinner in 2016, the group returned to Poco Diablo for a private star-gazing event. "We hired a local astronomer through the hotel," Barot says. "He came out with a telescope and gave a presentation about the universe and the stars. We got to see things like Saturn and its rings. It was just amazing."

After the offsite dinner last year, the group participated in a murder mystery dinner hosted by national company THEY Improv, which hires local talent to produce events in in-

"We always want a sophisticated and relaxing destination. Sedona meets that definition, but it is also very beautiful."

Lisa Barot, Executive Assistant
TruWest Credit Union, Tempe, AZ

dividual destinations. "That was a lot of fun," Barot says. "And again, it was something unique for a meeting."

Barot also praised Poco Diablo for the quality of its F&B. "Both the food and the service are excellent," she says. "They did wonderful buffets for us. One was a Mexican buffet that was just fantastic. The breakfast buffets were also very good. And in terms of service, they were on top of everything."

As for activities, golf, spa treatments and exploration of Sedona were popular. "One of the cool things to do in Sedona is the hiking trails," Barot says. "We had a number of attendees who did that. But other people just took it easy and went to the spa to just enjoy the serenity of the place."

For Barot as the planner, the most important factor in the success of her

meeting was the service and support she got from Poco Diablo. "The customer service at the hotel was phenomenal," she says. "I knew from the time I went on the first site visit for the 2016 meeting that the service would be excellent. As the meeting planner, I just immediately felt more comfortable there than at other properties because of the way I was treated and how well my needs were taken care of. Then, once we went there for the first meeting, all of our executives loved it so much that they wanted to go back immediately." In fact, they liked it so much last year that they will go back for a third time in 2019.

For planners unfamiliar with Sedona, Barot encourages them to investigate the destination. "The thing that really defines it is its serenity and artistic flair," she says. "It's a very relaxing and creative place. You go there and you just automatically feel at one with nature and relaxed. It's very special."

Tucson

Another unique and spectacular Arizona destination is Tucson, whose illustrious history dates back to the most famous days of the Old West.

Lisa Browne, events manager at Gainesville, Florida-based CPAmerica, a coalition of independently owned U.S. accounting firms, hosted a three-day, three-night meeting in Tucson last November for 135 tax accountants, plus spouses and guests.

Why Tucson? "We let our member firms choose the destination, by vote," Browne says. "We narrow it down to the top two or three choices, then at the current year's meeting, we pick the destination for the following year. At our 2016 meeting in Santa Rosa, California, attendees overwhelmingly chose Tucson. The main reason was that we have a very active accounting firm member in Tucson. And they wanted other members to learn about Tucson and get excited about it, so they led the cheerleading for selecting it. Then I went on a site visit with my boss. And from the minute we ar-

Enjoy the views from an elegant outdoor reception at the Hyatt Regency Scottsdale Resort & Spa at Gainey Ranch.



Credit: Hyatt Regency Scottsdale Resort & Spa

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Rugged, natural beauty encircles the Loews Ventana Canyon Resort in Tucson.

rived in Tucson, we both immediately became big fans of the place. It's very naturally beautiful. And all of the hotels we visited were not just beautiful themselves, but they are surrounded by beauty everywhere you look. It is just a gorgeous place."

One of the things that makes Tucson unique, Browne says, is that its hotels are all designed and built to take full advantage of the destination's rugged natural beauty. "For example," she says, "they have hiking trails and gardens operated by their chefs."

As for airlift from around the country, she was surprised by how easy it was to get to Tucson. "Once we realized that we could easily get there from Gainesville, Florida," she says, "we also realized that anybody else from around the country could get there easily, too. And that turned out to be true."

The hotel Browne chose was the Loews Ventana Canyon Resort. "It is a fabulous hotel," Browne says. "We did an RFP process and before I went for the site visit, we had narrowed our selection down to seven or eight properties. And because we were not familiar with Tucson, we looked at downtown properties and resort properties and one casino property."

One of the key reasons why Loews Ventana Canyon won out was the layout of its meeting space. "It was just perfect for us," Browne says. "The rates we got at the hotel also were very attractive. And it also has a very nice spa. So when we added up those factors, it was just the right choice for us for this particular meeting."

After the meeting, both Browne and her attendees gave excellent reviews to both the room product and food and beverage at Loews Ventana Canyon.

A highlight of the meeting was an evening "food truck rally" recommended by the hotel and executed by its in-house destination management company. "One of our service reps at



"Everyone at Visit Tucson was fantastic. I work with CVBs across the country all the time. And I rate them as one of the best I've ever worked with, especially in terms of their knowledge of the area and their attention to detail and their creativity."

Lisa Browne, Events Manager
CPAmerica, Gainesville, FL

the hotel told us that foods trucks are kind of a big thing in Tucson and we had also seen them in other destinations," Browne says. "So we decided to do it because it was something different that was also fun. We brought in three local food trucks and the hotel also provided an taco and fajita station. We also had a s'mores station for desert. People just loved it."

Another highlight, suggested by the local CVB, Visit Tucson, was an off-site event at Cocoraque Ranch & Pavilion, a working cattle ranch. "The owner of the ranch decided at some point that he had this great property that could offer something truly unique to meeting planners," Browne says. "They do cattle drives and cookouts and it's a very cool unique venue. We had a little mini-rodeo, then a ranch-style buffet

dinner that included steaks. And we had a guitarist come out and provide entertainment. And I never would have known about or found the ranch if it were not for Visit Tucson and their creativity. Our attendees loved it. It was a very unique and special experience."

Visit Tucson played a major role in the success of her meeting, Browne says, particularly when it came to making the best possible use of the destination. Browne singled out her lead representative, Brooke Sauer, for praise. "She arranged our site visit and also helped us in planning things like the food truck rally and our offsite event at the ranch," Browne says. "She just did a spectacular job. But everyone at Visit Tucson was fantastic. I work with CVBs across the country all the time. And I rate them as one of the best I've ever worked with, especially in terms of their knowledge of the area and their

attention to detail and their creativity. I can't praise them highly enough. They just go above and beyond the call of duty in every respect."

For meeting planners not familiar with Tucson, based on her experience, Browne has a clear, simple message. "It's a very beautiful and unique place. And they also have a wonderful local food scene. The resorts and other hotels are top-notch. And most of all, you get a lot for your money as a meeting planner. It's a great value in addition to being a very special place."

And she backs her up her opinion with her business. This September, CPAmerica will go back to Tucson, this time using The Westin La Paloma Resort & Spa. And once again, Browne will enthusiastically work closely with Visit Tucson.

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Loews Sapphire Falls Resort at Universal Orlando, inspired by the Caribbean, features 115,000 sf of meeting space. Credit: Loews Sapphire Falls Resort

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Orlando

"We frequently use Florida as a destination," says Linda Cunningham, vice president, conference development at the American Council of Life Insurers (ACLI) in Washington, DC. "We hold about 12 meetings each year. And at least two or three of those each year are somewhere in Florida. The kinds of meetings we do in Florida are typically C-suite meetings, and we go to Florida because of the nature of those high-level attendees and their

desire to be in a resort setting at a time of year when the weather is cold where they are."

For their most recent Florida meeting, Cunningham and ACLI hosted 500 C-level executives from insurance companies in Orlando last October. For the first time, Cunningham chose a hotel in the vast Universal Orlando Resort complex, the new Loews Sapphire Falls, which opened in fall 2016. "I booked the hotel before it opened," Cunningham says, "and one of the reasons was my comfort level with the Loews brand. I had also seen all

the drawings and specs, and I knew it would be a top-notch meeting hotel."

The hotel lived up to her expectations and earned excellent reviews from attendees. "The property is fresh, because it's new," Cunningham says. "It has a very open, bright design, with lots of windows. It has a very airy kind of 'island' feeling, which is very nice for a meeting. It also has excellent meeting space and amenities. But the thing that really sets it apart is the level of the service. The staff just helps you as the meeting planner in every way possible. And that makes my job easier."

She also praises the food and beverage at Loews Sapphire Falls. "It was very

"We go to Florida because of the nature of those high-level attendees and their desire to be in a resort setting at a time of year when the weather is cold where they are."



Linda Cunningham, Vice President, Conference Development
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Breeze Ocean Kitchen, Eau Palm Beach Resort & Spa

Credit: Eau Palm Beach Resort & Spa

House of Blues Orlando five times now," Villa says. "And they always deliver a spectacular event. We've used different entertainment, but it has always been excellent."

Palm Beach

Located 90 minutes north of Miami on one

of Florida's most famous stretches of beach, Palm Beach is another time-honored destination that is particularly popular with high-end groups from the insurance and financial services industries.

Cunningham used it for a three-day CEO roundtable conference late last year. Her hotel was the legendary The Breakers, which hosts the meeting every other year, alternating with The Ritz-

Carlton Naples.

"That event is our *crème de la crème* meeting," Cunningham says, "and the reason we rotate between

for a client's 2018 incentive program to be hosted in May for 100 qualifiers plus spouses and guests.

"The program went to The Ritz-Carlton, Amelia Island near Jacksonville in 2016 and the client wanted to go back to Florida for the second time in three years this year, so we started looking at properties," Czerlonka says. "I was already familiar with what is now Eau Palm Beach from back in the day, when it was a Ritz-Carlton. I had not been back since the change of ownership and branding, but as I started to do my research, I realized that I wanted to go back on a site visit and experience it again to see what was different."

During a site visit to Palm Beach with his client, Czerlonka visited several hotels. What clinched the selection of Eau Palm Beach, he says, was its extraordinary preparation for and treatment of him and his client during the site visit. "Everything the Eau did set itself apart from the other hotels," he says. "The best way to describe the experience we had is to say that from the moment

good, especially for a large hotel with about a thousand rooms," she says. "I was impressed not only with the quality of the food, but also with the presentation and the service. Our attendees were very impressed."

Cindy Villa, senior events manager at Covina, California-based financial services company Transamerica, used Orlando twice last year, for meetings in January and May. For both events, she chose the Omni Orlando Resort at ChampionsGate.

"Weather is our No. 1 reason for going to Florida," Villa says. "And the weather is good year-around, not just in the winter. The airlift is good from everywhere. We also get very good hotel rates compared to other destinations. And the range of activities and entertainment available are another thing that makes the state very popular with our attendees. It always provides a memorable experience."

Among her reasons for selecting Omni Orlando Resort at ChampionsGate for back to back meetings last year were its highly acclaimed pair of championship golf courses. "Another reason," she says, "is the hotel's meeting space. It is wonderful, just impeccable. The location of the hotel is also perfect for our meetings. And the staff is excellent."

For the first meeting, Villa kept all food and beverage onsite. "The F&B at the hotel is excellent," she says. "And the service is also very good."

For the second meeting last May, the group went offsite for a dinner and evening of entertainment at the House of Blues. As entertainment, she opted for the Blues Brothers band. "I've used



Eric Czerlonka, Principal Creative Director
Czerlonka Productions, Boston/Los Angeles

those two properties is that because the attendees are CEOs, we want a five-star resort with a good golf course. We always do evaluations of destinations and hotels for all of our meetings, and those two properties are just the hotels that our CEOs rank most highly, so we keep going back."

Now establishing itself as the premier meeting venue in town is the Eau Palm Beach Resort & Spa, formerly The Ritz-Carlton, Palm Beach. Set on tony Palm Beach island, the hotel features more than 30,000 sf of meeting and event space and a Forbes Five Star spa.

Eric Czerlonka, principal creative director at Boston/Los Angeles-based meeting and incentive house Czerlonka Productions, chose the Eau Palm Beach

we arrived and got out of our car, the site inspection was completely dialed in, down to the smallest detail. It was all about them introducing us to the hotel and having us personally experience the level of service they offer. They also wanted to make sure we understood the culture of the Eau brand. It's an independent brand and when you walk into the hotel you can tell immediately that there is a lot of pride in the brand and the property. It becomes obvious that they do not settle, in any way, for anything other than the best in terms of everything, from the flowers in public spaces to the amenities. They have worked very hard to create an old school luxury hotel that is just exceptional. And the service is second

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A key element in Czerlonka's recommendation of Eau Palm Beach was its updated room product. "The guest rooms, designed by Jonathan Adler, are modern and stylish. And that's unusual for an old school luxury hotel. It's just a very different look and feel from what you see in most luxury hotels. It makes the Eau unique."

Another factor in Eau's favor was its F&B capabilities. "This group is a heavy

diversity, Miami also delivers what Castillo calls "a unique flavor" in terms of the experience it offers. "There is nowhere else where you can have the kind of experience you have in Miami," she says. "It is unlike any other place. And a big part of the reason for that is that Miami is a byproduct of so many other cultures from all over the world."

A major factor in Miami's prominence as a meeting destination is its unique and widely celebrated hotel product. Several new hotel brands, including

hotel in the world last year by readers of *Condé Nast Traveler*.

"Many meeting planners are always looking for the next 'hot' thing, and what they find is that next hot thing often originates in Miami," Castillo says.

The city's next major hotel opening, scheduled for next year, is the 1,700-room Marriott World Center, which will anchor a 30-acre mixed use project that will feature a dynamic mix of dining, shopping and entertainment.

Among the new hotels that opened last year are a new Four Seasons Hotel & Surf Club in Surfside, north of Miami Beach; an SLS Lux and Hyatt Centric in Miami's Brickell financial district; an Aloft Hotel in Coral Gables, and an Aloft in the upscale enclave of Aventura.

As new hotels open, the Trump National Doral Miami, continues to reign as one of the area's dominant meeting properties, thanks in large part to its sprawling and lush tropical setting. But what sets Trump National apart more than anything else is its four wildly popular championship golf courses, led by the universally acclaimed Blue Monster. The hotel's flagship restaurant, an outpost of BLT Steak, is another major factor in its popularity with discerning meeting groups.

Naples and Marco Island

Naples and Marco Island, located in Southwest Florida — now fully operational following Hurricane Irma — have an array of vacation and meetings options year-round. With more than 30

"Jacksonville is a great place to be able to take advantage of the natural beauty of the Florida coast, including our beaches and our hiking trails and kayaking."

Monica Smith, Vice President of Sales and Services
Visit Jacksonville, Jacksonville, FL

user of food and beverage for four days," Czerlonka says. "That means we need a lot of variety. So one of the things we look for is flexibility and creativity from the chefs. And the Eau gave us that. We weren't just sold on standard banquet menus."

Miami

Over the last decade, Miami has evolved into one of the most acclaimed international travel destinations in the world. As a result, it has emerged as one of the most diverse and multicultural places in the U.S. That unique stature, along with its stunning array of new hotels and its widely acclaimed dining scene, has made it a red-hot meeting and incentive destination.

"Our sales pitch is always the fact that Miami is a unique destination," says Illeana Castillo, associate vice president of convention sales at the Greater Miami Convention & Visitors Bureau.

"That's a word that is overused, but it really does apply to Miami. First of all, we are a truly international destination that does not require a passport because we're in the U.S. That also means we're easy to get to. We have a wonderful climate that is great any time of the year. And we literally offer something for everyone."

Because of its extraordinary cultural

the acclaimed green brand 1 Hotels and the Edition brand from Marriott and boutique hotel king Ian Schrager, made their high-profile debuts in Miami before spreading elsewhere.

Among the most acclaimed of the new hotels opened in the last several years is the exquisite, Forbes Five Star Faena Hotel Miami Beach, built by visionary Argentinean developer Alan Faena, who is completing a Faena Arts District to complement his hotel. The property's interiors, which epitomize old world glamour, were designed by The Great Gatsby movie director Baz Luhrmann and his Academy Award winning wife, costume designer Catherine Martin. The Faena was named the No. 1



The Sunbar at the Faena Hotel Miami Beach is quintessential Miami.

Credit: Faena Hotel Miami Beach



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A banquet on the beach at the Naples Beach Hotel & Golf Club.

Credit: Naples Beach Hotel & Golf Club

miles of soft, white sand beaches, a thriving arts and culture scene, distinctive dining, family attractions and the best of outdoor adventure, the Paradise Coast is truly a destination with it all. Located just two hours from Miami, four hours from Orlando and three hours from Tampa. Travelers outside of the Sunshine State can fly into Southwest Florida International Airport, which provides nonstop service to 49 destinations on 15 different air carriers.

After a two-month closure due to Hurricane Irma, LaPlaya Beach & Golf Resort reopened mid-November to guests after an \$8 million renovation. The transformation includes luxurious new guest rooms in the Gulf Tower, a reinvigorated lobby, and a stunning new look for award-winning signature restaurant, Baleen — known for its toes-in-the-sand dining on the beach. “Our resort is a welcoming haven for guests seeking a quintessential Floridian coastal elegance and experience,” says Marco Perry, managing director of LaPlaya Beach & Golf Resort.

Naples Grande Beach Resort reopened in December, following a 3½-month closure due to Hurricane Irma. The independent, luxury resort had a multimillion-dollar refresh that is reflected in its guest rooms, meeting and public spaces, pools and lush outdoor landscaping. Director of Sales & Marketing Frank Cavella says, “It’s been a challenging few months, but we’re excited and eager to come back stronger than ever, offering our new and return-

ing guests upgraded amenities and accommodations, with our signature grand gestures and passion for service. We’re so thankful for the support of the Naples community, specifically our hardworking staff, to get us back in the business of hospitality and memory making.” The 474-room property is set on 23 waterfront acres adjoined by a pristine 200-acre nature preserve and mangrove estuary.



Cindy Villa, Senior Events Manager
Transamerica, Covina, CA

Florida is known for having top-notch golf resorts, exemplified by The Naples Beach Hotel & Golf Club. The Golf Club recently completed a \$9 million total redesign of the AAA Four Diamond beachfront resort’s historic 125 acre golf course. The redesign was done with input from golf icon and acclaimed course designer Jack Nicklaus in collaboration with noted course architect John Sanford. The course is open for public play as well as for resort guests. The resort made \$50 million in renovations and enhancements over the last few years. “The staff has done an outstanding job getting the resort ready to again welcome guests and groups, and I am so proud of the work they’ve put in. The resort looks great,” says Jason Parsons, the resort’s general manager.

Jacksonville

Located on the northeastern Atlantic coast is Jacksonville, a less well known but increasingly popular meeting destination that is steadily gaining increased awareness and popularity.

“My background is as a meeting planner and a CMP,” says Monica Smith, vice president of sales and services at Visit Jacksonville. “And in that context, there are things about Jacksonville that immediately appeal to corporate planners. One is how accessible we are. We have excellent airlift. And our airport offers exceptional ease and convenience. It’s very easy to get into and out of.

“Another big factor in our favor today is affordability,” she says. “We are a very affordable destination and that has been widely acknowledged in the industry. We deliver great value. And at the end of the day, one of the big issues for planners today is how much the meeting is going to cost because budgets remain under scrutiny and pressure.”

“Weather is our No. 1 reason for going to Florida. And the weather is good year-around, not just in the winter. ...We also get very good hotel rates compared to other destinations.”

Smith cited five hotels as the city’s premier meeting properties. They are the Hyatt Regency Jacksonville Riverfront, located on the St. Johns River; the Omni Jacksonville Hotel, located downtown near the beach; and the Jacksonville Marriott and Sheraton Jacksonville, located in the city’s south side business district. The area’s top beachfront hotel is the One Ocean Resort & Spa, located on Atlantic Beach.

A new \$77 million luxury resort complex, The Atlantis Project, which will include a full-service hotel, will break ground this year on Jacksonville Beach.

Future plans, now in the discussion stage, include a new Jacksonville convention center and hotel, which Smith says will further cement the city’s evolving reputation as a serious contender in the Florida destination sweepstakes.



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She also invokes the city's local dining scene as another key factor in its success as a meeting destination. "That is another thing that really sets us apart and which meeting planners really like when they come here," Smith says. "We have concentrated for the last couple of years on a program we call 'Only in JAX,' which highlights our best local restaurants, meaning wonderful restaurants that are unique to Jacksonville and which feature the best of our homegrown chefs." Among her favorite eateries for groups is Moxie Kitchen + Cocktails, owned by a husband-and-wife chef-manager team that also owns three other popular and innovative restaurants. Moxie serves steaks, seafood, pasta dishes and comfort foods such as meatloaf.

"We also feature a number of micro-breweries and micro-distilleries that are very popular with corporate groups," Smith says. Examples include downtown's Intuition Ale Works and Manifest Distillery, both of which feature meeting and event space.

"We also offer a variety of attractions, especially for people that love sports and the outdoors," Smith says. "Jacksonville is a great place to be able to take advantage of the natural beauty of the Florida coast, including our beaches and our hiking trails and activities such as kayaking on the St. Johns River and its tributaries." Among the city's most popular major attraction for groups is the Jacksonville Zoo.

Eclectic resorts

Yet another factor that keeps Florida perennially at the top of the heap of statewide meeting destinations is the



Hyatt Regency Jacksonville Riverfront offers rooftop, pool-side receptions.

Credit: Hyatt Regency Jacksonville Riverfront

wide assortment of resort properties that dot the state in all directions.

In the northwest corridor is Destin, home to what are often hailed as the best beaches in the country. Its unique and laidback meeting properties include Sandestin Golf & Beach Resort, which has been recognized by *U.S. News & World Report* as the No. 1 resort on Florida's so-called Emerald Coast. The resort features more than 20 restaurants, a spa, marina, and four golf courses that are hailed as the best in the area.

Another exceptional property is The Henderson, a Salamander Beach & Spa Resort. The property features four restaurants and two coffee shops/café's, as well as a spa. It is located near a pair of top local attractions, Big Kahuna's Water & Adventure Park and Henderson Beach State Park.

Located in Hardee County near the tiny, quiet community of Bowling Green,

the 16,000-acre Streamsong Resort is one of the Sunshine State's most unique and special properties. It offers bright, cheerful and stylishly modern guest rooms complemented by first-rate amenities, including a trio of championship golf courses.

Debuting last fall, along with a new clubhouse and restaurant, is the third championship course, Streamsong Black, designed by Gil Hanse. Hanse also is the architect of the Olympic Golf Course in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, and co-designer of Castle Stuart Golf Links in Scotland. Streamsong Black was named best new course in the U.S. last year by *Golf Magazine*.

Streamsong Resort features 228 guest rooms, 25,000 sf of indoor and 40,000 sf of outdoor meeting and event space, five dining options, conference and event facilities, the grotto-style AcquaPietra Spa and infinity pool.

In Tampa, Innisbrook Resort & Golf Club has built a solid reputation and is one of the state's premier meeting properties. It features four restaurants: Packard's Steakhouse, Market Salamander Grill, Grill at Loch Ness and Turnberry Pub. The Market is a to-go market that features chef-prepared specialty foods from around the world, featuring American and Mediterranean influences. Innisbrook also boasts four championship golf courses and a world-class spa.

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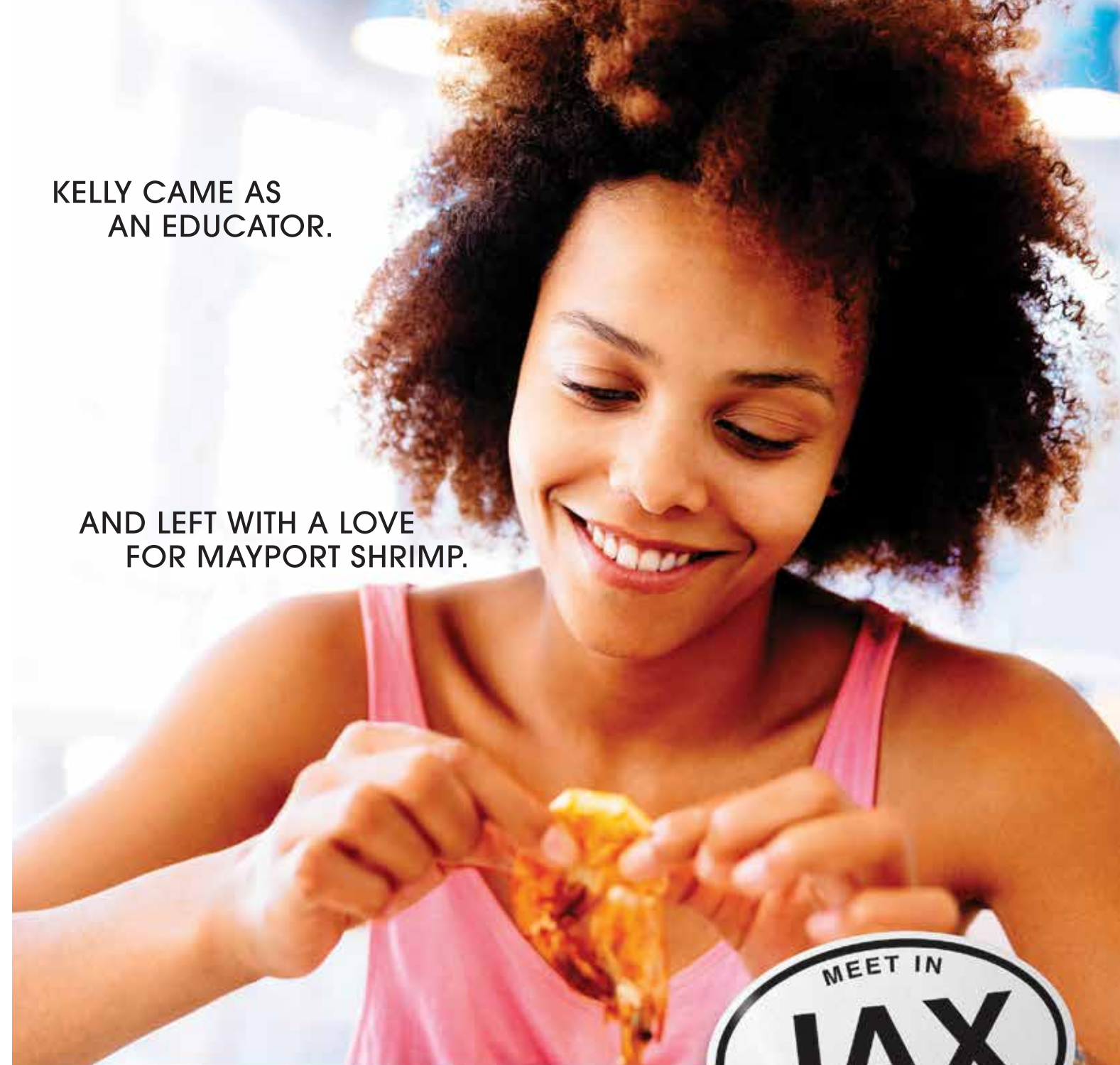


Streamsong Black golf course was named best new course in the U.S. by Golf Magazine.

Credit: Streamsong Resort

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JOHNSON

Jess Johnson was named director of sales and marketing for Cheyenne Mountain Colorado Springs, a Dolce Resort. He most recently served as director of sales and marketing at Sheraton Bay Point Resort in Panama City Beach, Florida.

La Playa Beach & Golf Resort, a Noble House Resort in Naples, Florida, has appointed **Linda Menshon** as director of sales and marketing. She formerly



MENSHON

served as director of sales and marketing at Naples Bay Resort.

The Westin Hilton Head Island Resort & Spa has named **Steve French** as director of sales and marketing. He most recently was director of group sales with Washington Marriott Wardman Park in Washington, DC.

Benchmark has named **Jean Spaulding** as director of sales and marketing for



FRENCH



BARUCH

Villas of Grand Cypress, a Gemstone Collection property in Orlando, Florida. She was most recently director of sales and marketing for the Omni Orlando Resort at ChampionsGate in Orlando.

Tulio Baruch was named director of sales for Grand Velas Los Cabos in Cabo San Lucas, Mexico. He most recently served as director of sales and marketing for Andaz Mayakoba Resort Riviera Maya.



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