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## fresh CHOICES

*Convention  
Centers Dig  
in to Healthy  
Catering  
Trends*

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James Katurakes,  
executive chef,  
Centerplate at the  
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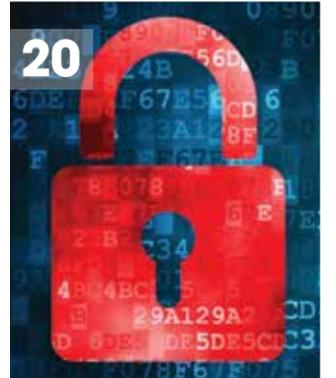
Steve O'Malley, Michael Guerriero, and David Peckinpaugh (pictured left to right)  
Maritz Global Events



14



36



20



26



32

## DEPARTMENTS

- 4 *Publisher's Message*
- 6 *News & Notes*
- 8 *Snapshots*  
Destinations International  
2019 Annual Convention
- 12 *Snapshots*  
ASAE Annual Meeting  
& Exposition
- 50 *Career Track*

## SPECIAL SECTION

- 44 *2019 Distinctive  
Achievement Awards*



46

## FEATURES

- 14 *Fresh Choices*  
Convention Centers  
Dig in to Healthy  
Catering Trends  
**BY CHRISTINE LOOMIS**
- 20 *Safe & Secure*  
How to Ensure Your  
Conventions Are  
Cyber Secure  
**BY KEITH LORIA**
- 26 *Customize  
Your Content*  
Planners Must  
Increasingly Tailor  
Educational Information  
to a Global Audience  
**BY PATRICK SIMMS**
- 32 *Smart SMERFs*  
SMERF Numbers Add  
Up To Big Business  
for Destinations,  
Hotels and Venues  
**BY DEREK REVERON**

## DESTINATIONS

- 36 *Canadian Charm*  
Attractive Venues and Beautiful Monuments Make Our  
Neighbor a Five-Star Destination **BY RON BERNTHAL**

## Convention Centers Focus on Healthy Catering Trends

**O**ur cover story, "Fresh Choices" reviews the ever-popular food and beverage topic. Health and wellness have become an important consideration among association planners and as a result, today's food and beverage trends are a reflection of that. These trends seem to be playing out across all demographics and global destinations. There's long been a perception that healthful menus are too costly, but this seems to be changing as demand from planners increases. Some planners may have the budget and are willing to pay more in favor of health and wellness, while others find ways to mitigate costs by offering smaller portions. Healthy menus should begin with considering portion size and what is being planned to serve. In many cases, vegan and vegetarian options are no longer an occasional request, they're now an expectation. Planners should not work off the same menu at every venue. Farm-to-table and fresh local ingredients are today's best bet to satisfy attendee appetites. Food and beverage trends come and go, so what's next?



Are your meetings and conventions safe and secure? Our "Safe & Secure" story in this issue suggests how to ensure your events are cybersecure. Keeping your events safe is a major objective for any planner. Having a cyber-incident response plan is a must and should be in place prior to the beginning of any event. Seasoned planners are very aware that conventions and other events are a perfect setting for hackers and cyberthieves to infiltrate your computers and other devices. Cybercriminals find it easy to infiltrate many devices due to lack of security updates and older devices with outdated cybersecurity capabilities.

If you haven't considered having your next convention or meeting in Canada, you should take a look at "Canadian Charm" in this issue. You will find attractive destinations and venues to accommodate groups of all sizes. With the favorable currency exchange rate, Canada is truly an affordable, year-round choice for your next event.

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**Harvey Grotzky**  
Publisher

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# BEYOND THE BALLROOM



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## Phoenix Convention Center Offers Canyon On Third, An Outdoor Event Experience

PHOENIX, AZ — The Phoenix Convention Center is the premier host for major events such as the NFL Experience for Super Bowl XLIX, the Playoff Fan Central for College Football Playoffs and the NCAA Final Four Fan Fest, to name a few among other numerous conventions, concerts, trade shows and expos. The Phoenix Convention Center is excited to now offer Canyon on Third Street, a unique

outdoor event space, for all conventions, special events and venue activities. The 80,000-sf, outdoor event space on Third Street, between Washington and Monroe streets, is within walking distance of downtown Phoenix's trendy restaurants, shopping and sports facilities. Flanked by the Convention Center's North and West buildings, Canyon on Third offers unique, one-of-a-kind activities.

## Oklahoma City Convention Center "Topped Out" With Ceremonial Steel Beam

OKLAHOMA CITY, OK — The MAPS 3 Convention Center was ceremonially "topped out" in August, an important milestone on the way to its scheduled opening in late 2020. "Topping out," traditionally traced to Scandinavia, is a ceremony in tribute to the natural resources used to construct a building. A tree or branch is placed on the highest beam in the frame, often with flags or streamers. For the MAPS 3 Convention Center, crews secured a tree with an American flag. The 200,000-sf

exhibit hall will dominate the ground floor, featuring three operable walls to divide it in up to four flexible spaces. About 45,000 sf of meeting spaces are on all levels of the building, and many also have operable walls to make the spaces flexible. The rooms can be configured to provide up to 27 individual meeting spaces. A 30,000-sf ballroom is the main space on the fourth level, complemented by 10,000 sf of pre-function space and a 4,000-sf balcony.



## ASAE Annual Meeting & Exposition Invited Attendees To Learn And Play With Purpose

WASHINGTON, DC — More than 5,400 association professionals and industry partners gathered in Columbus, OH, August 10-13, for the 2019 ASAE Annual Meeting & Exposition. Participants heard from keynotes Jeremy Heimans and Henry Timms and Alton White, and participated in more than 110 education sessions, six game changers and explored 710 booths featuring 445 companies in the expo hall. "The theme for this year's event of learn and play with purpose resonated in every

new and inventive ways to do business within their own associations," says Susan

into their passions, find the courage to achieve their dreams, value the importance of first and last impressions and trust instincts with forgiveness and compassion. The ASAE Foundation Classic was hosted by Experience Columbus at the Nationwide Arena and headlined by Ohio native John Legend. The sold-out event had the highest attendance and revenue in the 13-year history of The Classic. In addition to attendees volunteering their time at the Reeb Avenue Center, National



Jeni Britton Bauer

NICK HAGEN PHOTOGRAPHY

aspect of the meeting. From the design of the main stage and convention center, to the content covered by our speakers, attendees were compelled to consider

Robertson, CAE, interim ASAE president and CEO. For the closing keynote, White showcased his skills as a singer and performer, encouraging attendees to: tap

Veterans Memorial and Museum, Netcare Access, CompDrug and Maryhaven, ASAE raised more than \$30,000 for the Columbus Foundation's Gifts of Kindness Fund.

## Destinations International Releases The 2019 DestinationNEXT Futures Study

WASHINGTON, DC — Destinations International recently announced the release of the 2019 DestinationNEXT Futures Study. The Futures Study is a global, in-depth report into the major opportunities and trends for destination organization leaders. The study is funded by the Destinations International Foundation, a nonprofit organization dedicated to empowering destinations globally by providing education, research, advocacy and leadership development. The study can be used as the cornerstone for the development of a destination's strategy, whether it be in the form of a strategic plan, board retreat or tourism master plan. More than 520 industry and community leaders in 55 countries participated in the 2019 DestinationNEXT global survey to help identify the industry's trends and strategies. The results show a much greater emphasis today on destination management and community advocacy.



## Live! by Loews - Arlington, Texas Holds Ribbon Cutting and Grand Opening Celebration

ARLINGTON, TX — The new luxury hotel and resort offers easy access to Texas Rangers' Globe Life Park, the Dallas Cowboys' AT&T Stadium and more. Ideal for meetings and conventions, Live! by Loews - Arlington features more than 35,000 sf of meeting and event space, including: a 14,000-sf ballroom, seven meeting rooms, banquet menus, on-site A/V services, outdoor lounge and private rooftop terrace. Pictured: Ron Price, Arlington CVB president and CEO; City Council members Andrew Peele, Ignacio Nunez, Barbara Odom-Wesley and Helen Moise; Reed Cordish; Texas Rangers owner Neil Liebman; Alex Tisch; Texas Rangers owner Ray Davis; Jeff Williams, Arlington mayor; Jonathan Tisch, Loews CEO (with scissors); Blake Cordish; Andrew Tisch; Scott Nasser, GM of Live! by Loews-Arlington; and Robert Shepherd, mayor pro tem.

## Hyatt Regency San Antonio Announces Renovation To Conference Center

SAN ANTONIO, TX — Hyatt Regency San Antonio, on the famous River Walk and directly connected to Alamo Plaza, has completed a renovation to its Hyatt Regency Conference Center, including updates to the conference center's décor and A/V technology in meeting rooms. Each monitor is controlled by an iPad Pro through a wireless connection for a user-friendly experience in showcasing presentations and visuals during a meeting. Across the street from the hotel, Hyatt Regency Conference Center provides 8,000 sf of meeting space. Complementing the conference center, Hyatt Regency San Antonio boasts an additional 32,000 sf of on-site meeting and event space.

## Greater Columbus Convention Center Qualifies As Certified Sensory Inclusive

COLUMBUS, OH — The SMG-managed Greater Columbus Convention Center (GCCC) has become the first convention center in the world to become Certified Sensory Inclusive through KultureCity. The GCCC collaborated with KultureCity to improve the capabilities of the facility and staff to accommodate guests with sensory processing challenges and provide an inclusive, seamless and enjoyable experience. Sensory sensitive and sensory regulation challenges are most often experienced by those with autism, dementia, Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and similar health concerns affected by overstimulation and noise.

## Global DMC Partners Adds Nashville DMC To Network

WASHINGTON, DC — Global DMC Partners, the largest global network of destination management companies (DMCs), welcomed Evolution Event Solutions to its exclusive partnership of more than 65 independently owned DMCs. Evolution Event Solutions is a team of creative, hands-on professionals who bring a variety of perspectives to the drawing board. Together the team welcomes partnerships with companies during the initial steps of event planning so they can help bring visions into reality. The team has worked to book more than 11,000 room nights, manage events hosting more than 289,000 attendees and negotiate contracts resulting in more than 77% savings for clients.

## Visit Orlando Appoints Mike Waterman New Chief Sales Officer

ORLANDO, FL — George Aguel, Visit Orlando president and CEO, announced that industry veteran Michael D. Waterman has been appointed chief sales officer for Visit Orlando. Waterman has assumed the sales position, reporting directly to Aguel.

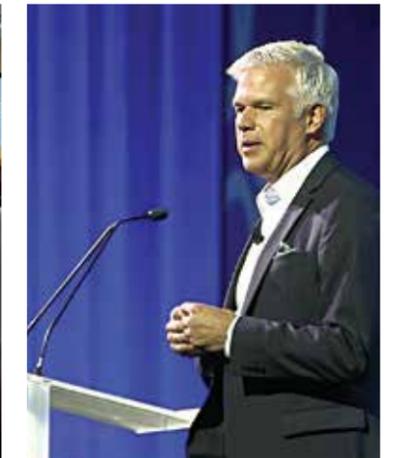
With almost 30 years of experience in hospitality sales and marketing, Waterman's background includes, most recently, the position as president and CEO of Visit Houston.



Waterman

# Destinations International 2019 Annual Convention

St. Louis, MO — More than 1,525 attendees engaged in five keynote sessions, four mega sessions and more than 50 concurrent sessions, all designed around the theme of “Evolve and Elevate” July 23-26, 2019.



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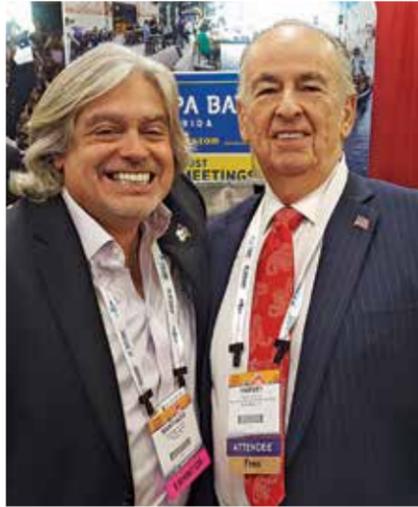
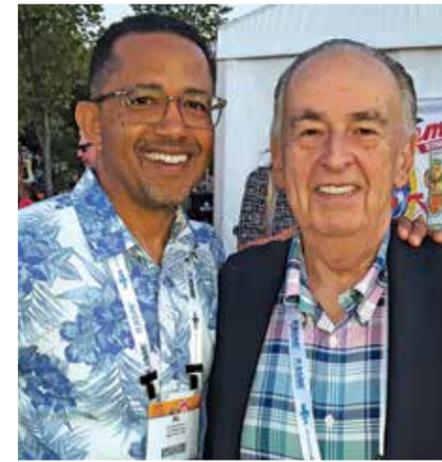
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# ASAE Annual Meeting & Exposition

More than 5,400 association professionals and industry partners gathered in Columbus, OH, August 10–13.



Attendees have increased their demand for plant-based alternatives and brain-friendly foods. As a result, some chefs today are growing their own produce and herbs.



# fresh CHOICES

By Christine Loomis

## Convention Centers Dig in to Healthy Catering Trends

**H**ealthy is in, heavy is out. That's the overarching approach to dining nationwide. But is it true at convention centers hosting association planners and attendees? Absolutely.

While "healthy" takes many forms, our experts — planners and chefs — point to the same basic trends: Increased demand for plant-based alternatives; infused water; local ingredients; a higher percentage of vegan, vegetarian, gluten-free and dairy-free items on group menus; the popularity of poke and acai bowls; smaller portions/fewer courses; teas and fresh-fruit juices; and fewer high-sugar drinks and snacks.

All also agree that neither meat nor sweets will disappear. However, meats are being cooked and featured in healthier ways, and traditional sweets are offered alongside healthier nuts, fruits and low- or no-sugar desserts.

These trends play out across all demographics and geographical locations.

Courtney Lohmann, CMP, director of culture with PRA South Florida, says the events industry has seen a huge shift in how dining is handled. "Planners don't want to serve the same chicken they serve in every city. They want to see authenticity and excitement with their menus."

Health and wellness are part of the national zeitgeist, and F&B trends are a reflection of that. "We've moved into a realm of brain-friendly foods such as nuts and trail mix to keep us charged up and moving through the second half of the day. I also like that we're moving to smaller portions, which keep budgets down and attendees from overeating. Allergy-friendly menus are also a must. Eight items cause about 90% of food allergies: cow's milk, eggs, tree nuts, peanuts, shellfish, wheat, soy and fish."

Though most meals are planned indoors, Lohmann suggests finding more ways to get attendees outside during breaks. "Mother Nature is proven to increase our health, too," she says.

### EMPHASIS ON LOCALLY GROWN FOODS

The emphasis on locally grown foods is one piece in the larger trend of creating a sense of place. "Dishes have a local taste to them and incorporate more of the story of the destination you're in," Lohmann says. "This is honestly my favorite part of the menu now."

The drive for local also amps up sustainability. "Everyone is trying to be more conscious of what they're ingesting and using," Lohmann says. That means bottled beverages are out due to high sugar and plastic. "Flavored water stations should be the norm," she continues. "I suggest pulling from the local area to add ingredients that make your destination unique. In South Florida that might be water infused with star fruit and pineapple; in New Mexico it might be jalapeno and lime. And," she adds, "encourage attendees to bring refillable bottles."

Hardly new, healthy options are routinely part of pre-con discussions along with increased requests for special meals. But before making big changes to a group's typical F&B offerings and delivery, Lohmann advises being upfront from the start.

"During the registration process tell them that the entire trip will be free from certain allergens in menus.

This helps create a sense of ease and may even



drive attendance. If you're going to shift in a big way — have one day of all vegan meals, for example — tell that story before, during and after the event. Engage your attendees with your menu; talk about why you're making these changes. You'll find that engagement with the change is much higher."

There's long been a perception that healthful menus increase costs, but experts say this is changing as demand in the marketplace increases. In addition, they're finding that more groups are willing to pay increases in favor of health. Yet there are ways for planners to mitigate costs; smaller portions is one.

"Healthy menus should begin with portion size and what you're serving," Lohmann says. "At home, do you serve yourself three 6 oz. portions of protein at dinner? Probably not, so why do it at events? Most attendees take a portion of everything on a buffet. So first, reduce how many



options you provide. Second, reduce portion size and serve meals on smaller plates. Doing this, you can serve higher quality food items and still hit budget.”

Deborah Sorgel, M.Ed., CMP, DES, manager, meetings and expositions at Kellen, says vegetarian and vegan options are no longer a discussion but an expectation. She adds that planners whose events include many international attendees, especially from Asia, should plan for a significant number of vegetarians. “With one large group, I stopped counting vegetarian requests under the ‘special diets’ category a few years ago and started ordering for about 20% vegetarian.”

Attendees request many types of diets these days. “This year I had my first request for ‘Halal,’” Sorgel says. “This is the dietary standard as prescribed in the Qur’an. I was pleasantly surprised to find that the venue knew of it and was prepared to accommodate it. I don’t expect it will be the last time I see that request.”

No industry, it seems, is without some demand for healthy food. “I’ve been surprised to see how much action oatmeal bars are getting from men who might have been ‘meat-and-potatoes’ guys all their lives,” Sorgel says. “Boomers are watching their cholesterol, fat and sugar, which isn’t new among conferences with high female attendance or among health-care professionals, but it is new to me in the manufacturing sector. Those mostly male groups might still be heavy on meat but they’re watching their carbs, too. There’s no one-size-fits-all standard anymore.”

Sorgel is also seeing increased

desire for more complex plated luncheon entrees. “Roast chicken with generic veggies and starch gives way to poke bowls, which are easily prepared for a variety of diets by adding chicken, fish or tofu. They’re healthy as well as trendy. And rather than two meats and a fish on buffets, I’m seeing vegetarian options replacing one of the meats.”

Moreover, she says, attendees don’t have to be vegetarian 100% of the time to favor vegetarian options at conferences. “I offered a poke bowl/plate to a group of health-conscious nurses and had great feedback. I’ve also used this as an action station at a publisher’s reception in Chicago and it was the most popular station at the event.”

Sorgel acknowledges healthy dishes can impact budget. “Many healthy options require additional preparation to make them desirable. Fresh fruit is healthy and not too expensive, but sliced fruit is more attractive and desirable. Yogurt and fruit are healthy in individual plastic containers but fresh-fruit parfaits in pretty glassware are more desirable. Some groups are willing to pay more to have that.”

As for portion size, Sorgel says, “We need to look at whether we’re over-feeding attendees, which isn’t healthy. I had instances this year where cookies and ice cream at breaks were barely touched because attendees had finished lunch just 90 minutes before. People don’t need to eat every two hours. Next year, I may offer only beverages with bagged snacks on a consumption basis. I hope there will be some interesting options available.”

Matt Smith, CEC, CCA, executive chef at the Greater Columbus Convention Center in Ohio, says more attendees want to know where their food is sourced.

### THE CUTTING EDGE

One question to consider is how planners should intersect with trends. “Meeting professionals are sometimes not on the cutting edge of trends,” Sor-gel says. “While we may see them coming, it often takes a while before demand becomes high enough for us to make a change. For general group satisfaction with the menu, I want to rise with the wave, not necessarily be in front of it.”

Chefs today are well aware of the emphasis on healthy and local. Many grow their own produce, have beehives and harvest fresh herbs on-site. The Javits Center in New York City is proof that on-site farming can succeed even in the densest urban area. Javits is constructing a 1-acre rooftop farm, and its green roof is already home to birds and bats as well as bees from which chefs harvest honey.

Mariam Karim, vice president, guest experience at Javits, notes the center’s catering staff has many ways to meet planners’ requests for healthful options in addition to on-site gardens. She says chefs are using cauliflower for pizza crusts and other typically breaded items, and providing such options as immune-boosting soy wild-berry smoothies, poke bowls, snacks featuring protein vs. sugar, house-made chia seed “pots” for dessert and hydration stations featuring herbal, fruit and vegetable infusions.

Perhaps most interestingly, Javits is combining F&B trends with tech trends. The center launched Sally the Salad Robot, a robotic vending machine available at all hours that creates fresh salads and protein pairings on demand for the center’s staff, based on their touchpad choices.

One byproduct of the increased demand for healthy dishes is that it has stoked creativity among chefs. Karim says chefs at Javits are preparing an ever-widening variety of healthy options, “from vegan sushi to dairy-free, sugar-free desserts.”

### THE NEED TO BE CREATIVE

They’re also offering meat and traditional sweets in creative ways. “Lean red-meat salads with whole grains and fresh

greens can provide needed fuel if a client doesn’t want to eliminate meat from the menu, and many planners now add crudité, fresh fruit and nuts to cookie breaks to give attendees healthier choices.”

There are multiple factors in the popularity of healthful eating, but Hans Lentz, executive chef at Hawaii Convention Center, thinks one is our unprecedented access to cooking shows, tutorials and chefs. “Guests are increasingly discerning about what they eat when they travel and how their food is prepared and presented,” he says. “And meals have become more than just meals; they’re an experience. Attendees expect the meal to tell a story, authentically connect them with a sense of place and be presented in a way they can share with others at the table and through digital media.”

While Lentz says Hawaii CC has always offered a variety of tastes and nutritional and dietary preferences, there’s now more interest in these dishes. He says demand for vegan, vegetarian, gluten- and dairy-free options doubled to nearly 10 percent of event menus.

“Our team has done such a good job of innovating in this area that attendees will order non-meat dishes because they’re so attractive,” he says. One example: The center’s Paradox Burger. “It’s gluten-free and vegan and incorporates an array of spices, quinoa and lentils for a balanced, protein- and fiber-filled burger choice — that also happens to be incredibly tasty.”

Lentz also highlights infused waters, fresh juices and continued focus on local. “Our first choice is always to look locally for everything from fern shoots in salads to sea salt and algae in our poke. Not only are these options fresh from the farm, ranch or ocean, they support our local economy and are better for the environment as they don’t require shipping. This reinforces the deeper story and experience of each dish.”

For example, he continues, “If we have a luau-style menu reflective of a Hawaiian barbecue, we can create salads and sides that incorporate local fruits and vegetables like our ‘ulu, breadfruit and taro. We’ve also created fruit-juice bars for breaks. Attendees can still stop by and grab a cookie, but they have enticing alternatives like a



juice bar and fresh-made acai bowl.”

Linda Arcangeli-Story, CMP, also a manager, meetings and expositions with Kellen, agrees that increased demand for healthy options drives creativity and innovation. “Farm-to-table and fresh local ingredients are center stage and we aren’t just working off the same menus at every venue. Food has become a true art and focus of events. You’re seeing chefs’ creations rather than cookie-cutter menus.”

She says asking chefs to create something off the formal menu is popular, “giving them the freedom to come up with something specific to your attendees.”

### “Farm-to-table and fresh local ingredients are center stage and we aren’t just working off the same menus at every venue.”

Linda Arcangeli-Story, CMP  
Manager, Meetings and Expositions  
Kellen



Among the changes Arcangeli-Story has made in response to current trends is ordering traditional sweets for only about a quarter of her attendees. “If it’s included in the package that’s fine, but I try to lower the numbers, adding fruit and cheese stations along with standard sweets. And I’m not getting push back from my organizations,” she adds.

Among her groups, increased dietary requests are significant. “In the past you’d have maybe two people; now it’s half your attendees. There are so many requests you have to be conscious

Patrick Kehler, executive chef with Aventura Catering, says healthy food can actually decrease F&B costs because “cooking these items requires little to no costly additions.”

that when you accommodate people you aren’t costing the association dollars, as some of these are preferences rather than allergies.”

But increased awareness of allergies has driven another trend: Transparency and labeling of ingredients. Arcangeli-Story says that impacts a planner’s job — but there’s an upside. “Having to have everything labeled and making sure each coffee break includes almond or soy milk, etc., means you have to pay a lot more attention to detail. But that increases your creativity when planning, which makes it a more exciting process.”

Creating delicious, healthy dishes often begins with education. Patrick Kehler, executive chef with Aventura

Catering, an Aramark company, the food-service provider for the Phoenix Convention Center, says, “We’re educating our team on healthy eating at home and in the work place. This knowledge carries over to client conversations and when preparing food.”

The Phoenix CC has its own urban tower garden producing various types of greens and herbs, including the center’s signature “chocolate-mint leaf lettuce.” And though requests for healthy and diet-restricted dishes are not new, Kehler says, “The standards for these



The Orange County Convention Center in Orlando, Florida, has an aeroponic garden where chefs harvest approximately 850 plants a week.

have been elevated. The quality of food must improve daily.”

Kehler thinks healthy food can actually decrease F&B costs because “cooking these items requires little to no costly additions like cream and butter.”

Like the other chefs, Kehler builds menus “with plenty of healthy meat options for clients to choose from. The heavy options are there but fewer people want to leave a convention stuffed and uncomfortable.”

His menus include cauliflower steak, lots of vegetables, salads and whole grains. There are sweets for breaks, too, offered alongside nuts, seeds and veggie chips.

But for Kehler, customizing is paramount. “We meet with clients on a more intimate platform to find out what they really want and adjust our menus to give them the ‘wow’ experience. Customizing special requests and meeting with chefs give clients a sense of partnership. Each event involves working together to make sure each guest gets healthy — or comfort — foods.”

The Orange County Convention Center in Orlando, Florida, has an aeroponic garden where chefs harvest approximately 850 plants a week. The center’s house-grown plants include sprouts, microgreens and herbs offered to groups as a “farm-to-table” option.

James Katurakes, executive chef with Centerplate, says one trend he’s seeing is increased interest in ethnic cuisines including Korean barbecue and Pho noodles. “Noodle soup has been extremely popular in the last couple of years.”

He lists grain salads and artisan items as trending, with artisan foods providing that desired sense of place. “Our clients are wanting a more unique, authentic approach to their food. I don’t see that trend going away anytime soon.”

### NO ‘STANDARD’ BUFFET

Like others, he says the standard buffet is no longer “standard.” It includes gluten-free and vegetarian items routinely. He also points to the growing need to meet complex dietary requests. “People are no longer just vegetarian or gluten-free; they’re vegan and gluten free or vegetarian and kosher. That provides a challenge in finding products and preparing dishes for those with several restrictions, but we’re also seeing the market change.”

Katurakes says healthy, fresh foods have long been available at prices comparable to other foods. “However, when we get requests like non-GMO or 100% organic, the price does pick up, and

**“There’s a big push to make the product even more fresh by finishing the dish out on the floor for attendees to see.”**

James Katurakes  
Executive Chef  
Centerplate  
Orange County Convention Center



that’s due to supply and demand.”

Just as planner’s roles are impacted by food trends, that’s true for chefs, too. “Planners want chefs in the dining rooms ‘finishing’ the product,” Katurakes notes. “There’s a big push to make the product even more fresh by finishing the dish out on the floor for attendees to see.”

That deeper connection to the food is something Matt Smith, CEC, CCA, executive chef with Levy Convention Centers at the Greater Columbus Convention Center in Ohio is seeing as well. “Attendees have always talked about wanting to eat healthfully, but now we’re seeing guests who have invested real time and thought into what this means for their lifestyle,” he says. “Event planners and guests want to know more about how we source

the food. They’re excited to learn that we work with local growers, artisans and boutique purveyors who prioritize organic ingredients and think deeply about the environmental impact of their products.”

The definition of healthy options continues to expand. “On average, 5% to 7% of our attendees express some type of food preference, allergy or intolerance. It’s not just the traditional dairy, nuts and seafood,” Smith says. “More and more we’re seeing attendees avoiding sulfate/phosphates, carbohydrates, MSG and gluten. We’re long past the days when we could just take the protein off a plate and double the vegetables for a guest. We put just as much creativity and care into the preparation and presentation of these specialty orders as we do every other dish so these attendees can also have a terrific experience.”

Smith’s boxed lunches, for example, are a far cry from traditional. “Attendees are absolutely blown away when they open up the lunchbox expecting the standard plastic-wrapped sandwich and chips and instead find our Ploughman’s Lunchbox featuring morninga-ricotta, honey, berries, hard cooked egg, smoked turkey sausage, pickled pearl onions, seven-grain wafers and chia seed dusted kale chips.”

But, Smith notes, “The majority of attendees still eat traditional meat diets. Through smart planning and good relationships with event planners, we can offer amazing food to guests with every possible dietary preference.”

Does that come with a price tag? “Planners,” Smith says, “understand that catering to the specialized needs of their attendees results in greater guest satisfaction and engagement, and this is well worth the small additional cost.”

Certainly F&B trends come and go. But after all is said and done, is healthy, fresh, local convention food really a trend? It’s probably better described as today’s norm, and planners, chefs and associations are embracing it. |AC&F|

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SAFE &amp;

BY KEITH LORIA

SECURE

## How to Ensure Your Conventions Are Cyber Secure

**Y**ou can't have a convention without technology, and you can't keep computers, tablets, phones and other devices used by attendees at a convention safe without taking steps that protect all those gadgets from cybercriminals.

Even small conventions are sure to see lots of devices in use for all sorts of reasons. A speech or talk given by an expert or executive will likely feature a PowerPoint presentation, music may be played through a computer and participants are sure to be using their phones to email and text.

Keeping conventions safe is a 24/7 aspect of the job for anyone who plans conventions for a living.

"Any responsible event organizer should already have a cyber incident response plan in place prior to the start of the convention so that they can follow proper security protocols and limit the scope and negative impact of a potential breach," says Attila Tomaschek, digital privacy expert for ProPrivacy.com.

He adds that conventions represent a perfect setting for hackers and cyber thieves to infiltrate computers and other gadgets.

"Conventions are a great opportunity for organizations within a specific industry to come together to learn from each other and to share ideas," Tomaschek says. "They are also, unfortunately, a great opportunity for hackers and other cybercriminals to exploit certain vulnerabilities and steal valuable and sensitive data from organizers and attendees alike."

Tomaschek notes that larger conventions are often at a greater risk than smaller ones, because with more people networking and sharing information, there are more potential victims for cybercrimi-

nals to target.

"The sheer amount of data transferred and shared between two parties at a convention can be astronomical," he says. "A single entity potentially lacking proper security protections and getting compromised can spell tremendous risks to sensitive personal data ending up in the wrong hands."

According to Michael Schenck, director of security services for Kaytuso, attendees at conventions often are confident that the host organization is being vigilant about cybersecurity, but that confidence often isn't earned.

"Convention centers are more dangerous than a midtown Starbucks for cybersecurity," Schenck

**"The sheer amount of data transferred and shared between two parties at a convention can be astronomical."**

Attila Tomaschek  
Digital Privacy Expert  
ProPrivacy.com



says. "The biggest threat is the trust that comes as part of human nature. Conventions are advertised events where everyone is there for a purpose — a common thread. Additionally, people are typically there for social and professional networking, so we are likely to let our guard down. That's the beginning of it; easy targets and the creation of a target-rich environment. The rest is all the obvious — unprotected systems, rogue Wi-Fi, compromised phone charging stations, HD cameras that could easily be used to record keystrokes, the list goes on."

### MODERN-DAY PICKPOCKETS

Obviously, theft is not a new concept, and J. Eduardo Campos, founder, president and managing

partner of consulting firm, Embedded-Knowledge Inc., says cybercriminals are simply a 21st-century version of a tradition of crooks that dates back hundreds of years.

"Large groups of people gathering for events were usually a target for criminals, from pickpockets to cell phone thieves and purse grabbers," says Campos, who has decades of experience solving complex programs for global organizations, including as a former Microsoft executive. "Today, cybercriminals joined the ranks of those willing to take advantage of distracted conference attendees, cocktail gadflies and meeting-goers. This new focus is due to the value of the information in their electronic devices — computers, laptops, tablets, and

phones — which store a trove of personal sensitive information, such as financial records."

He adds that surveys indicate these threats are getting worse on a daily basis, with reports of hacking regularly making the news.

"Event planners, as well attendees, are usu-

ally non-expert consumers of technology," says Campos, co-author of "From Problem Solving to Solution Design: Turning Ideas Into Actions." "Criminals go after this information so that they can use it to enable illicit online financial transactions."

Another issue according to Campos, is that people aren't knowledgeable about the security configurations of their devices. Other factors that make it easy for cybercriminals to infiltrate devices are lack of security updates and older gadgets with outdated cybersecurity capabilities.

"Cyber criminals are individuals looking to take advantage of ill-configured electronic devices to steal personal and financial information," he says. "The ultimate goal is to make money quickly and cleanly, which sometimes involves black-



mailing over sensitive pictures, embarrassing emails, or simple ransom — they will lock you out of your computer and will only unlock it after you pay a ransom, which we don't recommend you do at all."

Paul Lipman, CEO of award-winning cybersecurity company BullGuard, says cybercriminals come in all shapes and sizes and all sorts of demographic backgrounds.

"But what they're looking for is simple — access to personal information and data they can use for malicious purposes, or to extort bitcoins or payment through ransomware, infect computers with malware and other fraudulent purposes such as identity

theft, and for financial gain. Cybercriminals can easily take advantage of an unprotected network where there are multiple users connected to the same network."

He adds that open Wi-Fi networks allow these cybercriminals to distribute malware to anyone who is connected to that network "in the blink of an eye."

And conventions are attractive targets for these thieves, Lipman says, because many conventions do not require passwords to access the Wi-Fi in use, and if there is a password, it's often easy to guess or it's written on papers that are included in brochures or packets given to attendees.

"Any person at the conference — even if they are not an attendee and

are just in the lobby or close enough to pick up a Wi-Fi signal — can easily ask an attendee to give them the password — and many attendees would offer it to be friendly," he says. "They could, in fact, be giving a fraudster or hacker easy access to the network and leaving anyone who is accessing the Wi-Fi open to having their data and other personal information at risk for a potential hack or breach."

**"Cybercriminals can easily take advantage of an unprotected network where there are multiple users connected to the same network."**

Paul Lipman  
CEO  
BullGuard



Schenck says just who cybercriminals are could depend on the nature of the convention.

"It could be people looking to make money on ransomware, looking to create or expand a botnet for an unrelated activity, identity thieves, or even espionage — national, economic or industrial," he says.

### CYBERCRIME VICTIMS

One of the key reasons cybersecurity needs to be a priority when planning a convention is that any participant who uses a device on the convention's Wi-Fi is a potential target.

"Both attendees and organizers are at risk," Tomaschek says. "Attendees can easily be tricked into providing per-

Robert Siciliano, onstage, a security awareness expert and CEO of Safr.Me, says that in general, attendees of a convention are more vulnerable than hosts.

sonal information to another individual at the event posing as a legitimate business contact. Event organizers are also certainly at a heightened risk of a potential breach simply due to the vast amounts of registration data containing all kinds of personal information that organizers collect from attendees. Such a wealth of data is a gold mine for cybercriminals and therefore needs to be properly protected via the strictest of security protocols."

Campos says all participants of a convention are at risk, both organizers and attendees, for several reasons, including the value of personal financial records on the black market and the low level of preparedness that exists at many conventions.

"Passwords, financial data, and other sensitive personal information quickly show up on the darknet after a breach, where criminals freely negotiate with the best buyer when not directly engaging in blackmailing the original information owner," he says. "To prevent attacks that put convention crowds at risk of losing control of their sensitive information, there must be a minimal set of protective measures to promptly detect and thwart cyberattacks."

The most common tools used are antivirus solutions. However, they are not a silver bullet. Campos had a colleague who had all the security configurations well-done and good antivirus installed, and had his laptop breached anyway. He discovered after the fact that he had been using a compromised Wi-Fi network in his monthly professional gathering, which would download a computer's antivirus into his device at every connection, disabling his antivirus to begin with.

"My friend had to spend hours cleaning the virus infection of his laptop," Campos says. "Moreover, he started using a special software called VPN — Virtual Private Network — which protected his connections while

using public Wi-Fi, and he never faced any issue again."

Lipman agrees that the most secure method in protecting information is to use a personal VPN to connect to the internet.

"VPN solutions offer protection across multiple devices, and the cost of protecting them is relatively cents per day," he says. "It's actually really simple for hackers to set up a fake malicious network and pretend to be 'Free SFO Airport Wi-Fi network' or 'Starbucks Wi-Fi.' A personal VPN allows convention attendees to avoid putting themselves at risk while connecting to an unknown network."

Tomaschek adds that convention organizers should make sure that all of their devices are secured through strong passwords or fingerprint-scanning technology, which protects computers, tablets and phones from unauthorized access.

"Organizers should also ensure that their systems are properly encrypted to secure their data as well as attendee data," Tomaschek says. "Conference attendees also need to take certain critical precautions when attending a conference and interacting with contacts. Attendees should also ensure that their devices are properly password protected, disable wireless communication features like Bluetooth, connect only to the official trusted Wi-Fi network of the conference, use a VPN to encrypt all online activity and just use common sense and never share any information other than what is necessary."

Robert Siciliano, a security awareness expert and CEO of Safr.Me, says in general, attendees of a convention are more vulnerable than hosts. "But this might also depend on the country in which the event is being hosted," he says. "Overseas in Asia, Russia, China or South America, hacking Wi-Fi isn't just for fun and profit, it is a sport."

### PROTECT YOUR WI-FI

Any center that hosts conventions is bound to offer free Wi-Fi to organizers and participants of any convention, but an unprotected Wi-Fi network can put users at risk.

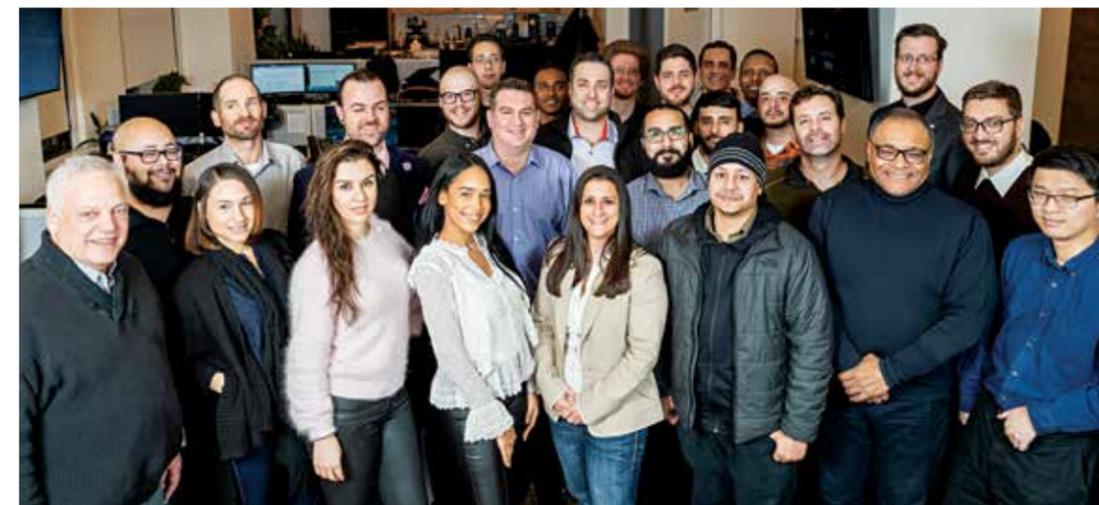
"Free, open, unencrypted Wi-Fi

invites criminal hacking," Siciliano says. "It is best to engage in either password-protected encrypted Wi-Fi, or encourage the attendees to enlist a virtual private network software to encrypt and lock down their wireless connection."

He adds that in addition to cybertheft, convention attendees also should take precautions against the old-fashioned kind of thievery.

"Theft of digital devices left in conference rooms during breaks or lunch is a big problem in a convention environment," Siciliano says. "Attendees tend to feel that their items are not susceptible to physical theft and put too much reliance on trusting the nonexistent event security."

Anthony Bustamante, a professor in the cybersecurity management fac-



ulty at Tulane University's School of Professional Advancement, says cybersecurity begins with the most basic of steps, including setting up strong passwords that aren't taped to your laptop and tablet.

"I've walked into banks before where an employee's username and password into the banking system were on a sticky note where I could see it," he says.

He adds that all staff working on a convention should be trained on the best practices for cybersecurity, and encouraged to report on suspicious activity.

"The same security principles that you apply as a meeting planner will also apply to your attendees, but one additional option to increase the security of your attendees' Wi-Fi connection is to incorporate PKI certificates into the Wi-Fi authentication process," Bustamante says. "Extra steps

will be required on the users' end to ensure they load the certificates into their devices, but it will protect them from connecting to a rogue access point that is pretending to be the real access points."

### STEPS FOR SECURITY

Free Wi-Fi is common in all sorts of places — libraries, coffee shops, hotels, etc. — and while Tomaschek says these networks can easily be infiltrated by cybercriminals, conventions can still offer a free Wi-Fi network to attendees, along with advice as to how participants can protect their gadgets.

"Attendees should feel free to use the provided Wi-Fi network as long as they protect their internet activity and use a VPN whenever they connect to the

Michael Schenck and the team from Kaytuso, pictured, offer security suggestions to meeting planners and attendees such as using a virtual private network to encrypt online activity.

network," Tomaschek says.

Schenck suggests following the same steps that are used to secure any computer, such as MFA (Multi-Factor Authentication), hardened configurations, encryption, locking policies and current advanced anti-malware.

"Use a VPN before connecting to anything but a recognized hotspot, or better yet, use a tethered device or mobile hotspot you control," he says.

Lipman suggests that planners make sure there is a WPA2 (Wi-Fi Protected Access) password on the Wi-Fi network that is being used at the convention. He adds that planners should recommend that all attendees use a



virtual private network to add another layer of protections.

“VPNs enable consumers to safeguard their online privacy — flying under the radar and surfing the internet in stealth mode while retaining complete anonymity via military-grade encryption,” Lipman says. “VPN works by hiding a consumer’s origin IP address, preventing others — including ISPs and government organizations — from monitoring their online browsing activity, what websites they visit, what they download or what services and applications they use.”

Furthermore, attendees should be given official convention Wi-Fi login details with regularly updated passwords. One thing they shouldn’t do is assume the first public Wi-Fi that shows up on their device is the proper one.

“To keep themselves even more protected, attendees should be encouraged to use their own personal VPN, like BullGuard VPN, on their laptops, tablets and phones to protect themselves from potential cyberattacks,” Lipman says.

Campos says keeping cybercriminals at bay requires specialized software tools. These include anti-virus that shields your device and VPNs to protect your connections to public Wi-Fi.

“Also, it’s important to keep pace with the constant update of the software — such as monthly free Windows updates — and device configurations. This series of steps is also known as ‘cybersecurity hygiene,’” he says.

He suggests creating a daily routine and habits, featuring some simple steps, in addition to updating your anti-virus software.

Those steps include being wary of email attachments and web links, especially from senders you don’t know. Also, don’t connect unknown or untrusted storage devices or hardware to your computer or mobile device, for example don’t share USB sticks or external hard drives between suspicious computers or devices. He also says not to download software from an unknown web page, be very careful when you do download files, and use freeware or shareware. Finally, don’t share personal or business information because criminals can impersonate you and send fake emails to your contacts.

#### IN THE EVENT OF A BREACH

So let’s say a planner is overseeing a convention and it’s going wonderfully. Attendees are communicating, networking, and discovering new ideas that can help their businesses and careers. But then the planner suspects a breach has occurred.

Tomaschek says the first step is to identify and isolate the breach. “In the event of a breach, organizers should also immediately notify attendees of the threat and clearly communicate to them the steps they should take to protect themselves and their devices from the incident,” he says. “Organizers also must communicate to attendees the nature of the incident and exactly what steps they are taking in response to the incident and how it will be resolved.”

Bustamante says a breach at a convention is different from their conventional counterparts at companies, where computer systems reside on one network and use similar com-

J. Eduardo Campos, founder, president and managing partner of Embedded-Knowledge Inc., says cybercriminals are a 21st-century version of crooks that dates back decades.

puter models and software. “A breach typically results from one system being compromised and an attacker leveraging the trust relationship between this machine and all other internal machines on the network,” he says. “When credentials are stolen, they will likely work across the domain to some extent. Now contrast this with a convention network. Attendees that connect to the centralized network are likely to be running a wide variety of hardware and software. Authentication is not centralized and there is no trust relationship between devices. In the latter scenario it is much more difficult to have a crisis response plan, in which a specialized team is hired to conduct an investigation to determine the nature of the breach.”

At this type of event, the most prudent course of action is to respond quickly and to be as transparent as possible with attendees and vendors about what has transpired, this will allow them the opportunity to take the necessary next steps to protect their assets.

Campos says all attendees should be noted of any potential breach, and that law enforcement should also be contacted. And always collaborate with a cybersecurity expert who can help with these situations. He added that he has worked with clients who experienced breaches.

“It happened because users were not prepared to identify an attack,” Campos says. “They clicked on email attachments that downloaded a virus in several computers. After the fact, they were trained and it never happened again.”

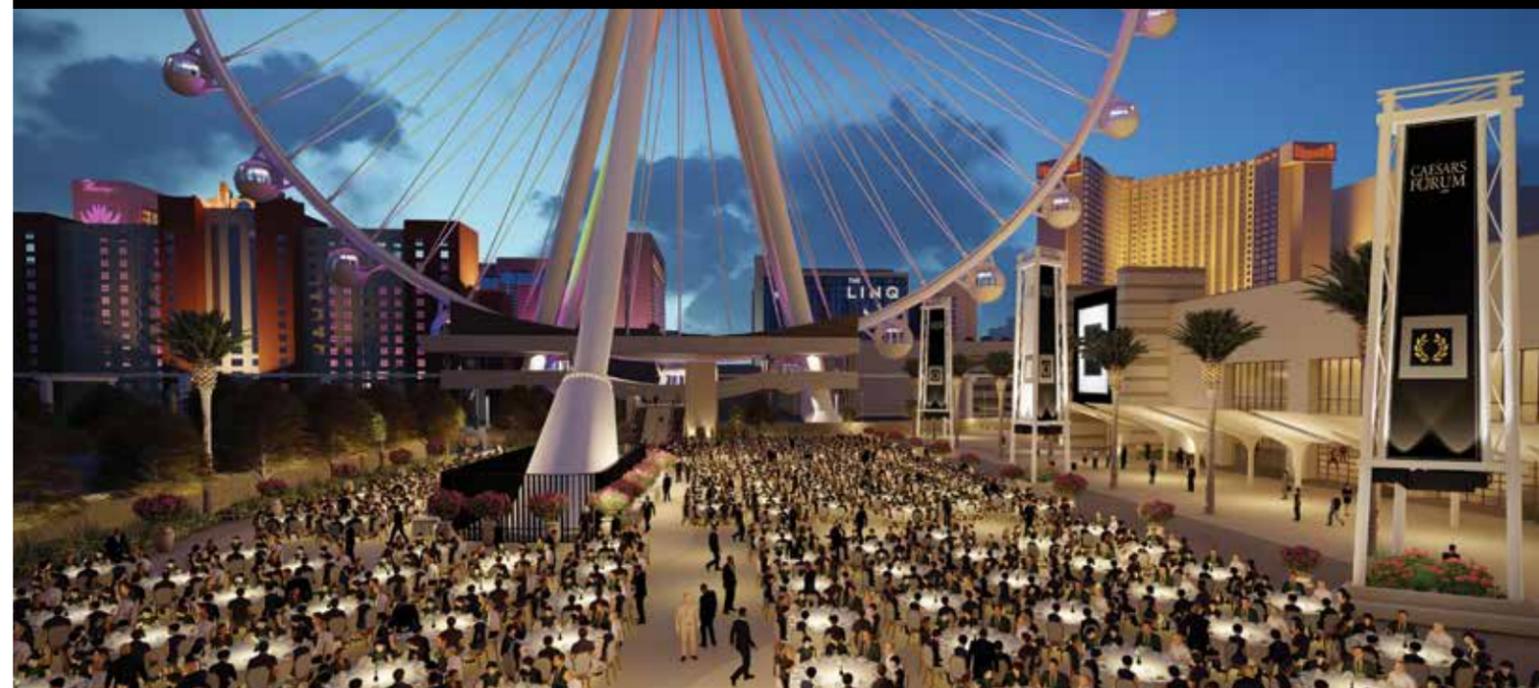
He adds that it all starts with people and the processes that are put in place before any technology is employed.

“Work on user awareness, give step-by-step guidance, and keep a channel open for alerts and their feedback,” Campos says. “In terms of processes, work with an expert to develop a checklist to ensure you have safe Wi-Fi connections, updated devices and the right software to protect your electronic devices and connections.” |AC&F|

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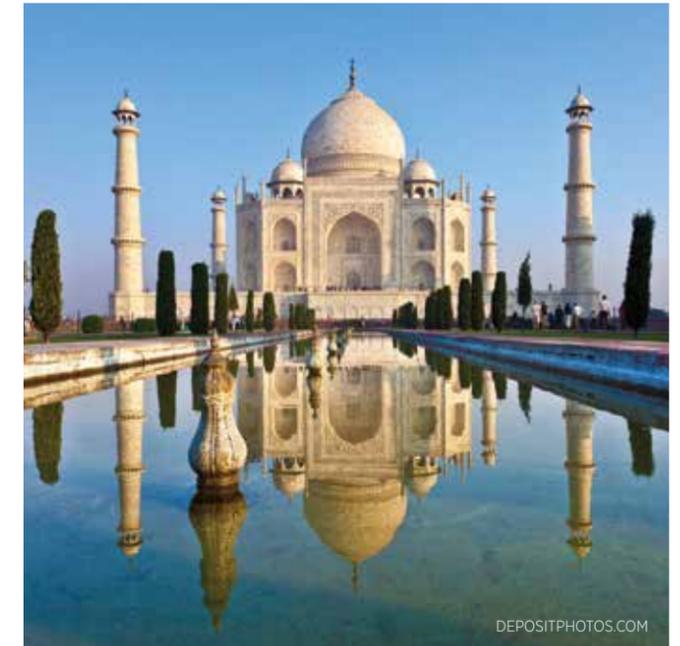
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BY PATRICK SIMMS

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## Planners Must Increasingly Tailor Educational Information to a Global Audience



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China and India offer tremendous growth opportunities, so more associations are hosting events in these countries and others around the world. As the meetings and conventions industry branches out to more international attendees, planners must remember to adjust their content and methods.

**W**hile planners aren't necessarily content experts in their association's field, they are integral to the delivery of education. Typically, they collaborate with the organization's committee members and educational designers to determine the ideal venue, speakers, format, schedule and other elements of the sessions, taking into account the audience demographics. And increasingly, audiences include more international attendees as associations hold more meetings globally and welcome more international delegates to domestic meetings.

A sign of the times is that associations, in general, are expanding their global presences, according to Erin Goblirsch, manager of Smith-Bucklin's, Education & Learning Services division. "That's just the world we live in these days,

but also there are more opportunities to reach a wider audience," Goblirsch notes. "Virtual conferences are contributing to expanding global presence. And even if you have an event that is happening domestically and is targeted domestically, there are still likely international attendees. So it's important to keep that mindset of who the audience is and how you are catering content to a more diverse group of attendees."

The most direct way to reach new international audiences is of course to stage more international meetings, particularly in regions where membership is growing or shows promise of growing. Among the many U.S.-based associations where this initiative is a priority are the Society of Architectural Historians (SAH) and RIMS, the Risk Management Society. "SAH continues to look for new international destinations

for our annual conference after our 2017 Glasgow, Scotland conference,” says Christopher Kirbabas, director of programs. “SAH has an opportunity to increase our global presence and continue to introduce new international audiences to SAH, our mission and to others who share a passion for the built environment.” While RIMS’ Annual Conference has not yet left North America and will likely not do so for many years, “we have developed new global events that are regional in nature,” says Stuart Ruff-Lyon, CMP, DES, vice president, events and exhibitions. “We are holding risk forums in China, Singapore, Australia, New Zealand and Colombia in 2019. We are heavily focused on India and China. We see tremendous growth opportunities in these countries, and we are proud to help develop the risk management disciplines in these regions.”

### PREPARING FOR AN INTERNATIONAL EVENT

If an event held internationally will see robust local attendance, the educational offerings should naturally reflect the interests and professional profiles of that audience. The association’s committee is an invaluable resource in this regard, especially the members who are familiar with the local contingent. “The education committee is critical to planning content because they are the subject-matter experts,” Goblirsch says.

“It helps to have a committee that really embodies who the attendees are going to be as far as age, industry sector, where they’re from in the world, etc. You can really test ideas within the committee and ask, ‘Is this going to work? Is this something you would attend?’ I rely on at least a couple of people from the host

**“The education committee is critical to planning content, because they are the subject-matter experts.”**

Erin Goblirsch  
Manager, Education & Learning Services  
SmithBucklin



committee who know the attendees on the ground.”

The International Association of Amusement Parks and Attractions (IAAPA), for example, relies on its regional committees and task forces to help determine session content for its international meetings, which are held in cities throughout North America, Latin America, Europe and Asia. “The higher-level executives from the big industry partners such as Disney, Universal and Europa-Park and representatives from different amusement facilities that make up our committees and task forces help us identify topics relevant to the region,” explains Michael Shelton, director of program management in the IAAPA Education Department. While IAAPA offers cer-

tification-related core courses in every region with the same base content and delivery, some of the educational content must be region-specific, based on the nature of the local amusement park industry. “Certain things that apply in America may not apply in other regions. The topic that we vary the most on content-wise would be safety. We do have a Safety Institute that is a core curriculum course, but there are different laws and rules in each region specific to how safety is administered and how different regions need to follow procedures.”

Similarly, RIMS’ planning team relies on regional advisory groups to help customize content for its

international conferences, while still representing topics of global interest among the membership, such as enterprise risk management. “We always tailor our event content to regionalize our education. We examine the needs of the prospective audience, and work hard to build programs that will help risk professionals advance the risk management profession and the discipline,” Ruff-Lyon explains. “We use our regional advisory groups to weigh-in on our call-for-proposals process on our international regional meetings’ agendas. The groups review session submissions and simultaneously propose other ideas and speakers for our agendas. We also rely on our local sponsors to suggest content and propose speakers. Really, we wouldn’t have successful programs in non-North American regions without our advisory groups and local partners/sponsors.” In order to advance the profession in areas where it is less developed, RIMS is offering more introductory courses outside of the United States and “creating new online digital events that are regionalized and introductory,” he adds.

Content that is geared toward the local attendees can also emerge directly from the call for proposals process, particularly if the desire for such topics is emphasized in the CFP. “When

Attendees take a break on a South African safari, a planned excursion during an education-focused meeting for medical services professionals. SDI, part of the SmithBucklin family, planned the event.



SAH opens our Call for Sessions every October, we encourage session submissions with topics that explore the built environment of the city and region that we are in,” Kirbabas says. “Of the final 36 sessions chosen, we typically will get one or two sessions that highlight local topics. SAH also offers a Saturday morning seminar that highlights a city-specific topic or project that is of interest to locals.”

### ENGAGE LOCAL SPEAKERS

Involving local speakers is a major component of SAH’s regionalized education. Its local planning committees help source architectural historians and other industry stakeholders in the meeting destination.

“We also work with the CVB to help identify individuals and organizations who can contribute their expertise to our attendees,” Kirbabas says. “We engage with local experts to be speakers, panelists or tour leaders of our 20 or more tours conducted throughout the four-day conference. Based on the subject, we invite local historians, preservationists, architects, government officials and other experts to do a deep dive to understand the history and context of the seminar subject and gain better understanding from the varied stakeholders.”

For several reasons, leveraging local speakers can be advantageous. “I think they help bring a level of authenticity to an event,” Goblirsch says. “It may not be economical for a nonprofit association to fly speakers in from around the world. And one reason people travel to conferences is to have the opportunity to hear new speakers with different perspectives. We try to find local experts to share their knowledge, such as professors from nearby universities.”

Not only content, but also the session format sometimes needs to be appropriated to the local audience based on their cultural preferences. According to Goblirsch, who specializes in educational design, “whether or not there are trending formats, it’s really important to consider your audience and their culture. Do they want to participate or would they rather sit back and listen? So even if something like



PechaKucha, a storytelling presentation style where 20 slides are shown successively, with 20 seconds of commentary on each, is super popular, it may not be right for an audience or speakers who expect a traditional presentation format with statistic-heavy content.”

### ATTENDEE PARTICIPATION CONSIDERED IDEAL

Highly interactive sessions, where the attendee is regularly participating, are often considered ideal these days. “The interactive piece has been very consistent over the years,” Shelton says. “We have an industry that loves to share information and knowledge; they love to talk about what each park is doing in their location.”

‘Talking head’ style presentations, on the other hand, are often disparaged

RIMS, the Risk Management Society, hosted the Risk Forum India 2018. RIMS is hosting global events to take advantage of tremendous growth opportunities.

Pacific attendees, they prefer to learn by listening and asking questions. They’re culturally more comfortable giving and receiving information. That doesn’t mean that I wouldn’t suggest trying something new and different.”

In this age of busy professionals seeking quickly digestible information, shorter-length sessions are likely to be popular across cultures. IAAPA has begun offering “micro sessions” designed to maintain attention. “They’re much more focused on one specific topic instead of having four or five presenters over an hour-and-a-half period,” Shelton explains. “We stay current on trends in the industry and adult learning, so the session formatting decisions are a combination of what we hear from our attendees and trying to meet their needs professionally.”

Translation services are needed for some IAAPA international meetings, such as those in China.

“Although the session may be in English, one of the panelists may speak a little English but he wants to answer in simplified Chinese,” explains KC Doreste, CMP, director, meetings and special events at IAAPA. She has adopted a few best practices in sourcing translators, including ensuring they can do simultaneous ‘real time’ trans-

**“We also work with the CVB to help identify individuals and organizations who can contribute their expertise to our attendees.”**

Christopher Kirbabas  
Director of Programs  
Society of Architectural Historians



as passé. Yet again, cultural considerations, as opposed to ‘what’s trendy,’ should inform the formatting choice. “In North America, our expectation generally is interaction, and more often than not attendees are more comfortable having roundtable conversations,” Goblirsch says. “But if you’re planning an event that’s highly attended by Asia-



lation. “We also have the devices that can switch from channel 1 to channel 2, so that way if you don’t understand them you can go to the other channel and they’ll be translated. So the better the translator and the better the equipment, the bigger the reward. In the past we’ve flown with the teams that have done this, but we’ve learned that local translation companies usually are better because they understand their equipment and the technical demands in the particular convention center.”

### OVERCOMING THE LANGUAGE BARRIER

In addition to overcoming the occasional language barrier, the basics of planning educational programs in other countries include a sensitivity to local scheduling customs.

David Tharp, executive director of the International Association for Food Protection, observes that “Sometimes it is appropriate to begin sessions at 8 a.m. ending at 5 p.m., and other times it may be better to begin at 9 a.m. or even 9:30 a.m. and run until 6 p.m. or 6:30 p.m. It is best for us to rely on the local organizing body to provide direction on these decisions.”

Latin American and certain European audiences tend to prefer a later start.

“In Europe they might not eat dinner until 9 or 10 p.m., so having sessions that start at the crack of dawn the next morning may not be a good

idea,” Goblirsch advises. The schedule should also be compatible with the long midday lunch breaks that are the custom in some cultures such as Spain. “Some businesses close in the afternoon and you may want to have a break in your day to reflect that because the hotel or convention center may also practice those customs,” she adds.

Some audiences may prefer more breaks, as the RIMS planning team has learned through experience. “For example, we know not to serve a heavy breakfast in India, and instead add more tea breaks to our schedule,” Ruff-Lyon says.

Educational designers know that the setting where learning takes place impacts engagement and retention, and for that reason it’s valuable to take learners out of the conference room

**“We know not to serve a heavy breakfast in India, and instead add more tea breaks to our schedule.”**

Stuart Ruff-Lyon, CMP, DES  
Vice President, Events and Exhibitions  
RIMS, the Risk Management Society



on occasion. Thus, tailoring the educational experience should involve leveraging the destination’s off-site venues to imbue the program with local character and improve learning outcomes. IAAPA, for example, has held sessions at venues such as Shanghai Disney Resort and Ferrari World Abu Dhabi. “We don’t want to keep

Translation services are needed for some international meetings. Planners must consider how different cultures absorb information.

them in a room all day long, especially when they’re in training meetings for three days,” Doreste says. Educational tours of local amusement parks are another way IAAPA varies the setting for its participants.

Goblirsch has a similar philosophy: “We know that adults learn differently than children, and part of that is giving them the opportunity to have different experiences. So whenever possible, I try to embrace the benefits of the destination and give people the opportunity to explore while also learning.”

For example, when staging the educational program for a travel association meeting in Bangkok, her team held “educational immersions” at three off-site locations, and attendees selected the one that best suited them:

- Thailand Creative & Design Center. Thailand Creative & Design Center was founded to integrate the ingenuity of Thai society and culture with modern knowledge and technology. TCDC includes exhibitions, talks, workshops and a resource center designed to inspire creativity.

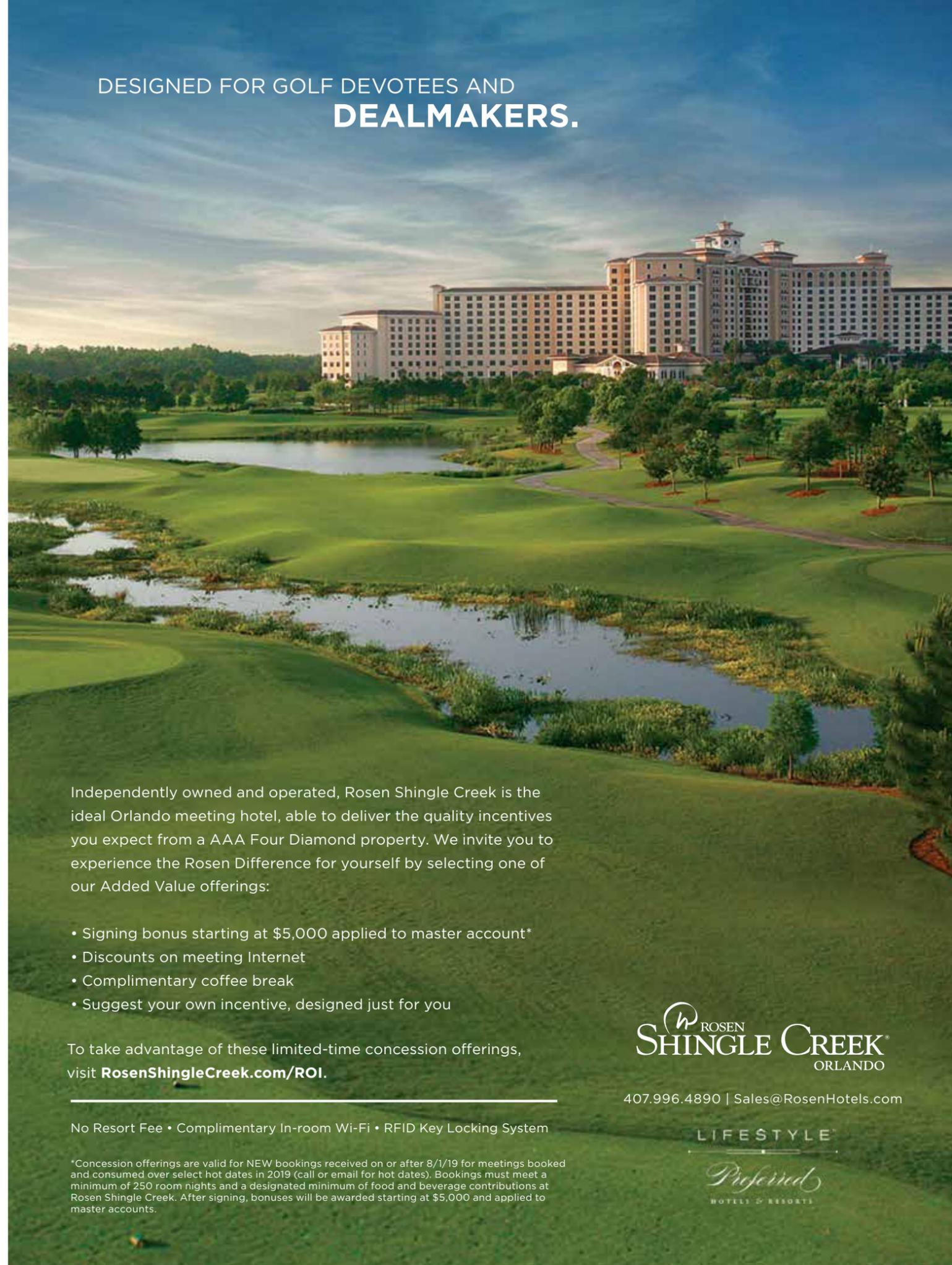
- Soy Sauce Factory, which has been renamed 56th Studio. This is a creative space that focuses on art and design exhibitions from emerging young artists from all over the world. The venue is a combination of design studios, gallery space and pop-up eatery.

- P. Tendercool, which was created by Duangrit Bunnag, Thailand’s most famous architect. P. Tendercool is a 43,000-sf rustic gallery studio that shows cross-cultural creations of unique furniture and home décor from talented local workmanship.

Educational programs held at such venues bring attendees closer to the

local culture and ultimately send a more memorable message. Ideally, then the design of the learning program will reflect not only the local membership base in terms of their professional interests and business culture, but also the destination itself and the resources it offers the group. **| AC&F |**

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# Smart SMERFs

## SMERF Numbers Add up to Big Business for Destinations, Hotels and Venues

By Derek Reveron

The meetings industry is full of unique acronyms, but none are catchier than SMERF (social, military, educational, religious and fraternal) groups.

Although SMERF groups typically are small, their numbers add up to big business for destinations, hotels and venues.

Here's why: They book rooms on weekends, during shoulder seasons and off-peak times when corporate groups are least likely to meet. They tend to be loyal to properties and destinations and they have dedicated attendees who continue to meet during economic downturns with little or no attendance decline.

According to Dean Jones, CMP, director of conferences and events for the Religious Conference Management

Association, "I think SMERF events are a consistent market. Many are mandated by their by-laws to meet on a regular basis. When the economy is good, these events tend to attract more people, but even in bad economic times, the events still meet."

Indeed, the dedication of SMERF attendees to their organizations drives meeting consistency.

"SMERF attendees are passionate about their causes — social, military, education, religious or fraternal," Jones says. "When attendees are passionate, they prioritize their decisions. This leads to wanting to be involved, wanting to attend, wanting to volunteer and leading the charge for their cause. This tends to lead to growth in meetings."

While SMERF groups are a main-

stay of the meetings industry, they must overcome certain challenges to obtain good value. For example, meetings and budgets tend to be small and attendees typically pay their own way and lack expense accounts.

As a result, controlling hotel costs is crucial. About 60 percent of SMERF planners say expensive hotel rates are the top reasons for not choosing a destination, according to a survey conducted by Destination Analysts Inc.

### How to Get the Best Deal

Getting the best deals requires out-of-the-box thinking by planners. "Smart SMERF planners are looking off the beaten path," Jones says. "They are exploring destinations and venues they've not considered before. There are

plenty of places to meet where there is value available. These destinations may not have a theme park or beach nearby, but they often have value propositions that will still appeal to attendees."

SMERF groups often find value in second- and third-tier destinations that are less costly than their larger counterparts and offer more competitive deals. One such destination is Virginia Beach, a popular draw for SMERF groups.

The Spanish Eastern District of the Assemblies of God recently met for the second time at the Virginia Beach Convention Center (VBCC), one of the largest convention centers on the East Coast and the nation's first to earn LEED Gold certification from the U.S. Green Building Council.

Originally, the group considered the VBCC due to a recommendation. According to Selene Serrano, WM district financial officer, "We belong to a larger organization and we ask similar groups in the organization about their experiences and properties they have used in the past."

After meeting with VBCC officials, the group chose it in large part because the convention center met the group's budget needs.

"In our case, being a not-for-profit religious organization, funds are very limited," Serrano says. "The money factor impacts greatly the negotiating and selection process, whereas you want to provide the best by keeping the cost at a reasonable rate. Some properties have little to no flexibility."

But, Serrano adds, that wasn't the case with the VBCC.

"We received great value in rooms, F&B and other fees," Serrano says. "The catering service helped in hosting a lunch for leaders by providing accessible prices, a great selection and awesome quality. The concessions had a variety of food items at reasonable prices for attendees."

In addition, Serrano says, the VBCC's location, logistical help and space flex-

ibility were keys to the meeting's success. "We had the ability to expand," Serrano says. "We originally booked for 2,000 people in the general session, but the VBCC was able to accommodate an additional 1,800 due to their large

**"Being a not-for-profit religious organization, funds are very limited."**

Selene Serrano  
WM District Financial Officer  
Spanish Eastern District of the  
Assemblies of God



facilities and flexibility. We were also allowed to come in the night before the meeting started at no extra charge to store and set up items. This helped us save time in the morning."

### Location and Service

Location and service were also big pluses for the Spanish Eastern District.

"The property is conveniently located in the city, making it easily accessible from all hotels, and it's also just a few blocks from the beach, restaurants and entertainment," Serrano says. "Overall, we as well as our attendees, were extremely satisfied. We will certainly return to this property soon."

It can be a big challenge for the Spanish Eastern District and other larger SMERF groups to find the right space at affordable cost.

It's a hurdle that Ambassadors for

Christ Inc. (AFC) overcame to hold a 3,000-attendee event for Christian Chinese churches in North America at the Baltimore Convention Center (BCC). Attendee hotels included the Hilton Baltimore Inner Harbor and Baltimore Marriott Inner Harbor at Camden Yards.

According to Catherine Roberts, convention manager, Chinese Mission at AFC, "Looking for a location in the Northeast corridor for a budget conscious group is quite a challenge, especially for our group that needs nearly 200,000 sf. Balti-

more provided affordable and available space. The BCC is easy to work with, and they make a great team with the Hilton and Marriott."

"Visit Baltimore worked closely with us to clear the last financial and logistical hurdles," Roberts adds. "They offered us some creative ways to offset the cost of renting space at the convention center."

In the past, the AFC preferred to use a retreat center or a large hotel where the meeting space is part of the overall package, including rooms and meals. However, "Baltimore was the first convention center without hotel rooms we have used," Roberts says. "And Visit Baltimore made that possible."

It was the AFC's second time using the BCC. As with many SMERF groups, local community connections also played a role in the AFC's decision to return.



COURTESY OF WASHINGTON.ORG

“First and foremost is the importance of our local partners,” Roberts says. “Our event is a partnership between our organization and Chinese churches in the local areas — in this case Baltimore and Washington, DC. Having partnered with them once, we reaped the benefits of a learning curve with them and met a second time in the same location.”

SMERF groups such as AFC generally have their own strategies for negotiating with properties, which are to negotiate aggressively, focus on curbing the biggest expenses first and exercising flexibility when necessary. The goal is to control out-of-pocket costs for attendees while building attendance.

Those goals align with Susan Feldman, conference services manager of Ayelet Tours, which recently planned a meeting for a religious organization at the Hilton Cincinnati Netherland Plaza hotel for 530 attendees.

Feldman uses the following strategy

## Flexibility for Dates and Patterns

Flexibility was also a key.

“I did some give and take with concessions in order to make sure we were within budget,” Feldman says. “In the end, the room rate was within my client’s budget as was food and beverage pricing. The A/V team really outdid themselves and came in under my client’s budget. The hotel was fine for this conference. They were a pleasure to work with.”

Flexibility is crucial to the ability of SMERF groups to get value during the current seller’s market. Being flexible also helps SMERF organizations overcome the limitations of size, budget and low attendee on-site spending.

According to Jones, “Being flexible with dates and patterns can often determine whether you’ll get to utilize the venue or destination you desire. If you can fill a need gap on a calendar for

periods which means lower rates and an opportunity for our hotel partners to fill occupancy gaps. We look at hotel need dates to determine how we can best fill those gaps and at what cost.”

SMERF meeting planners say it’s important to have at least two sets of off-peak date options that include one of the following alternatives — arriving on a Wednesday and departing on a Friday or arriving on a Sunday and departing on a Wednesday. Such options are crucial when considering destinations where leisure business increases room rates on weekends.

It’s easier for SMERF groups to have booking flexibility because, unlike corporate groups, their annual event may be the only travel the group does each year. And SMERF meetings can occur any time of the year and may take place over holidays and weekends.

## Timing is Important

That is precisely what the AFC does. “We hold our meeting between Christmas and New Year’s, a time when most hotels are empty,” Roberts says. “Culturally, this is a win for us as many Chinese churches usually hold retreats over holiday periods when the whole family can get away together. By using a quiet time for the industry, we can get the best possible deal on rates, dates and space.”

Jones offers the following additional advice:

“Teaming up with a similar organization and meeting at the same time and place, and perhaps sharing space and menus can be a huge savings and give more buying power,” Jones says. “Booking a multiyear deal in the same city, or with the same hotel chain can possibly generate some savings over time.”

Prioritizing concession lists can also help.

“Categorize your concession needs into ‘deal breakers,’ ‘helpful to have’ and ‘icing on the cake,’” Jones says. “If you ask for and expect everything on your wish list, you’ll likely not get it and your event will be rejected by a property. But if you determine things you feel you must have vs. the rest of your wishes, you are more likely to have favorable consideration.”

It’s also important to remember the following when negotiating concessions: “Each property knows the dollar value of your wish list,” Jones says. “Some are easy to provide, some may be impossible with a hefty price tag.

Be reasonable with your wish list and you’ll find more opportunity.”

## Getting the Best Possible Value

Flexibility alone won’t get the best possible value. It’s crucial that SMERF planners know and stress their attendance and spending history. While the spend may not be huge, it is usually consistent because attendees typically pay their own expenses.

The financial limitations of SMERF attendees makes communication with properties even more important, according to Brian Parker, CMP, president of Parker Conference Management Inc., who specializes in planning meetings for predominately African-American groups.

Parker recently held a successful meeting for a group in Washington, DC at the Washington Marriott Wardman Park, a conference hotel in the Woodley Park neighborhood.

Parker’s advice: “The best approach is to ensure the clearest communication possible with hotels. Advise them in advance of the group’s budget restraints so they can respond with dates, meeting patterns and room rates that are palatable to the group,” Parker says. “Regarding food and beverage expenses, advise them of budget limitations so they can work with you to customize menus, etc.”

Parker has planned meetings for the National Association of Black Accountants, the Association for the Study of African American Life and History and the National Association of Health Services Executives. Such groups often prefer smaller destinations.

“A lot of SMERF-type groups prefer to meet in second- or third-tier cities because they are less expensive to do business in,” Parker says.

Meanwhile, more smaller destinations are courting SMERF groups.

According to Jones, “Markets that are interested in enticing SMERF meetings often have good incentives available. Recently, I’ve seen the following offered: no attrition, big discounts on meeting space rentals, hotel point bonuses, rebates to offset event budgets, transportation between properties, etc.”



The growing number of options is increasing competition which, in turn, generates even better deals.

“With many second- and third-tier cities vying for the same SMERF events, it puts planners in the driver’s seat, depending on the destination,” Jones says. “It all seems cyclical, but currently, there are many cities that are interested in attracting the business to fill gaps in their calendars.”

In addition, more CVBs are designating sales managers to oversee SMERF groups and including the word

SMERF planners work with CVBs and DMOs such as Destination DC, which has ‘Redcoats’ to work in a variety of positions to assist attendees at conventions.

professionals, fraternal organizations, etc., so we understand what each group needs to connect them with local resources and contacts to help make the meeting happen.

Most of all, Dunn says, “We make it clear that each event, no matter the group or size, has the potential to

own the city and has a wealth of resources at their disposal. Special experiences that can be tailored to a specific SMERF group is a huge draw and helps make them feel welcome.”

Melissa Riley, vice president, convention sales and services, Destination DC, makes it

**“Special experiences that can be tailored to a specific SMERF group is a huge draw and helps make them feel welcome.”**

Jason Dunn, CTA  
Group Vice President of  
Diversity Sales and Inclusion  
Cincinnati USA CVB



“SMERF” in the job titles. For example, the Arlington Convention & Visitors Bureau has a “Director of National Accounts: National Associations & SMERF.”

SMERF groups are becoming valuable to destinations for two other reasons: They provide opportunities for new and loyal repeat business. The category of SMERF groups are expanding to include special interest, sports and multicultural.

For example, Cincinnati USA’s Vibe Cincinnati program targets multicultural SMERF groups.

According to Dunn, “Through Vibe, we create custom programming that introduces event attendees and planners to Cincinnati’s vibrant mix of cultures. We’ve established local relationships with church leaders, educa-

clear why SMERF groups are valued.

“What’s most important to recognize is that overall, the SMERF market is stable and predictable,” Riley says. “Unlike corporate events, SMERF meetings are often required by bylaws and reliably take place over certain times of year. Meeting attendees, and often their families, will use conferences as extended vacation opportunities.”

Meanwhile, many SMERF planners are aware of the value of CVBs. About 58 percent of SMERF planners say they are “very familiar” with CVBs, according to the survey by Destination Analysts.

Savvy planners will get the best deal for SMERF meetings by stressing the loyalty of attendees, their collective spending history and willingness to meet during off-peak times. |AC&F|



Cincinnati USA’s Vibe Cincinnati program targets multicultural SMERF groups.

a hotel, you’ll be more likely to get the deal you need.”

Jones says that SMERF groups’ flexibility paired with all that they offer can help planners strike deals.

“Many SMERF events bring a lot of room nights, and often involve families,” Jones says. “These factors often generate good revenue for a venue and destination, although they may generate room rates lower than those of some other market segments.”

CVB sales executives who assist SMERF groups also stress the need for flexibility.

According to Jason Dunn, CTA, group vice president of diversity sales and inclusion for Cincinnati USA CVB, “In order to find the best price, many groups opt for dates in non-demand

# Canadian Charm

Attractive Venues and Beautiful Monuments Make Our Neighbor a Five-Star Destination

By Ron Bernthal

During the Tourism Industry Association of Canada's (TIAC) annual conference this past November, it was reported that business events now accounts for 34.4 percent of all tourism in Canada, a big part of Canada's US\$71 billion tourism industry. If you include leisure travel that gets booked around business events, the business event sector increases to about 50 percent of the industry.

What this means is that MICE events in Canada is increasingly playing a larger role in the country's GDP. The lure of organizing meetings, conferences and trade shows in Canada — lower costs, modern and reliable public transportation, high-quality accommodations and dining facilities, state-of-the-art convention centers, safe and visitor friendly cities — is attracting more

U.S. meeting planners than ever before. The meetings and conventions sector alone represents more than US\$22.5 billion in economic activity.

It has recently been very economically advantageous for associations in the U.S. to organize meetings in Canada, with an extremely favorable exchange rate for U.S. organizations. Thus, Canadian suppliers and DMOs expect that more U.S.-based planners will be considering meeting locations in Canada.

## MONTRÉAL

Last year, passenger traffic into Montréal-Pierre Elliott Trudeau International Airport (YUL) from the U.S. surged almost 12 percent, and the Association des hôtels du Grand Montréal reported hotel occupancy reached 77 percent.

"This year was again punctu-

ated with city-wide public and MICE events, marking the city's efforts to position itself as a cultural metropolis and international-caliber destination," says Christopher Marilley, director of meeting and convention sales for Tourisme Montréal. More than 100 festivals happen in Montréal every year, from world-class culinary events to large outdoor gatherings.

The Palais des Congrès de Montréal (Montréal Convention Centre) is downtown just steps away from historic sites, world-class shopping and dining, the Old Port and the Entertainment District. More than 16,000 hotel rooms are available within a 10-minute walk from each other, including approximately 4,000 rooms directly accessible via an underground pedestrian network. For meeting planners and delegates, this means you can enjoy Montréal without

worrying about climate and ground transportation logistics.

Montréal offers many excellent hotels that can accommodate groups including: Fairmont The Queen Elizabeth, Le Centre Sheraton Montréal Hotel, Le Westin Montréal, Loews Hôtel Vogue, Ritz-Carlton Montréal and the DoubleTree by Hilton Montréal. All these properties have ample meeting and convention space, restaurants and private catering.

## QUÉBEC CITY

The city's landmark Fairmont Le Château Frontenac is a five-star property located in Old Québec City, with views of the St. Lawrence River and the historic fortified city. The 611-room property offers three restaurants and a large fitness center, as well as 23 function rooms.

Located downtown, in a dynamic neighborhood packed with history and culture, the Centre des Congrès de Québec (Québec City Convention Centre) offers 300,000 sf of exhibition, convention and meeting space in a LEED certified building. The Hilton Québec and Delta Hotels Québec offer a total of 948 rooms, meeting spaces and indoor passageways that link both properties to the Convention Centre.

Event planners have a new venue option — the recently reconstructed Voltigeurs de Québec Armoury in Old Québec City. Originally built in 1885, the structure was damaged by fire in 2008, but reopened for events last year after a US\$75 million reconstruction project that blended its historic architecture with a modern design and

high-tech amenities. The new Armoury is minutes away from the Québec City Convention Centre and can welcome up to 1,300 people in three large rooms and a reception area with views of the Plains of Abraham.

Last year, the American Society of Mechanical Engineers (ASME) held its annual International Design Engineering Technical Conference and the Computers and Information in Engineering Conference in Québec City.

"A professor at Laval University in Québec City, who was chair of the planning committee suggested we look at Québec City for our annual conference," says Edmond Valpoort, CMP, manager, conferences and events, for ASME. "After visiting the city, touring the Convention Centre and its adjacent

hotels and looking at transportation logistics, we fell in love with the people and all the facilities we visited."

Valpoort continues, "We used the Hilton Québec City and the Delta Québec City as host hotels, and several other nearby hotels for additional accommodations. Our group of about 1,250 attendees had adequate space at the Convention Centre. We had about 35 concurrent breakout sessions every day, so the space was ideal."

Like many association planners, Valpoort was pleased with the choice of a Canadian destination for their international conference. They had been to Montréal for two conferences in previous years.

"I've been singing the Québec City song to my planner friends for a while now," Valpoort says. "Our post-conference surveys came back with great reviews from attendees. The location of the Convention Centre was often mentioned in the surveys, how attendees were able to stroll out of the venue at lunch time and find nice places to eat if they didn't want to dine every day at the conference venue."

The Convention Centre is just a few minutes away from dozens of

Québec City offers plenty of hotel and venue options from which planners can choose, including Fairmont Le Château Frontenac, the Québec City Convention Centre and Delta Hotels Québec.

Hilton Québec offers 22 multipurpose rooms and more than 23,000 sf of meeting space.



CLAUDE BOUCHARD



Montréal is making a proactive push to become an international destination. Hotel occupancy and visitor numbers are surging.





excellent restaurants, microbreweries, bistros and sidewalk cafés. The venue is part of a complex that has two restaurants, and light meals are available within the Convention Centre.

## TORONTO

Tourism Toronto and its meetings, conferences and events department, Business Events Toronto, report that 26 citywide conventions were held last year, a new record for the number of citywide conventions held in a single year.

The record number of citywide events speaks to Toronto's place as the hub for innovation, technology, finance and business within Canada. The team at Business Events Toronto taps into Toronto's strength in these key economic sectors and uses the vibrancy of Toronto to attract these major events to the region. There were also numerous international conferences and meetings.

The Metro Toronto Convention Centre features 442,000 sf of exhibit space, 77 meeting rooms, multipurpose ballrooms, and a theater equipped for performing arts. As part of a recent multimillion-dollar expansion project, there are additional meeting spaces on the South Building's 600 Level.

The new Hotel X Toronto, a unique 30-story lakefront urban resort that opened last year, offers planners a cutting-edge mix of hospitality, sports

and entertainment options on the lakeshore just minutes from downtown. The property is the only hotel on the historic Exhibition Place grounds. The hotel offers more than 80,000 sf of indoor and outdoor event space.

The International Association for the Study of Lung Cancer (IASLC) held its 19th World Conference on Lung Cancer in Toronto last year with more than 7,000 delegates from around the world.

"The venue requirements for the conference were quite extensive with

**"The vast array of restaurants and event venues available in the city surely contributed to enhance our delegates experience in their free time."**

Mathias Posch  
President and Chairman at International Conference Services / President at IAPCO



over 13 concurrent session rooms, large plenaries, a 130,000-sf exhibit space, and over 30 smaller rooms for side meetings and offices," says Mathias Posch, president and chairman of International Conference Services and president of IAPCO and the core PCO for the Toronto conference. "Therefore, when selecting a destination for the annual conference, appropriate convention facilities are a key deciding factor. In Toronto, the Metro Toronto Convention Centre was able to accommodate all of our needs. A plus point was also its location, being right in the

Toronto offers the Metro Toronto Convention Centre, which features 442,000 sf of exhibit space, 77 meeting rooms, multipurpose ballrooms and a theater equipped for performing arts.

center of the city with a large number of hotels within walking distance and easy access to the city's great public transport services."

"We contracted with 18 properties downtown for over 3,300 room nights at peak, and 90 percent of our room inventory was less than 15 minutes' walk to the venue," says Posch. "Being a CME accredited medical event, our focus is not on social events. However the vast array of restaurants and event venues available in the city surely contributed to enhance our delegates experience in their free time. We did host a private themed event at the Hockey Hall of Fame, a memorable evening for our guests with plenty of photo opportunities."

Having easy flight connections from the USA, Europe and Asia was another important element for the attendees, and using Toronto's Pearson International Airport proved to be a perfect fit for the large IASLC group.

"Canada's principal airport offers travel routes to every continent and a 90 minute flight for over half the U.S. and Canadian population," Posch says. "The UP Express train connects the airport with the city center in just 25 minutes, with trains departing every 15 minutes."

Toronto was an extremely good destination choice last year for the IASLC's conference and resulted in the highest attendance in the history of the event.

Following the success of citywide conferences last year, the momentum continues this year. A Jehovah's Witnesses International Convention took place recently at the Enercare Centre, with approximately 45,000 delegates. That convention joins other meetings and events secured for 2019, including MPI's World Education Congress (WEC), the signature event for meeting professionals that attracted 2,000+ attendees to the Metro Toronto Convention Centre.

For offsite venues, Assembly Chef's Hall, in downtown Toronto, is Canada's first chef-driven food hall venue. Boasting 15 internationally inspired concepts, Assembly offers five event spaces for a combined 18,000 sf of indoor/outdoor event space. Large outdoor patios with private bars for summer gatherings, heated indoor spaces offer spacious opportunities in the colder months. Menus for events are fully customizable with healthy breakfast and coffee options, as well as Asian fusion, Italian, Mexican, Japanese, Mediterranean, Thai, barbecue and vegetarian options. Assembly Chef's Hall offers complementary event planning services.

## OTTAWA

The Shaw Centre offers planners an architectural icon in the heart of Canada's capital, within walking distance of 6,000 hotel rooms and an easy 20-minute drive from Ottawa/Macdonald-Cartier International Airport. The Shaw books about 500 conventions, meetings and trade/consumer shows a year.

The Westin Ottawa is connected to the Shaw Centre and the CF Rideau Centre via an indoor walkway, and offers planners 27 tech-centric meeting rooms, a Grand Ballroom and another ballroom with windows overlooking the Rideau Canal and Canada's Parliament building. Fairmont Château Laurier, opened in 1912 and across the street from the Shaw Centre, has expanded its meeting space overlooking the canal. The Ottawa Marriott Hotel also provides over two-dozen meeting rooms, plenty of meeting and event space and four concierge levels.

The Ottawa Conference and Event Centre, 15 minutes from downtown, contains convention space, 37 meeting rooms, extensive F&B services and complimentary underground parking. The facility is connected to the 397-room Courtyard Ottawa East and the 179-room Hampton Inn by Hilton Ottawa.

"Our members chose Ottawa for our 2020 RIMS Canada Conference because Canada's capital city offers something for all of our 2,000 expected conference attendees," says Stuart Ruff-Lyon, CMP, DES, vice president of events and exhibitions at New York-based RIMS, the Risk Management Society. "The city has great dining, accommodations, is within walking distance to cultural venues and, important for us, is home to a very vibrant and engaged risk man-



agement community. Our society's 10 Canadian chapters alternate as our conference host, so we are looking forward to a well-attended event in 2020."

Ruff-Lyon says they have blocked rooms at five downtown hotels for attendee bookings. "Our hotel options include the Fairmont Château Laurier, Novotel Ottawa, Les Suites Hotel Ottawa, Lord Elgin Hotel and the Westin Ottawa. In addition, the four-day conference will feature networking events at various event spaces and attractions throughout the city."

Ruff-Lyon also liked that the airport is an easy 15- to 20-minute taxi ride from downtown. "The airport's location makes travel to the city easy, an advantage that makes any event even more attractive to a larger pool of potential attendees," Ruff-Lyon says.

The city has many off-site venues that welcome association groups, including several large national museums that can host private receptions, dinners and conferences, including the Canadian Museum of History, the Canada Agriculture and Food Museum, the Science and Technology Museum, the Canada Aviation and Space Museum and the National Gallery of Canada.

## EDMONTON

The downtown Edmonton Convention Centre offers more than 150,000 sf of space, and 2,900 hotel rooms within walking distance. The facility received a Venue Excellence award from the International Association of Venue Managers (IAVM) that recognized the Convention Centre as one of North

RIMS, the Risk Management Society, held its annual event in Edmonton last year and plans to hold this year's event in Ottawa.

America's top-five performing public assembly venues.

The JW Marriott Edmonton ICE District opened earlier this year, one of only three JW Marriott branded hotels in Canada. It will be the centerpiece of the \$3 billion ICE District project, Edmonton's newest downtown neighborhood. The ICE District is a 25-acre development combining residential condos, a public plaza, sports and entertainment venues, 300,000 sf of retail space and 1.3 million sf of office space, all within walking distance to the Edmonton Convention Centre.

"The 54-story JW Marriott is helping to boost Edmonton's image and attract international investors as part of the massive ICE District development," says Edmonton Mayor Don Iveson. The hotel's guest rooms and meeting spaces, including the Wayne Gretzky Ballroom, occupy the first 22 floors of the tower. Across the street is Rogers Place, a multi-use sports and entertainment arena with a seating capacity of 18,500 as a hockey venue and 20,734 for concerts. The JW Marriott, along with the Stantec Tower next door, are key parts of the ICE District's first phase, now three-quarters completed.

The Westin Edmonton is also downtown, directly connected to the Convention Centre. Fairmont Hotel



Quartier Petit Champlain | Photo: Jeff Frenette

## SPOTLIGHT ON QUÉBEC CITY

Full of European charm and modern-day flair, Québec City is one of Canada's leading meeting destination. With the Québec City Convention Centre located in the heart downtown, minutes away from hotels, attractions and restaurants, this 400-year old city offers a perfect backdrop for your meetings and events, with a side of *joie de vivre!*

Because you're important to us, our team will help you make your mark in Québec City by wowing your attendees with a memorable meeting experience. We will work hand in hand with your team to ensure your event is successful—and makes a little history of its own.

## WHY QUÉBEC CITY?

### European charms

A stone's throw away from most major U.S. Cities

### Best gastronomic city

Top 10 in the world  
- Condé Nast Traveler

### More than 350 direct flights weekly

U.S. customs preclearance facility (2019)

More than  
**17,250 rooms**

### Enjoyable city to walk

Top 5 in the world  
- TedCity2.0

### 1<sup>st</sup> destination in Canada 6<sup>th</sup> in North America

- Travel + Leisure World Best Awards

### Culture city of the year

- Leading Culture Destinations  
Awards: Traveller's Awards 2016

### Canada's #2 sport destination

- Global Sports Impact Index  
(GSI Canada, 2019)

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

508 630-6607  
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\*Don't worry, she has our contagious *joie de vivre.*



Québec, accessible via major U.S. cities  
Photo: Québec City Business Destination

# QUÉBEC CITY, YOUR SUCCESS MAKES HISTORY.

**YOUR QUÉBEC CITY**

**BUSINESS DESTINATION**

**#MeetQuébecCity**



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The Calgary Stampede, which includes the popular annual rodeo, is a world-class, year-round gathering place in the heart of the city. It's also a not-for-profit community organization that celebrates western heritage.

ence of about 2,200 participants, as well as the flexibility of the hosting organizations, the ability of the hosting group to accommodate special needs, costs and the desirability of the city," says Jay Lightfoot, executive officer of Conference Management Services Inc. "Calgary scored very high in each of these categories, and our expectations were exceeded."

Lightfoot liked the TELUS Convention Centre because of the proximity to several hotels. "We ended up using the Marriott Downtown, the Hilton Garden Inn Downtown, the Fairmont Palliser, Best Western Calgary Centre City, as well as the Hotel Arts, a 10-minute walk from the Convention Centre," Lightfoot says.

"We used the Convention Centre for most of our events, as well as the Calgary Stampede for our banquet night," Lightfoot says. "Our experience with Canada in general, and Calgary specifically, was fantastic. Canadian hosts were easy to work with, as were all the local and provincial agencies we worked with. All the folks we dealt with in Calgary were flexible and willing to help us."

Because of various reasons, they had to move the conference from an overseas location just six months before the scheduled dates, "... unheard of with a conference this size," Lightfoot says. "We were somewhat concerned that people would not be willing to travel to Calgary because it does not have a well-established reputation as a conference destination. It turned out that many people had never been to Calgary, although most had heard of it. Thus, many people were curious and wanted to attend to see the city, and our actual attendance exceeded our expectations."

Once there, the attendees at the Calgary conference had a great time. "They really got into the culture of the city and appreciated the warmth and hospitality

gary Downtown, Hotel Arts, and The Westin Calgary.

The Calgary Stampede is a world-class, year-round gathering place in the heart of the city. As a not-for-profit community organization that celebrates western heritage, the venue's meetings and conventions team has more than 100 event staff, including caterers and A/V professionals, who work with plan-

**"Canadian hosts were easy to work with, as were all the local and provincial agencies we worked with."**

Jay Lightfoot  
Executive Officer, Conference Management Services Inc.



ners. Some of the event spaces on the Stampede grounds include the Nutrien Western Event Centre, a 150,000-sf agriculture showcase and competition venue; the Big Four Roadhouse, named for the four businessmen who founded the Stampede; the BMO Centre, the size of six football fields; and the historic Stampede Corral.

Last year, the IEEE International Conference on Acoustics, Speech and Signal Processing gathered in Calgary, the third time this organization met in Canada. Previous Canadian conferences were held in Vancouver and Montréal. "We chose Calgary for several reasons. The combination of suitable facilities for a large confer-

Macdonald, a city landmark since 1915, overlooks the North Saskatchewan River Valley, offers diverse meeting space, an outdoor terrace and is a four-minute walk to the Convention Centre.

The Edmonton EXPO Centre offers more than 522,000 sf, the largest meeting venue west of Toronto. The building integrates high-tech features with flexible, indoor space for trade and consumer shows, conferences and special events. It provides four exhibit halls, a grand ballroom and a conference and catering service.

## CALGARY

Calgary offers more than 13,000 hotel rooms, providing planners with a wide choice of accommodations, and several MICE properties in the downtown core, conveniently located near the Calgary TELUS Convention Centre (CTCC).

The CTCC connects directly to three hotels totaling more than 1,000 rooms by using the city's "Calgary +15" — a series of enclosed and connected walkways 15 feet above the ground. It is the world's most extensive pedestrian skywalk network, includes 59 bridges and links dozens of buildings in downtown Calgary, including the CTCC.

Three downtown hotels are connected to the CTCC via this unique above-ground walkway: Hyatt Regency Calgary, Calgary Marriott Downtown Hotel and the Fairmont Palliser. Other hotels that can accommodate groups in the city include Delta Hotels Cal-

of the people," Lightfoot says. "The food at the Convention Centre was also very good, and the conference was a great success. One small note, the conference banquet normally has about 350-400 attendees, and in Calgary we held the banquet at the Calgary Stampede's 'Big Four Roadhouse' venue, where we 'white hatted' the attendees by giving out about 750 traditional cowboy hats to the banquet attendees, a record attendance for our conference banquet."

Calgary is listed high on The New York Times Best Places to Visit in the 2019 list, and meeting planners will be adding the city's new Central Library, a spectacularly designed building to their off-site venue list. It is situated next to Studio Bell, home to the National Music Centre museum and performance space.

## VANCOUVER

Last year Vancouver experienced one of the busiest MICE events year in its history, with 32 large citywide meetings on the books, and dozens of smaller conferences and events. The Vancouver Convention Centre (VCC) is the city's premier exhibition and conventions facility. With its harbor-front location and stunning views, the VCC offers a beautiful setting, and the addition of the West Building in 2009, with its 6-acre Living Green Roof, enabled the VCC to reach 466,500 sf of meeting, exhibition and ballroom space. Along with the VCC's East Building, located in Canada Place, which it shares with a cruise ship terminal and the Pan Pacific Vancouver hotel, the VCC is the world's first double LEED Platinum certified convention center.

Vancouver has a number of established hotels that association and convention groups enjoy, including the Hyatt Regency Vancouver, Pan Pacific, Fairmont Waterfront, Four Seasons Hotel Vancouver, Fairmont Pacific Rim, Rosewood Hotel Georgia and the Shangri-La Hotel, Vancouver. The residual effects of the 2010 Winter Olympics, along with the city's booming cruise ship industry and exceptional cuisine, as well as its "green" reputation, has resulted in Vancouver hosting a record of more than 10 million visitors annually, with Vancouver



International Airport (YVR) adding more than 20 new routes.

"Our conference held earlier this year used more than 10 hotels in Vancouver," says Leslie Zeck, CMP, CMM, HMCC, director of meetings for the International & American Associations for Dental Research. "We have been well-supported by the CVB and hotel partners in our advance planning, including assistance in setting up our site visits, marketing support, information about customs and border control, and off-site venue options. We view this collaboration by the local city suppliers and venues as a true partnership while we worked in concert to organize an international convention for more than

**"I cannot think of any other convention destination that checks all of the boxes like Vancouver does."**

Leslie Zeck, CMP, CMM, HMCC  
Director of Meetings  
International & American Associations  
for Dental Research



6,000 delegates who attended from across the globe.

Regarding Vancouver's many amenities and the ease of communicating with her local contacts, Zeck continues, "I cannot think of any other convention destination that checks all of the boxes like Vancouver does. After planning meetings all across the globe, I can say that organizing a meeting in

The Vancouver Convention Centre is the city's premier exhibition and conventions facility. Its harbor-front location offers stunning views of the city.

Vancouver allows everyone to breathe easier. Using the city as a destination is the formula for success."

Zeck chose the Fairmont Waterfront as the convention headquarters hotel, along with other properties for attendee accommodations.

The newest accommodations and meeting venues in Vancouver can be found at Parq Vancouver, a mixed-use downtown "resort destination" project built to meet LEED gold standards. Located next to BC Place sports arena, Parq's three towers also contain the JW Marriott Parq Vancouver and the DOUGLAS, Autograph Collection hotel. Both hotels provide guests with convenient access to JW Marriott Parq Vancouver's wide range of entertainment amenities, including downtown's only casino, eight restaurants and lounges, a 30,000-sf, tree-filled elevated park located six floors above street level, a Spa by JW and a modern fitness center. JW Marriott Parq Vancouver also includes an additional 60,000 sf of meeting and event space, 13 boardrooms and the 15,000-sf Parq Grand Ballroom, the largest hotel ballroom in Vancouver. | AC&F |



# CELEBRATING THE BEST OF THE BEST



ARIA Resort & Casino

The deserving winners of the 2019 Distinctive Achievement Awards presented by *Association Conventions & Facilities* magazine have met or exceeded the high standards that association meeting planners demand today. Many of the more than 20,500 meeting professionals who read *Association Conventions & Facilities* cast their ballot for the hotels, resorts and convention and visitors bureaus that successfully accommodated their association meetings during the past year.



The Broadmoor



Omni Dallas Hotel

## THE DISTINCTIVE ACHIEVEMENT AWARD WINNERS WERE JUDGED ON THE FOLLOWING CRITERIA:

### CONVENTION & VISITORS BUREAUS

- Superior Service and Support
- Top-Notch Assistance with Promotion, Accommodations and Site Inspections
- High Level of Assistance to Identify and Liaise with Suppliers, Vendors, Facilities, Venues and Local Government
- Outstanding Communication and First-Rate Website

### HOTELS AND RESORTS

- Superior Service Standards
- Excellent Accommodations and Meeting Facilities
- Reasonable Room Rates and Labor Costs
- Advanced Technological Capabilities and First-Rate Website
- Environmentally Friendly Policies
- Paramount Safety and Security

You will find profiles of several of the best of the best on the following pages. | **AC&F** |



Rosen Shingle Creek



Omni Nashville Hotel



Wynn Las Vegas

## 2019 DISTINCTIVE ACHIEVEMENT AWARD WINNERS

### CONVENTION & VISITORS BUREAUS

- Atlanta Convention & Visitors Bureau**  
Atlanta, GA
- Choose Chicago**  
Chicago, IL
- Destination Cleveland**  
Cleveland, OH
- Destination DC**  
Washington, DC
- Discover Puerto Rico**  
San Juan, Puerto Rico
- Experience Columbus**  
Columbus, OH
- Explore St. Louis**  
St. Louis, MO
- Greater Houston Convention and Visitors Bureau**  
Houston, TX
- Greater Miami Convention & Visitors Bureau**  
Miami, FL
- Las Vegas Convention and Visitors Authority**  
Las Vegas, NV
- Long Beach Area Convention & Visitors Bureau**  
Long Beach, CA
- Los Angeles Tourism & Convention Board**  
Los Angeles, CA
- Nashville Convention & Visitors Corp.**  
Nashville, TN
- New Orleans & Company**  
New Orleans, LA
- NYC & Company**  
New York, NY
- Philadelphia Convention & Visitors Bureau**  
Philadelphia, PA
- San Diego Tourism Authority**  
San Diego, CA
- San Francisco Travel Association**  
San Francisco, CA
- Travel Portland**  
Portland, OR
- Visit Anaheim**  
Anaheim, CA
- Visit Austin**  
Austin, TX
- VISIT DENVER**  
Denver, CO
- Detroit Metro Convention & Visitors Bureau**  
Detroit, MI
- Visit Fort Worth**  
Fort Worth, TX
- Visit Indy**  
Indianapolis, IN
- Visit Irving Texas**  
Irving, TX
- Visit Orlando**  
Orlando, FL
- Visit Seattle**  
Seattle, WA
- Visit Tucson**  
Tucson, AZ

### CONVENTION CENTERS

- Cobo Center**  
Detroit, Michigan
- Las Vegas Convention Center**  
Las Vegas, NV
- Miami Beach Convention Center**  
Miami Beach, FL
- Music City Center**  
Nashville, TN
- New Orleans Ernest N. Morial Convention Center**  
New Orleans, LA
- Orange County Convention Center**  
Orlando, FL
- Walter E. Washington Convention Center**  
Washington, DC

### HOTELS AND RESORTS

- ARIA Resort & Casino**  
Las Vegas, NV
- The Broadmoor**  
Colorado Springs, CO
- The Diplomat Beach Resort Hollywood, Curio Collection by Hilton**  
Hollywood, FL
- Gaylord National Resort & Convention Center**  
National Harbor, MD
- Gaylord Opryland Resort & Convention Center**  
Nashville, TN
- Gaylord Palms Resort & Convention Center**  
Kissimmee, FL
- Gaylord Texan Resort & Convention Center**  
Grapevine, TX
- Hilton Anatole**  
Dallas, TX
- Hilton Chicago**  
Chicago, IL
- Hyatt Regency Chicago**  
Chicago, IL
- New York Hilton Midtown**  
New York, NY
- New York Marriott Marquis**  
New York, NY
- Omni Dallas Hotel**  
Dallas, TX
- Omni Nashville Hotel**  
Nashville, TN
- Orlando World Center Marriott**  
Orlando, FL
- Rosen Shingle Creek**  
Orlando, FL
- Sheraton Grand Chicago**  
Chicago, IL
- Sheraton New Orleans Hotel**  
New Orleans, LA
- South Point Hotel, Casino and Spa**  
Las Vegas, NV
- Walt Disney World Swan and Dolphin Resort**  
Lake Buena Vista, FL
- Wynn Las Vegas**  
Las Vegas, NV



# CELEBRATING THE BEST OF THE BEST

## ORANGE COUNTY CONVENTION CENTER



**T**he Orange County Convention Center (OCCC) — the second-largest convention facility in North America — is an international destination. But its mission is much more local: Infuse the Central Florida economy with business opportunities. The OCCC provides approximately \$3 billion in local economic impact annually, thanks to the 1.4 million guests who attend its yearly average of 200 meetings, conferences, banquets, conventions and trade shows.

**Facts & Features**  
Connected Total Guest Rooms: **5,192**  
Convention Center **FYI:** World-class convention and trade-show space combined with its culture of service, hospitality, family friendly entertainment and famous theme parks nearby make the OCCC ideal for your next trade show.

Building. After more than 35 years, The Center of Hospitality continues to showcase the leadership and exemplary service that has made the destination one of the most popular in the world, not only for tourism, but for conventions and trade shows.

Exhibitors, attendees and meeting professionals alike acclaim the attention to detail provided by the OCCC and variety of facilities and services, including over 7 million sf of combined meeting

space, sophisticated amenities and world-class, on-site business and service providers.

The OCCC is consistently rated top-tier, with incredible spaces, including the multipurpose Tangerine Ballroom, the Valencia Ballroom, network space in the Destination Lounge, the Sunburst signature meeting room with an outdoor terrace and the Honeybell and Hamlin board rooms.

Since 1983, the OCCC has undergone five expansions and countless Capital Improvement Projects. The fruits of that labor can be seen throughout the facility's campus. Today, the OCCC is ushering in a new era of growth and expansion with the approval to begin contract negotiations on the architectural and engineering design services for a \$605 million expansion, the Convention Way Grand Concourse and the Multipurpose Venue. The expansion will bring total exhibit space at the OCCC to 2.3 million sf.

The Multipurpose Venue brings an additional 200,000 sf of contiguous exhibit space in the South Building. Overall, the South Building will have 675,141 sf of exhibit space and a grand total of 1.15 million sf of exhibit space. The Multipurpose Venue will also incorporate connectivity between the North and South concourses.

The Convention Way Grand Concourse expansion includes an additional 60,000 sf of meeting space and an 80,000-sf ballroom along with a new entry to the North-South Building along Convention Way.

These projects will vastly improve the OCCC's North-South Building, create greater flexibility in booking events, and will keep the OCCC at the forefront of the convention industry. The expected completion of both projects is late 2023. | **AC&F** |

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COMING **2023**



## BUILDING FOR TOMORROW. SERVING YOU TODAY.

As part of a \$605 million Capital Improvement Plan, the Orange County Convention Center will welcome 200,000 square feet of new, flexible and column-free multipurpose venue. This expansion will also include our Convention Way Grand Concourse, an enclosed connection between the North and South concourses, with additional meeting and ballroom space, as well as a new grand entry to the North-South building.

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# CELEBRATING THE BEST OF THE BEST

## MIAMI BEACH CONVENTION CENTER



**F**rom perfect weather, pristine beaches and top-rated attractions to world-class hotels, dining and a thriving arts and culture scene, Miami has everything you need to host the meeting or convention of your dreams.

Few places in the world deliver such a thriving mix of international sophistication, natural tropical beauty and authentic cultural diversity as Miami.

### Facts & Features

Guest Rooms: **55,394**

Hotels/Resorts: **426**

Meeting Space: **1.2**

million sf

Convention Center **FYI:**

The Miami Beach

Convention Center will

soon be home to a

connecting **800-room**

headquarter hotel.

flavors of Little Havana or the Caribbean heritage of Little Haiti. Stroll through the street art district of Wynwood or the charming bohemian neighborhood of Coconut Grove. If you seek a more cosmopolitan edge, the bustling epicenter of Downtown Miami, with its gleaming skyscrapers, sweeping waterfront bay views, and endless shopping and dining possibilities, is the perfect neighborhood for you.

And no journey to Miami is complete without exploring iconic

South Beach, where the eclectic lifestyles and colorful art deco architecture come to life. Along with the stunning beauty of its beaches and colorful buildings, South Beach also offers a diverse mix of world-class boutiques, galleries and stores.

A vibrant and dynamic global hub, Miami continues to reinvent itself with incredible hotels, meeting spaces and enhanced infrastructure. Among the creative venue options is the reimagined Miami Beach Convention Center, featuring nearly 500,000 sf of versatile exhibition space and more than 180,000 sf of meeting space, including a 60,000-sf grand ballroom, a 20,000-sf junior ballroom, and 84 breakout rooms. The space also features a terrace where attendees can step out, mingle, and soak up the city's signature sunshine and ocean breeze.

The Greater Miami Convention & Visitors Bureau is excited to announce that the Miami Beach Convention Center will soon be home to a connecting 800-room headquarter hotel, making Miami the ultimate convenient meeting destination.

Miami is also easy to get to, with Miami International Airport (MIA) offering more than 400 flights from around the globe daily and serving more airlines than any other airport in the U.S. If you are already in Florida, try the Brightline, a stylish express train service that provides intercity travel connecting Miami, Fort Lauderdale and West Palm Beach, with service between Miami and Orlando coming soon.

These are just a few of the memorable and magical highlights awaiting any meeting planner considering Miami. Visit [MiamiMeetings.com](http://MiamiMeetings.com) to learn more.

| AC&F |

701 Brickell Avenue, Suite 2700, Miami, FL 33131

Contact: Barry Moskowitz, Vice President, Sales and Industry Relations | Tel: 305-539-3042 | Fax: 305-530-4276

[barry@gmcbv.com](mailto:barry@gmcbv.com) | [www.MiamiMeetings.com](http://www.MiamiMeetings.com)

# WORLD



# CLASS



# CITY

The Miami Beach Convention Center is a dynamic, vibrant business destination offering 500,000 square feet of flexible exhibit space, 84 breakout rooms, and a 60,000 square foot ballroom. Coming soon, this stunning venue will be enhanced with an 800-room headquarter hotel, making Miami Beach the ultimate meetings destination.

## FIRST CLASS CENTER.



GREATER MIAMI CONVENTION & VISITORS BUREAU

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[MiamiMeetings.com](http://MiamiMeetings.com)



ERICKSON

Sheraton Phoenix Downtown appointed **Jon Erickson** as director of sales and marketing. Erickson brings to his new role nearly eight years of experience in hotel operations.

Omni Orlando Resort at ChampionsGate named **Jen Isham** senior sales manager. Previously, she was the director of strategic accounts at Experient Inc.

Destination South Meetings + Events promoted **Taylor Levy** to associate director of sales. While Levy has been with the team for just over a year, she quickly became an asset to cultivate and grow relationships throughout Atlanta.

Connecticut Convention & Sports Bureau named **Taia Lionetti** manager of convention services and e-marketing. Lionetti will work with meeting planners and event managers who are considering or have booked conventions or conferences in the northern part of Connecticut.

Visit San Jose, the official destination marketing organization for the City of San Jose, along with the Team San Jose Board of Directors, named **Matthew Martinucci** vice president of sales and destination services. Martinucci will lead the sales department at Visit San Jose.

Hilton Hotels San Francisco Union Square appointed **Cindy Ramesh** complex director of sales and marketing. For the past 10 years, she has been at Hilton San Francisco Union Square as the director of sales, and since 2015 also has been responsible for the complex, which includes the addition of the Parc 55 San Francisco - a Hilton Hotel.

The Broadmoor in Colorado Springs named **Curtis Robison** to fill a new role at the resort: director of national sales - trade shows and exhibits. The position was created due to the resort's new 125,000+ sf of exhibition space and associated breakout rooms, which is slated to debut in spring of 2020.

NYC & Company welcomed **Katrina Stewart** as regional director, national accounts, Midwest, for convention development. Stewart will be responsible for selling New York City as a premier meetings and conventions destination in the Midwest region for groups requiring 151 rooms and above on peak.

Visit Winston-Salem named **Romona Williams** as new national sales manager. Williams is responsible for booking faith-based, multicultural and association meetings and conventions. She brings 15 years of hospitality industry experience to her new role.

Nemacolin Woodlands Resort, in southwestern Pennsylvania, appointed **Carrie Yauch** new director of sales. In her new role, Yauch will lead revenue-driving efforts utilizing her 13 years of experience in the hospitality industry.

| AC&F |



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