

WWW.TheMeetingMagazines.com

CORPORATE & INCENTIVE TRAVEL

THE MAGAZINE FOR GLOBAL MEETING AND INCENTIVE TRAVEL PLANNERS

2020 STATE OF THE INDUSTRY



FROM LEFT: MIKE WATERMAN, CHIEF SALES OFFICER, VISIT ORLANDO;
CATHERINE CHAULET, PRESIDENT AND CEO, GLOBAL DMC PARTNERS; JENNIFER PATINO, DMCP, CEO, HOSTS GLOBAL;
ANNETTE GREGG, CMM, SENIOR VICE PRESIDENT, EXPERIENCE, MEETING PROFESSIONALS INTERNATIONAL

**CLICK HERE TO
VIEW / DOWNLOAD
TABLET VERSION**

**TECHNOLOGY, INCLUSION,
SUSTAINABILITY AND
EMERGING DESTINATIONS
KEEP THE MEETINGS FIELD
ON SOLID GROUND**

**ALSO
IN THIS
ISSUE**

DEALING
WITH **ETHICAL
DILEMMAS**

**ENTERTAINMENT
TIPS**

DECIDING
YOUR **NEXT
DESTINATION**

**ACCESSIBLE
EVENTS**

LOUISIANA

CHICAGO

OHIO

IN THIS ISSUE //

TAKE A NEW LOOK AT THIS HISTORIC CITY.

**NEW
ORLEANS
& COMPANY**

Our long-time strengths of world class assets and walkability, combined with our profound commitment to you to forge a partnership that drives unparalleled success in producing an energizing experience for your executives, exhibitors, and attendees have been reimagined.

The result...meetings that exceed your attendance, financial and business goals and imprint memories of experiences talked about for years.

Choosing New Orleans is a win for you! Call us at 877-366-7425 or visit NewOrleans.com/Meetings to book.

features

- 16** **2020 State of the Industry**
Technology, Inclusion, Sustainability and Emerging Destinations Keep the Meetings Field on Solid Ground
BY CHRISTINE LOOMIS
- 24** **Dealing With Dilemmas**
Potential Ethical Challenges Lurk Around Every Corner for Meeting Planners
BY DEREK REVERON
- 30** **Hot Acts**
Strategies for Landing Big Names and Avoiding Big Booking Fees
BY PATRICK SIMMS

- 36** **Destination Decisions**
There is Much to Consider When Trying to Pick the Perfect Destination
BY MAURA KELLER
- 42** **Planning Accessible Events**
Experts Share Ideas to Make Events More Accessible for the Disabled
BY SOPHIA BENNETT

destinations

- 48** **Destination: Louisiana**
New Orleans Remains on Top, While Baton Rouge and Shreveport-Bossier Create Their Own Niches
BY DEREK REVERON
- 54** **Chicago Shines**
The 'Windy City' Offers Many Unique Venues Attendees Are Sure to Enjoy
BY DEREK REVERON
- 60** **Ohio Has It All**
Offers Attendees State-of-the-Art Facilities With Small-Town Charm
BY SOPHIA BENNETT

departments

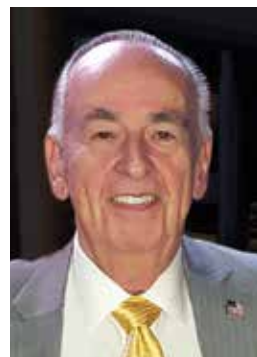
- 4** **Publisher's Message**
- 6** **News & Notes**
- 7** **Tips & Trends**
- 9** **Snapshots**
- 12** **Perspective**
5 Things Keeping Today's DMO CEOs Awake at Night
BY CHRIS FAIR
- 14** **Perspective**
Embracing Second-Tier Cities
BY MICHELLE KENNEDY
- 66** **People on the Move**



Looking Ahead With Optimism and Growth

While meeting professionals have expressed concern about economic uncertainty and possible political change, the overall opinion looking ahead is optimistic. They say the global economic and political instability has not deterred them as they continue to be more upbeat than in the past.

Most planners agree that meeting space will increase in some destinations, however it may not be enough to lower rates, especially in popular, major-tier cities. Some planners feel that hotel and meeting space in recent years has not kept up with demand in major-tier cities, and as a result have been favoring second-tier destinations. These second-tier destinations may be more affordable, however travel time may increase.



Budgets, always a major concern for planners, will probably increase slightly, however they may not keep up with rising costs. What that may mean is doing more with less. Going forward in 2020, planners also will continue to strive to improve memorable experiences for attendees.

Last, but not least, meeting planners claim that rates and more challenging contract negotiations have the biggest impact on fulfilling their jobs to produce successful and memorable meetings. See our exclusive report on the State of the Industry beginning on Page 16.

How are meeting planners dealing with potential ethical challenges? Sometimes the right ethical choice is clear and sometimes it isn't. Sometimes ethically correct decisions can appear to be unethical or inappropriate. Facing ethical challenges as part of a planner's function includes getting such offers that making an ethical decision can be confusing and tempting even for well-intentioned meeting professionals. Dealing with dilemmas, with comments from seasoned meeting professionals begins on Page 24.

Check out other useful feature stories in this issue, focusing on event entertainment, making events more accessible for the disabled and, to help you choose your next meeting check out destination reports on New Orleans and other Louisiana destinations, Chicago and great choices in Ohio.

Overall, we can all look forward to a great year ahead.

Harvey Grotsky

Harvey Grotsky
Publisher

FOLLOW US ON SOCIAL MEDIA



@corpincntvtrvl



linkedin.com/company/corporateincentivetravel



facebook.com/corpinctravel



@corpincntvtrvl

www.TheMeetingMagazines.com CORPORATE & INCENTIVE TRAVEL

A COASTAL COMMUNICATIONS CORPORATION PUBLICATION

PUBLISHER/EDITOR-IN-CHIEF
Harvey Grotsky

harvey.grotsky@themeetingmagazines.com

CREATIVE DIRECTOR
Kristin Bjornsen

kristin.bjornsen@themeetingmagazines.com

MANAGING EDITOR
Henry Fitzgerald

henry.fitzgerald@themeetingmagazines.com

EDITORIAL COORDINATOR
Heather Ballis

heather.ballis@themeetingmagazines.com

DIGITAL CONTENT COORDINATOR
Christine Smith

christine.smith@themeetingmagazines.com

CONTRIBUTING EDITORS

**Sophia Bennett
Sara Churchville
Cynthia Dial
Maura Keller
Christine Loomis
Derek Reveron
Patrick Simms
David Swanson**

PRESIDENT & CEO
Harvey Grotsky

VICE PRESIDENT OF OPERATIONS
David Middlebrook

david.middlebrook@themeetingmagazines.com

ADVERTISING SALES OFFICES

2700 N. Military Trail, Suite 120
Boca Raton, FL 33431-6394
561-989-0600 Fax: 561-989-9509
advertising@themeetingmagazines.com

REGIONAL MANAGER, TEXAS/
OKLAHOMA/ARKANSAS/LOUISIANA

Tim Kedzuch
630-728-9204
tim.kedzuch@themeetingmagazines.com

Corporate & Incentive Travel (USPS 716-450) is published monthly by Coastal Communications Corporation, 2700 North Military Trail — Suite 120, Boca Raton, FL 33431-6394; 561-989-0600. Single copies \$12.00 U.S.A. only. Yearly subscription price is \$125.00 in the U.S.A.; Canada and foreign is \$165.00. Back copies \$14.00 U.S.A. only. Distributed without charge to qualified personnel. Periodicals Postage Paid at Boca Raton, FL, and additional mailing offices. POSTMASTER: Please send address changes to Corporate & Incentive Travel, 2700 North Military Trail — Suite 120, Boca Raton, FL 33431-6394. Nothing contained in this publication shall constitute an endorsement by Coastal Communications Corporation (Corporate & Incentive Travel), and the publication disclaims any liability with respect to the use of or reliance on any such information. The information contained in this publication is in no way to be construed as a recommendation by C&IT of any industry standard, or as a recommendation of any kind to be adopted, by or to be binding upon, any corporate/incentive travel planner or agent. Reproduction of any portion of this publication by any means is strictly forbidden. Editorial contributions must be accompanied by return postage and will be handled with reasonable care. However, the publisher assumes no responsibility for return of unsolicited photographs or manuscripts. Subscribers: Send subscription inquiries and address changes to: Circulation Department, Corporate & Incentive Travel, 2700 North Military Trail — Suite 120, Boca Raton, FL 33431-6394. Provide old and new addresses including zip codes. Enclose address label from most recent issue and please allow five weeks for the change to become effective. Printed in U.S.A. © 2019

site



SO MANY WAYS TO MEET, ALL IN ONE MAGNIFICENT PLACE.



Only The Broadmoor offers so many distinct venues and experiences of all sizes and types. From impressive trade shows at our new Exhibit Hall to executive dinners. From grand reception halls to eclectic lakeside cocktails at sunset. From state-of-the-art meeting rooms to secluded brainstorming sessions at Cloud Camp 3,000 feet above the main campus. You'll find all of it and more within our over 315,000 square feet of meeting space, connected by a thread of quality, service and meticulous attention to detail. Visit broadmoor.com and contact us today to explore the wonderful possibilities.

THE
BROADMOOR



855.502.2081

BROADMOOR.COM

1 LAKE AVENUE, COLORADO SPRINGS, CO 80906

OPENINGS

Hard Rock Hotel & Casino Sacramento at Fire Mountain Opens

SACRAMENTO, CA — Hard Rock Hotel & Casino Sacramento at Fire Mountain made its highly anticipated debut recently with a legendary Hard Rock Guitar Smash. Festivities and entertainment included a star-studded performance from British rock icons, Def Leppard at Toyota Amphitheatre. The ceremony also included the donation of \$100,000 from the Hard Rock Heals Foundation and the Hard Rock Hotel & Casino Sacramento at Fire Mountain to the Enterprise Community Foundation, the charitable entity of the Enterprise Rancheria Tribe. With these celebrations, Hard Rock Hotel & Ca-



Courtesy Photo

sino Sacramento at Fire Mountain is the go-to destination in Northern California, from its incredible gaming facility to the worldly selection of dining options and luxurious brand amenities. “We are extremely excited

that Hard Rock Hotel & Casino Sacramento at Fire Mountain is able to open its doors to locals, travelers and lovers of the Hard Rock brand,” says Jon Lucas, chief operating officer of Hard Rock International.

FORECASTS

Incentive Research Foundation Releases Positive Industry Outlook for 2020

WASHINGTON, DC — The Incentive Research Foundation’s (IRF) Industry Outlook for 2020: Merchandise, Gift Card, and Event Gifting reports high levels of economic net optimism and a positive outlook for 2020. The new study provides useful insights and benchmarks on non-cash reward types, average spend, and how incentive programs are being administered. The IRF surveyed 377 industry professionals, including corporate, supplier, and third party segments, tracking key metrics over 10 years.

SUSTAINABILITY

MGM Resorts Announces Bold Vision for Social Impact and Sustainability

LAS VEGAS, NV — MGM Resorts International recently announced an evolved vision for social impact and sustainability, including setting goals to bolster diversity and inclusion, donate millions of meals and continue offering scholarship and educational opportunities for employees and their families. Through a commitment to be “Focused on What Matters: Embracing Humanity and Protecting the Planet,” MGM Resorts is committing to creating a more sustainable future.

EXPANSIONS

BENCHMARK Adds Manor Vail Lodge to Its Colorado Portfolio

THE WOODLANDS (HOUSTON), TX — BENCHMARK, a global hospitality company, is expanding its Colorado portfolio with the addition of Manor Vail Lodge. The year-round resort is set in the heart of the storied village, at the foot of Vail Mountain’s Golden Peak and is now a part of Benchmark’s prestigious Gemstone

Collection. It joins Benchmark’s Garden of the Gods Resort and Club in Colorado Springs and Tivoli Lodge, also located in Vail. Manor Vail Lodge provides the perfect backdrop for meetings, retreats and special events. With 25,000 sf of flexible meeting and special event space, the resort offers impeccably equipped boardrooms and meeting rooms in its dedicated conference center. The numerous activities at the resort and in and around Vail are ideal for both recreation and team-building activities.

CRUISE NEWS

Carnival to Base Four Ships in Galveston, TX

GALVESTON, TX — The Carnival Radiance will be deployed in Galveston in the spring of 2021, putting four Carnival Cruise Line ships in the Texas port year-round for the first time. The Radiance is the current Carnival Victory, a ship that will undergo a \$200 million, bow-to-stern renovation and name change. In Galveston, the Radiance will be joined by the Carnival Breeze, currently sailing from Port Canaveral, as well as the Carnival Dream and Carnival Vista. Together, the ships will carry an estimated 900,000 passengers a year. Starting in May 2021, the Radiance will alternate five-day Galveston cruises to Mexico with three different, nine-day itineraries as well as a pair of eight-port, 14-day Carnival Journeys cruises. The 7-year-old, 3,690-passenger Carnival Breeze will become the largest ship to operate a short cruise program from Galveston. The Carnival Dream will shift to six- and eight-day Caribbean voyages while Carnival Vista will continue with seven-day Caribbean cruises.

TECHNOLOGY

The Diplomat Beach Resort’s Tech Savvy Trends for Meetings and Events

HOLLYWOOD, FL — The Diplomat Beach Resort in Hollywood, Florida is the largest convention hotel south of Orlando, and their sales team has highlighted three of their top tech-savvy trends to implement for meeting and events in the upcoming year. With over 200,000 sf of flexible indoor and outdoor function space for up to 5,000 guest attendees, and special promotions, planners can choose from a wide-variety of enticing, customizable offerings.

TIPS + TRENDS

Global DMC Partners Releases 2019 Destination Rankings and 2020 Hot List



Hungarian Tourism Agency

WASHINGTON, DC — Global DMC Partners, the largest global network of independently owned destination management companies (DMCs) and creative event experts, recently announced their 2019 Global Destination Index. Based on data collected from nearly 7,000 meeting and incentive programs in the more than 500 destinations that Global DMC Partners represents, the index presents the most popular meeting and incentive destinations around the world for 2019 and global markets that are already trending for 2020. The implications of these findings reach far beyond the travel and meeting industries, which bring millions of people, as well as jobs and dollars, to destinations around the world.

“Companies that focus on socially responsible initiatives through their events and incentives directly contribute to supporting local growth, reducing poverty, protecting the environment and promoting peace in their host destination,” explained Catherine Chaulet, president and CEO, Global DMC Partners. “During a time when travel is more accessible to the masses than ever before, we have a responsibility to inform and educate in order to alleviate overtourism and undertourism. The meetings and events industry must bring awareness to emerging or secondary destinations while showcasing ‘hidden gems’ within popular markets to avoid already overly toured areas.”

To compile the index, Global DMC Partners evaluated leads received from their global client base of meeting and event planners organizing meetings, conferences, incentives and business events around the world in 2019 and 2020. The data was separated into two

categories, meetings and incentives, to highlight how cities attract different types of groups. “Because our client database is global, we are able to see some surprising destinations that show up on either list or on both and provide valuable insights,” Chaulet explained.

Top 2019 Global Destinations for Meetings & Conferences:

— Paris	— Copenhagen
— Chicago	— San Francisco
— Budapest	— Orlando
— Barcelona	— Washington, D.C.
— Prague	— Las Vegas

Top 2019 Global Destinations for Incentives:

— Costa Rica	— Budapest
— France	— Lisbon
— Bahamas	— Prague
— Italy	— Cancun
— Miami	— Aruba

2020 Meeting & Conference Destination Hot List

— San Diego	— Tokyo
— Nashville	— Washington, D.C.
— Singapore	— Austin
— Las Vegas	— Bahamas
— New Orleans	— Phoenix

2020 Incentive Destination Hot List

— Greece	— Iceland
— Bahamas	— New York
— Costa Rica	— Italy
— Budapest	— Switzerland
— Aruba	— Puerto Rico

— Global DMC Partners,
globaldmcpartners.com

CONSTRUCTION

Caesars Forum Construction and Business Announce Milestones

LAS VEGAS, NV — Caesars Entertainment recently announced more than 1 million room nights and more than \$390 million is contracted for meetings and events at CAESARS FORUM through 2020 and beyond. CAESARS FORUM, the new, 550,000-sf conference facility in Las Vegas, is set to open early 2020, is 70% complete, with crews working 24 hours a day, seven days a week to finish the project. In the last 20 months, more than 125 contracts for meetings and events have been signed. More than 75% of the business booked occurs within



CAESARS FORUM is 70% complete and is set to open in early 2020.

the first three years of operations and more than 70% represent new business to Caesars Entertainment. Meetings and events industry leaders ConferenceDirect, Cvent, HelmsBriscoe, Meeting Professionals International

and Professional Convention Management Association have selected CAESARS FORUM for their annual meetings. It will carry a LEED silver certification and feature the world's two largest pillar-less ballrooms.

EXPANSIONS

The Broadmoor's New Exhibition Hall Slated for 2020 Opening

COLORADO SPRINGS, CO — The Broadmoor in Colorado Springs will soon offer the most luxurious trade show and exhibition hall experience in the industry, as the only Forbes Five-Star, AAA Five-Diamond awarded hotel in the country to operate a large, on-site exhibition space. When the newly-announced 110,000+ sf of exhibition space and associated breakout rooms debut in spring of 2020, the resort will be able to provide the highest level of service large conference or trade show attendees can receive. The Broadmoor has long been lauded as Colorado Springs', and one of Colorado's top destination for events, whether for an executive board meeting or a multiday conference for 5,000+ attendees.

RECOGNITIONS

Cincinnati USA CVB's Jason Dunn Elected NCBMP Chair

CINCINNATI, OH — For the first time, the National Coalition of Black Meeting Professionals (NCBMP), formally National Coalition of Black Meeting Planners, has selected a board chairman who is not a convention planner to lead the organization. Jason Dunn, group vice president of Diversity Sales and Inclusion at the Cincinnati USA Convention & Visitors Bureau, was elected Board chairman during the recent 36th Annual NCBMP Convention in New Orleans. Before accepting the role of chair, Dunn served as the Board's vice president.



Dunn

UPGRADES

San Francisco Marriott Marquis Reveals Refreshed Design

SAN FRANCISCO, CA — The iconic San Francisco Marriott Marquis has recently unveiled an extensive transformation, tailored to facilitating the most inspiring environment. Celebrating one of the world's most innovative cities, the newly designed Marriott Marquis seamlessly connects travelers to San Francisco's

culture of thoughtful design and creative brilliance. One of the largest hotels in San Francisco, the redesigned Marriott Marquis continues to be a staple in the skyline, celebrating the spirit of the city through its visually impactful interior and exterior. The newly renovated guest rooms and suites have been thoughtfully redesigned to meet any traveler's needs. Stunning views of the city are paired with multipurpose work surfaces that allow guests to choose exactly how they seek to work and live.

SNAPSHOTS //



Photo by David Knapp



Courtesy of Ottawa Tourism



Photo by Jenni Girtman

1) Attendees at GBTA's WINIT Gala 2019. **2)** Karen Williams, Louisville Tourism president and CEO and Greg Fischer, Louisville mayor, present the ROSE Award to Patrick Rhodes, a security guard at The Seelbach Hilton Louisville. **3)** Officials from Visit Orlando and Orange County mark the opening of World Travel Market London. **4)** Ottawa Tourism hosts clients at Mary Poppins event also in London. **5)** Nick Fugaro, left, Vivastream CEO and Zac Balson, Vivastream CTO, awarded at B2B Marketing Expo. **6)** Atlanta Hospitality Hall of Fame inductees: L-R, Ed Bastian, Delta Air Lines CEO; Leona Barr-Davenport, Atlanta Business League president and CEO; Renee Perdue Rucker, SecurAmerica security director; and Gary P. Stokan, Peach Bowl Inc. president and CEO.



Summit, the additional facility at WSCC
Rendering: LMN Architects

INSPIRING



**A CITY KNOWN FOR INSPIRING
NEW IDEAS IS CREATING
SPACE FOR YOURS**

Last year downtown Seattle hotel supply increased by twenty percent, with another five percent expected this year. In 2022, we will open Summit, the additional facility at Washington State Convention Center. Having two buildings – Arch and Summit – provides meeting planners with more space to host and inspire attendees.

Learn more about placing your meeting in Seattle at visitseattle.org/meetings.

IMPRESSIVE



Summit, the additional facility at WSCC
Rendering: LMN Architects

Hyatt Regency Seattle which opened December, 2018
Credit: Hyatt Regency Seattle

VISIT
seattle

 Washington State
Convention Center

5 Things Keeping Today's DMO CEOs Awake at Night

BY CHRIS FAIR

The job of leading a Destination Marketing Organization (DMO) can seem quite glamorous at times. As the chief salesperson for the city, you have the opportunity to travel to many different places in the markets you're seeking to attract. Back home, you lead a team of people charged with highlighting and promoting the best places, people and experiences your city has to offer. What's not to like?

But just as the role of the DMO is evolving, so too is the role of the CEO within each of these organizations.

I recently had the opportunity to facilitate a panel discussion between the CEOs of the DMOs in Los Angeles, San Francisco, San Diego and Aspen to pick their brains as to what they saw as the key issues and opportunities for their destinations in the years to come.

Debbie Braun, Aspen Chamber Resort Association; Ernest Wooden Jr., Los Angeles Tourism & Convention Board; Joe D'Alessandro, San Francisco Convention & Visitors Bureau; and Joe Terzi, San Diego Tourism Authority all knew each other well, so the conversation was convivial and entertaining. But it was also quite serious when it came to discussing the new and emerging issues each of their destinations are facing. Based on our conversation, it seems there are five key themes foremost for these CEOs into the future.

1. Growth

While hitting each year's goals for hotel bookings has always been top of mind for every CEO of a DMO, rising visitor numbers since the Great Recession are beginning to create a series of new issues as some of these destinations begin to contemplate whether there's a limit to how many visitors each destination can accommodate.

"We've enjoyed 10 years of growth, and there are now

250,000 more people coming into San Francisco a day than five years ago — this includes people who visit; who work. We're at capacity," D'Alessandro says. "Some of our neighborhoods are feeling the crush of visitors."

While some of this growth is the result of a secular shift in consumer spending from purchasing goods to experiences such as travel, much of it is simply a numbers game — both demographic and economic — that is driving exponential growth in the absolute number of people traveling around the world.

"Demographics of the world are changing. When you look at the number of people traveling today versus 10 years ago, it's double. In the next 10 years, it will double again," Wooden explains. "Today we have 30,000 airplane seats a week, up from three flights a week five years ago."

2. Development

As a result of the rise in the number of visitors and projected increases, DMOs are no longer just thinking about sales and marketing, but how to develop their destinations — making sure that this growth and the economic benefits that come with it don't come at the expense of quality of life for local residents.

"Whereas, 10 years ago it was website and visitor brochures, I spend more time at city hall talking about land-use code or talking with businesses than I do on marketing or websites or visitor guides," Braun says.

In Los Angeles, our team at Resonance is working with the city and L.A. Tourism to create a Tourism Master Plan that not only identifies infrastructure and product development needs to accommodate future growth, but how and who should manage and fund them.

"In the past, all of these collective issues around zoning, tourism investment and protection of our assets would find their way to my desk. And we were not ready to act

on them. So L.A. created the City Tourism Development Department, charged with protecting the hard assets of tourism," Wooden says. "This tourism development group helps us think about how we are going to evolve and protect the assets through a master plan."

3. Housing & Homelessness

More heads creates a need for more beds. It's the growth of leisure travel that led to the rise of Airbnb. And while Airbnb has affected the average daily rate achieved by hotels in some markets due to reduced compression in peak periods, the rise of home-sharing has been even more disruptive to the rental housing market as residences that historically would have been rented long-term to people like those who work in the tourism industry are now being rented short-term to visitors.

In Aspen, like many resort destinations, policies were created and investments made years ago to create workforce housing. What no one in Aspen anticipated was that people would continue to own and live in this staff housing after they retired.

"Workforce housing is a massive issue for ensuring there are candidates to fill jobs. We are learning that rentals may be better than the ownership that we allowed hospitality workers to obtain in the past. The retired workers are staying in place, exacerbating the problem," Braun says. "But we also look at housing to be helped by transit, as well as other perks."

And while the affordability and availability of housing is important to every destination, the CEOs of large cities like San Francisco and L.A. are even more concerned about homelessness.

"We have 55,000 people living on the streets in L.A. It's the No. 1 non-tourism related issue for us," Wooden says. "Our core reasons for why homelessness exists are often wrong. Sure there are so many macro issues — elements of drugs or crime or young people running away — but most

of these people are one paycheck away from losing a roof over their head. And once they're out, it's almost impossible to get back in. For us in tourism, it's starting to bleed into areas that we never before saw — in and around the convention center for instance. There is seldom crime, but it's the No. 1 threat to tourism."

4. Advocacy

With issues such as over tourism and homelessness becoming top of mind for DMO CEOs today, probably the most significant change they've experienced in their roles is the need to become more engaged politically.

"Years ago we played less political roles and were focused on membership and advertising and marketing," Terzi explains. "Today, you're missing an opportunity if you're not politically active. You have to be the person who is repping not just the hotel industry, but the entire tourism industry. It's critical for your council and mayor to know how valuable tourism is."

5. Labor

The last issue on these CEO's minds may not be a crisis today, but with the working-age population expected to shrink significantly in the next decade

as boomers age into retirement, attracting talent to work in each of these destinations may turn out to be one of the most important functions of a DMO a decade from now.

With billions being invested and a significant new number of hotels coming online in L.A. in the next few years, Wooden is well aware of the need for workforce development in his city.

"Today we employ 575,000 people in tourism. We project by 2028 that number will be close to a million. We're working with the city's workforce development group to find and identify candidates for all these upcoming jobs."

Of course we discussed a range of other issues and opportunities as well, but based on our conversation and work with other destinations around the world, I believe these five issues are going to be a priority for destinations large and small in the years to come.

C&IT

"When you look at the number of people traveling
**TODAY VERSUS
10 YEARS AGO,**
it's double. In the next 10 years, it will double again."



San Francisco Travel Association

In San Francisco, 250,000 more people a day are coming into the city than five years ago.



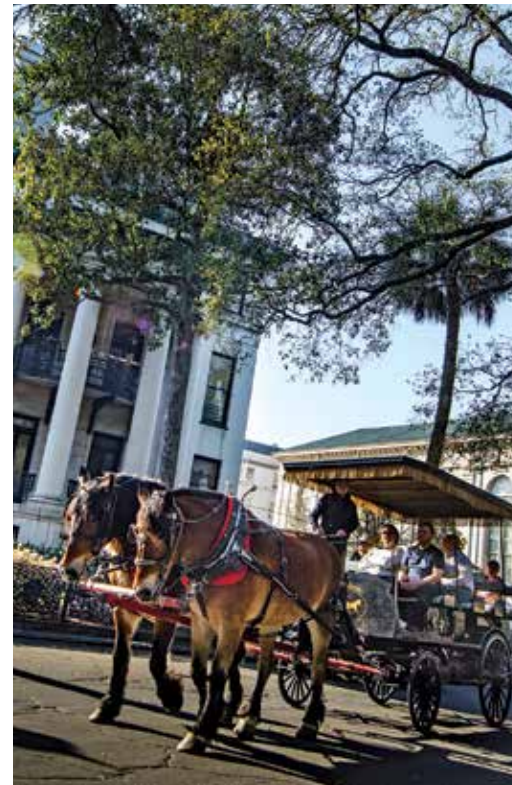
CHRIS FAIR | PRESIDENT & CEO, RESONANCE CONSULTANCY

A futurist, marketing strategist and facilitator, Fair has married his marketing expertise with futures methodologies to help clients envision and create development strategies, plans and brands that shape the future of places, communities, cities and regions around the world. As president of Resonance Consultancy, Fair leads a team that has completed more than 120 visioning, strategy, planning and branding projects for developers and destinations in more than 40 destinations. Visit Resonance.com.

Embracing Second-Tier Cities

BY MICHELLE KENNEDY

L-R: New Orleans, Louisiana;
Asheville, North Carolina;
and Savannah, Georgia



It is widely known that second-tier destinations have always been a popular choice for certain markets. With better availability, a wider geographic footprint and lower rates, planners are drawn to these sometimes-overlooked destinations. However, in the last year or so, second- and third-tier markets, also referred to as non-urban spaces, are getting the attention they deserve. And that newfound popular-

ity is expanding, as several planners in this space continue to give second-tier destinations a second look — no pun intended.

The importance of second- and third-tier cities and non-urban destinations was one of several items highlighted in the recently distributed in SITE's Bangkok Manifesto, aimed at establishing a vibrant dialogue within incentive travel membership and the business world at large. Many industry leaders came together, including Tony

Lorenz, former PRA Business Events CEO, to express their thoughts on the nature, purpose and direction of incentive travel within the ever-changing business world.

As shared in the manifesto, our industry must encourage more second- and third-tier cities and non-urban destinations to embrace incentive travel as part of their business mix, highlighting that success in our business is not dependent on massive infrastructure or investment.

These smaller, consumer-centric destinations deliver authentic, unrivaled content, places and one-of-a-kind experiences at an attractive price point. Just last year, interest in second- and third-tier destinations, relative to first-tier destinations, was up a remarkable 91%.

With the clear trend of a business and leisure travel mashup well underway, niche destinations readily stand apart.

PRA recently published an article on the benefits of secondary markets and the relentless focus on client experience. From business and messaging objectives forward, these markets leverage the heart of a small destination's personality to deliver on its promise. Let's revisit those now.

Significant Savings Means Enhanced Experiences

One main reason meeting planners are gravitating toward second- and third-tier cities and non-urban destinations is because of the noticeable lower price point. Instead of putting the full meeting budget toward accommodations, more money can be used for exciting team-building activities, off-site restaurant choices and even local corporate social responsibility (CSR) programs. Not only are prices a comparative bargain in smaller cities, but the venues are first-rate. Some of the finest hotels are in these markets. And the restaurants, special events and entertainment opportunities rival those in major cities. For many groups though, it is not just about costs. Participants yearn for new and unique bucket-list experiences, many times available only in smaller markets.

“Participants yearn for new and unique **BUCKET-LIST EXPERIENCES**, many times available only in smaller markets.”

A private Derby Days experience at Churchill Downs or a second line parade on the streets of New Orleans can only happen in these destinations.

Individual Attention

Smaller markets are working harder than ever to present themselves as worthy alternatives. They are proactive when it comes to attracting business, because they know they need to work to get the client's attention. For many groups entering these destinations, they are the focal point, as opposed to a destination that has major conventions happening every week. That personalized attention is an added incentive.

For example, second- and third-tier cities and non-urban destinations can work with planners directly to provide attendees with perks and benefits — from room enhancements and airport transfers to specialized destination experiences. These smaller destinations offer possibilities that enhance the overall guest experience.

A Sense of Place

With a higher sense of place and more local experiences, second- and third-tier cities and non-urban destinations provide attendees that missing piece. Signature restaurants run by city locals, neighborhood breweries, off-the-grid activities and unique accommodations crafted to enhance the destination experience are just some of the ways these cities make their mark on the meetings industry.

From customized, high-end experiences and individual perks, to significant cost savings, what second- and third-tier cities and non-urban destinations lack in size, they make up for in convenience, hospitality and local charm. Now, more than ever, there is an increasing acknowledgment across the industry on the importance of offering a wide portfolio of destination options for every type of client and budget.

C&IT



MICHELLE KENNEDY

Michelle Kennedy oversees integrated marketing for global Business Event Management firm, PRA, serving over 100 destinations worldwide. Kennedy brings more than 20 years of industry experience, having held head marketing positions with several Fortune 500 companies and leading brands.

2020 STATE OF THE INDUSTRY

Technology, Inclusion, Sustainability and Emerging Destinations Keep the Meetings Field on Solid Ground

BY CHRISTINE LOOMIS

By most accounts the meetings industry is in good shape. Could it be better? Sure. Could it be worse? Absolutely. Each sector of the industry experiences things in slightly different ways, but our insider experts agree that 2019 has been a good year — and 2020 could be even better.

THE MEASURE OF SUCCESS

Success can be measured in multiple ways. One interesting takeaway from the 2019 Incentive Travel Industry Index, a joint project of SITE, the Incentive Research Foundation and Financial & Insurance Conference Professionals (FICP), is that ‘soft-power objectives’ such as engagement, relationship building, authenticity, reputation and the importance of human touch are significantly more important than financial stability and value.

Some of our experts pointed to inclusion as one such measure. Fred Dixon, president and CEO of NYC & Company, offered a destination perspective, noting that delegates with disabilities are being better served, and inclusion of the LGBTQ community in the meeting and event space has increased.

Hotelier Ulrich Samietz, general manager of Grand Hyatt Baha Mar, lists creative differentiation, embracing change and building bridges as success. “From my point of view, this has always been the most captivating element of the travel industry — bringing people and cul-

tures of the world together to celebrate stepping outside of everyday routines.”

But ‘hard’ variables matter, too, including financial success. Richard Harper, an executive vice president at Helms-Briscoe, paints a positive picture in that regard. “The overall meetings economy continues to be robust, which is fueling significant economic output and job growth in the sector.”

Tech is at the forefront of success as well. Annette Gregg, CMM, MBA, senior vice president, Experience, at MPI, thinks more innovative event tech has been a plus for the industry.

Hotelier Axel Gasser, vice president and general manager at SLS Baha Mar, sees success in, “utilizing technology, particularly apps, to provide additional convenience to guests who spend a lot of time on their mobile phones. This includes the ability to check-in using an app and controlling the television from your phone instead of using the hotel remote.” He also thinks increased use of social media is a success. “For us, that means fully embracing social media and placing an emphasis on providing relevant content on the official hotel platforms as well as encouraging guests to post.” Given that the hotel’s target audience is millennials (1980-1994), it’s not surprising that tech and social media are successes. “This works well for SLS Baha Mar as this is a core demo for us.”

But some, including Samietz, caution against heavy reliance on tech. “With each passing year, we become more dependent on technology and screen time to accomplish

daily tasks. While embracing tools that make our guests’ and colleagues’ lives better is essential to success, the travel industry remains at its core a business of providing real-life connections.”

In the DMC realm, Jennifer Patino, DMCP, CEO of Hosts Global, thinks the industry and destinations themselves benefit when new destinations come to the forefront. “Emerging destinations,” she says, “are receiving good business opportunities.

They’re good for incentive award winners, too. Catherine Chaulet, president and CEO of Global DMC Partners, counts “the discovery of new or lesser-known destinations for incentive trips” among the year’s successes. She also puts “great advances in environmental considerations at meetings” in the plus column.

Brian Stevens, CEO of ConferenceDirect, describes the industry overall as “flat,” but says it’s a positive that Marriott International managed to so quickly integrate Starwood Hotels into its systems. Additionally, he says, “It’s likely that the collaboration of Hilton, Marriott, IHG and Accor investing in Group360, a meeting space booking engine, will be positive for both buyers and suppliers.”

Mike Waterman, chief sales officer for Visit Orlando, points out that regardless of the year’s successes, it’s important to look to the future. “We’ve had a strong year and 2020 is looking positive as well, but we’re always looking ahead to make sure Orlando remains the country’s top meetings destination. Our convention center is expanding significantly, our airport is adding an entirely new terminal that will increase airlift, and we’re in the

“Many predict that hotels may stop paying commissions altogether.”

The biggest disruption is a movement toward ‘community as a classroom.’

Emerging destinations are receiving good business opportunities.”



ANNETTE GREGG, CMM
Sr. Vice President, Experience
Meeting Professionals International



FRED DIXON
President and CEO
NYC & Company



JENNIFER PATINO, DMCP
CEO
Hosts Global

Tahira Endean, CMP, DES, CED, head of Events at SITE, agrees, noting that sustainability also continued to be at the forefront in meetings in 2019 and will be for 2020.

Dixon has a unique perspective on that aspect of meetings. “Another major success of the industry is its ongoing effort to make meetings, incentives, conventions and events green. In September, we were proud to again collaborate with The Climate Group — the international nonprofit focused on accelerating climate action — in coordination with the United Nations and the city of New York — to welcome Climate Week NYC.”

middle of the biggest two-year period for hotel expansion in Orlando’s history.”

On another front, Chaulet and Patino say navigating through all of the data privacy and General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) requirements and achieving compliance is yet another check in the 2019 success box.

Mike Fiber, CEO at PRA, offers this: “The industry’s single-greatest success has been the realization from the broader business community as to the importance of business events and their role in driving performance on an individual and personal basis.”

RIISING TO THE CHALLENGES

What, then, have been the biggest disruptors in 2019? Not surprisingly, many are out of the control of planners and stakeholders. “Social unrest and bankruptcies in the tourism and airline industries, as well as climate changes impacting travel patterns were the greatest disruptors this year,” Chaulet says.

Patino points to global economic uncertainty. “The biggest disruptor/game changer this year is continued economic uncertainty with the trade situation impacting the economic outlook. While I believe demand remains strong for meetings, economics and geopolitical issues are impacting the global meetings industry more regionally for a variety of reasons.”

Gregg emphasizes two issues: “Although the U.S. economy is growing, trade sanctions and isolationism have caused some fears in foreign travel to the U.S. and the strong U.S. economy makes it a more expensive destination for inbound travel. Additionally, the reduction in hotel commission payouts are affecting a huge sector of our industry — independent business owners. With hotel chains consolidating and wielding more power, many predict that hotels may stop paying commissions altogether.”

In Fiber’s view, “Consolidation in virtually every sector of the industry is under way, overdue and executed with varying degrees of success. We’re still in relatively early stages into a fully consolidated industry, so there’s time and room to deliver stronger execution over time.”

Then there’s climate change. “From natural disasters to man-made messes, we’re seeing this every day, globally,” Endean says. “From kindergarten classes to the highest level of government, this is on the agenda and we’re going to see this continue to affect the travel and event industry in both perception and day-to-day actions.”

Taking action is increasingly critical. “Meeting planners and leisure travelers are more aware of their environmental impact than ever before,” Samietz says. “Groups want to make a positive impact on destinations they experience

From natural disasters to man-made messes, we’re seeing this every day, globally.



TAHIRA ENDEAN, CMP, DES, CED
Head of Events
SITE

in a meaningful way and leave it in better condition than when they arrived.”

In Dixon’s view, “The biggest disruption is a movement toward ‘community as a classroom.’ While there will always be a place for traditional, large-scale event spaces, we increasingly see planners getting attendees outside of ballrooms and into communities.”

While Waterman admits technology can be a disruptor, he says there’s another way to view it. “We’re constantly connected to our devices, but that’s where experiential meetings come into play. Instead of fighting against technology, planners can view it as a way to create more engagement, whether it be through unique venues, one-of-a-kind experiences or even a corporate social responsibility event.”

WILL THE DISRUPTORS CHANGE?

Most agree that they’ll be largely the same with added challenges to negotiate come 2020. “Do we have

[A slight slowdown for meetings] may be offset with more last-minute bookings in 2020.



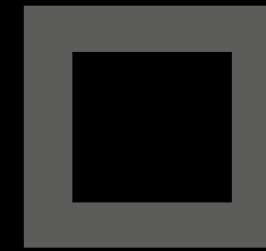
CATHERINE CHAULET
President and CEO
Global DMC Partners

other disruptors?” Endean asks. “Of course, from #MeToo to Brexit, strikes in world capitals and the rise of artificial intelligence across industries. All of these will continue to play out. The issues will always evolve, but ultimately, we have one planet and it requires our attention.”

One unknown is how the political scene will play out domestically. “We’ll see the same challenges, but planning is a calculated risk because of the U.S. elections,” Gregg notes. “More mergers and growth among multinational companies will require global travel and convergence via meetings; however, businesses may not commit until they see how the political environment stabilizes.”

Regardless of the challenges, Samietz says the fundamentals of providing value to clients and guests will remain the same. “However,” he adds, “developing creative new ways to delight our guests’ senses will remain a priority, which will bring innovative differences as well.”

M E E T T H E F U T U R E



CAESARS FORUM



**\$375 MILLION CONFERENCE CENTER OPENING
IN 2020 IN LAS VEGAS**

CAESARSFORUM.com | CaesarsMeansBusiness.com



CAESARS

CAESARS FORUM

Harrah's

NOBU HOTEL

THE CROWMELL

Flamingo

THE LINQ

Paris

planet hollywood

WSOP

BALLY'S

RISE

HARVEYS

HORSESHOE

ROADHOUSE

CAESARS INTERNATIONAL

BUDGET ANALYTICS

One question is whether meeting budgets increased in 2019. They have. But the degree to which they've risen is up for debate. Gregg, for example, labels it as "slight growth."

Patino says there have been modest increases. "But we're seeing more incentive program qualifiers, which decreases the per-person budget. And we're seeing more 'all-inclusive' solutions being booked for incentives as a strategy to contain spend. I think we'll continue with a slight growth cycle for the next 12-18 months. Our forecasts are stronger going into 2020 than they were for 2019."

At PRA, budgets are definitely larger, Fiber notes. "And the year ahead looks very robust in our business, more so than at any time in our history at PRA," he says. "Our clients are looking for increasingly experiential events, which is a positive for PRA given our solution set."

Dixon agrees the 2019 economy has been strong. "Domestically, the strong economy has generated additional revenue, which allows for more flexibility as in-house and third-party planners for Fortune 500 entities select ambitious destinations and exercise creativity in venue and hotel selection while implementing immersive and experiential programming."

One trend crystallizing related to budgets, Chaulet says, is "programs that spend more per participant but reduce the number of attendees for a higher, yet more focused spend." She also says she's seeing "some increases in budgets due to higher costs of service," adding that 2020 budgets look similar to 2019.

Citing data from the 2019 Incentive Travel Industry Index, Endean says, "Yes, overall budgets seem to be slightly on the rise, keeping up with slightly rising costs. And this trend appears to be continuing into 2022."

Samietz also points to the Index. "Having had the pleasure of attending this year's Incentive Research Foundation annual meeting in Miami, the data suggests that a majority of organizations are budgeting higher. Grand Hyatt Baha Mar has seen that trend

We're in the middle of the biggest two-year period for hotel expansion in Orlando's history.



MIKE WATERMAN
Chief Sales Officer
Visit Orlando

as well in 2019, with larger groups, higher attendance and more RFP opportunities among incentives programs than the year prior."

Glasser echoes that. "Given that SLS Baha Mar is an international destination and most of our groups are incentive, the budgets are pretty strong."

BOOKING FLUCTUATIONS

Everyone seems to agree that booking windows continue to shrink, which Endean calls the new norm.

That said, the uptick in last-minute bookings may be a positive according to Chaulet. "Currently we're experiencing a slight slowdown for meetings; however, this may be offset with more last-minute bookings in 2020."

Samietz also sees both sides of the bookings coin. "We've seen great demand for advance bookings as well as higher-than-expected demand for events planned inside of 90 days."

Then there's the question of how these shorter windows impact the way groups and planners work. "Groups

that typically come to SLS are a bit nimbler, can make decisions quickly and turn programs around within a few weeks or months," Glasser says. "The typical booking is coming within 24 months, but there are a number of groups that book more last minute — within a few months of meeting."

Destinations may experience these fluctuations differently, depending on a variety of factors. "Speaking for New York City, the meetings and conventions sector remains strong, consistently drawing in excess of 6 million delegates to the five boroughs each year," Dixon says. "As such, this remains a stable and integral segment of our overall visitor demographic, which shows no signs of slowing down. In fact, new business is already being booked for the highly anticipated Javits Center expansion, set to open in 2021. Naturally, booking windows vary dependent on convention size and season. If a citywide or large self-contained conference requires ample accommodations and high-capacity venues, they book further out to select from a wider variety of options. However, the booking window continues to shorten for smaller events."

INCENTIVES ON THE RISE

"The 2019 Travel Industry Index shows incentives on the rise," Endean says. "This makes sense given the current economics we're seeing globally and a recognition that when it comes to an informed talent pool seeking experiences as the No. 1 luxury, incentives remain a top recognition, recruitment and retention tool."

Samietz, Glasser and Patino all agree incentive programs are increasing overall. However, there are shifts in the programs themselves. "As travelers become savvier and more millennials qualify for incentives," Gregg says, "there's a demand for more unique destinations and experiential experiences."

The focus, Chaulet notes, "is on more impactful individual experiences, which are offset by smaller attendee numbers. Higher attention is given to the qualification process for the incentive trip."

MEETINGS & INCENTIVES Are Better in The Bahamas

NON-STOP FLIGHTS TO NASSAU PARADISE ISLAND – JUST A FEW HOURS FROM MOST MAJOR U.S. CITIES



For a corporate meeting, trade show or incentive trip, what could be a better reward than the crystal-clear turquoise waters and white sand beaches of Nassau Paradise Island. From executive boardrooms to 50,000 square foot ballrooms, for any size group and function, you'll find the ideal facilities for a successful meeting at one of these unique member properties:

- Atlantis, Paradise Island
- British Colonial Hilton, Nassau
- Comfort Suites Paradise Island
- Grand Hyatt Baha Mar
- Meliá Nassau Beach - All Inclusive
- The Ocean Club, A Four Seasons Resort, Bahamas
- Rosewood Baha Mar
- Sandals Royal Bahamian
- SLS Baha Mar

For additional information contact:

George Brice

Vice President Group Sales

Nassau Paradise Island Promotion Board

George@nipib.com

Or visit us online at

NassauParadiseland.com



NassauParadiseland.com

Fiber sees the same. “Incentive programs are rising, with more emphasis on experiences delivered and meaningful promises around sustainability and social responsibility being kept by the organizers.”

In New York, Dixon is getting client feedback that more programs will remain stateside as opposed to going abroad. “Furthermore, corporations are increasingly rewarding top performers with urban escapes, often choosing major global hubs with a relevant knowledge economy. In New York City’s five boroughs,” he says, “multiple industries are experiencing thriving economies. This gives incentive winners access to world-renowned industry experts in their fields and unparalleled opportunities to make meaningful connections.”

DEMOGRAPHICS

There’s no question that meeting demographics have changed as more millennials and now Gen Xers (1965-1979) and Gen Zers (1995-2015) enter into the equation and baby boomers (1944-1964) remain in the workforce. This year has been one of multiple generations attending programs and events with varying expectations.

“Multiple generations attending many of our events will continue,” Endean says, “particularly as we see four-generation workplaces with incentives for both sales and service opening more doors to program inclusion. It’s no longer a simple demographic understanding we need; rather, understanding the shifting values and alignments we need within our programs is key.”

Younger attendees drive many of these shifts. “They’re looking for brands they can believe in, authenticity and making a positive world change,” Gregg says. “The brand experiences at conferences need to reflect these ethics — walking the talk. The younger participant is also looking for learning environments that are more participatory, diverse, sustainable and high-tech/connected.”

Patino thinks demographics haven’t changed as much as the level

There are a number of groups that book more last minute — within a few months of meeting.



AXEL GASSER

Vice President and General Manager
SLS Baha Mar

of engagement. “As we see a greater number of young attendees, their interests and values are driving wellness programming and we’re seeing greater interest in sustainability initiatives. The audience we serve today requires greater creativity, understanding of the meeting objectives and measurement on the return on investment. Business as usual will result in compression; we’ve got to see through our clients’ and their stakeholders’ eyes, delivering on their unique goals or challenges to provide a ‘value add’ partnership with our clients.”

Dixon sees conference attendees today as younger, more diverse, increasingly tech savvy, focused on sustainability and interested in local culture. “Experiential events will only grow in frequency and prominence to match their expectations. It will be interesting to see how the industry adapts to accommodate this rapidly growing desire for innovative location and venue selection year-over-year.”

But Fiber has a different view. “Personally, I don’t reference demographics as much as mindset,” he says. “Everyone, regardless of age, gender and other demographic definitions has higher expectations around experience design and responsible delivery of business events.”

THE BOTTOM LINE

In the end, the state of the industry as 2019 comes to a close is mostly very positive.

Stevens does see one dark cloud, but also the silver lining. “We’ll have a hotel recession in the next three quarters,” he predicts, “but it will last a shorter amount of time than the last downturn.”

And in spite of persistent worries that face-to-face meetings will disappear, many experts, including Harper, believe they’ll remain a priority. “More and more organizations are seeing the tangible benefits of face-to-face meetings, which is a key driver for our industry,” he says.

Waterman agrees. “Nothing can replace the value of face-to-face meetings. No matter how technology evolves, there’s an inherent value in face-to-face meetings that cannot be replicated with virtual events. Whether it’s an educational event, an incentive meeting or closing a deal, in-person conferences will continue to have a significant impact on business.”

That’s Patino’s view as well. “Face-to-face meetings and incentives remain a key component of global business growth as well as employee engagement. And while we’re aware of economic/market uncertainties, we’re confident that the meetings industry will continue to successfully weather the challenges for industry growth into 2020.”

Looking back at 2019 and ahead to 2020 yields the same result: The meetings industry is on solid ground. But that doesn’t mean it’s time to sit back.

“We’re part of one of the largest, most influential and most far-reaching industries in the world,” Harper says. “It’s important that we all work together to ensure the industry and its impact continue to grow.” **C&IT**



ELINOR STEELE, VP Global Communications,
Tupperware Brand Corporation

WHEN TUPPERWARE WORKED WITH DISNEY FOR THEIR EVENT...

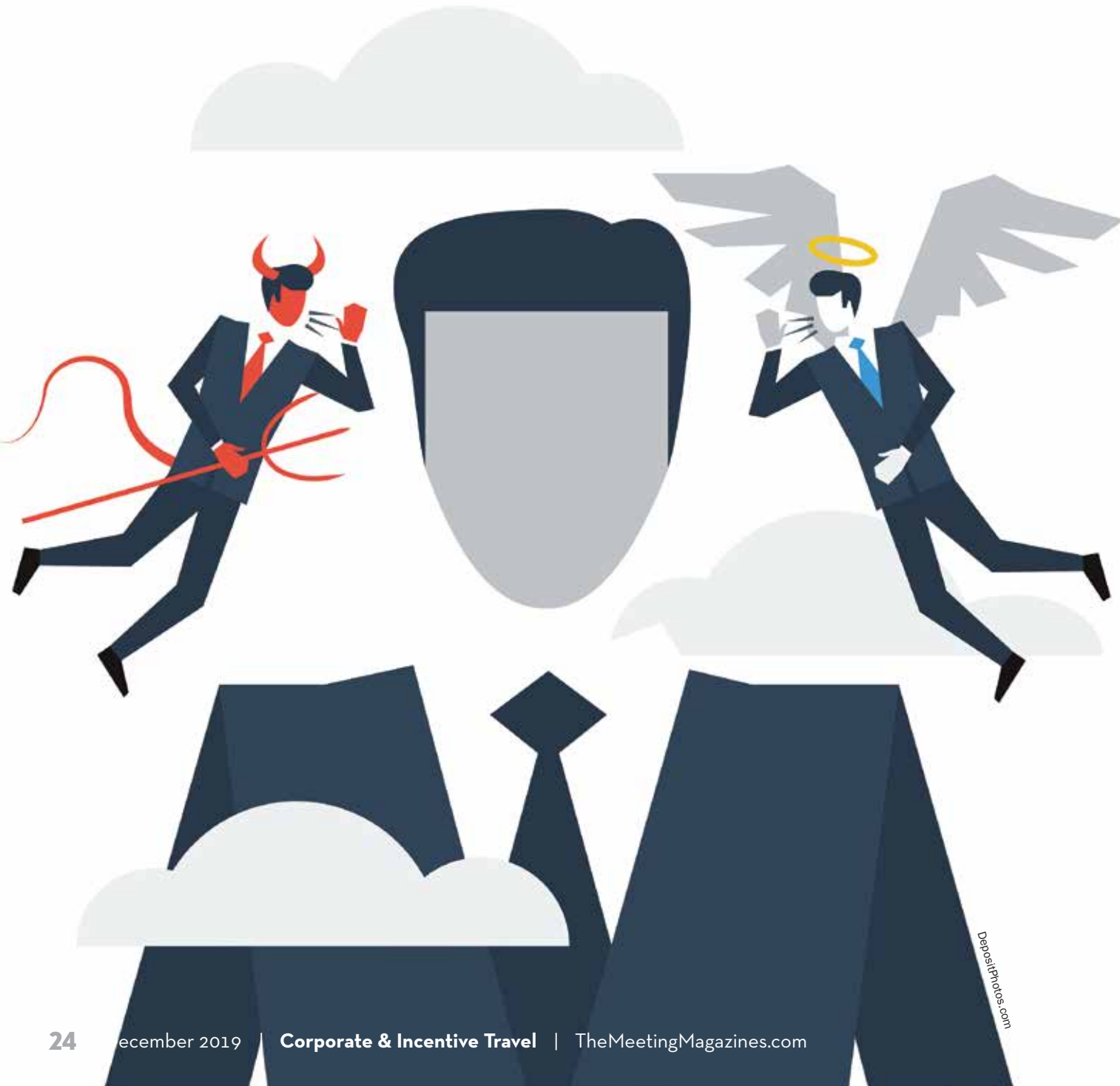
Elinor Steele’s goal was clear, but not easy: she wanted to inspire her guests above all else.

She says that Disney made this happen, creating an event that reignited passion for the company and its culture—a passion that the people took with them when they left. That’s what happens when you work with Disney: your story isn’t simply told. It’s experienced, by every single guest. If this is the kind of inspiration you’re looking for, just use our imagination.

Disney
MEETINGS
&Events
Use Our Imagination

disneymeetingsandevents.com
321-939-7129

DEALING WITH DILEMMAS



Potential Ethical Challenges Lurk Around Every Corner for Meeting Planners

BY DEREK REVERON

Take this quick ethics quiz: A destination that you have no foreseeable interest in booking offers an exotic familiarization (FAM) trip. Do you go?

The host hotel offers to put its reward points on your personal credit card. Do you accept the points or ask that they be given to the organization?

A supplier offers free tickets to attractions, a free hotel room and a five-star dinner for a relative or friend not involved in making site decisions. Your response?

You receive a 'swag bag' that includes an iPad. Do you keep it?

The vast majority of planners make the right decisions when facing tempting and challenging ethical situations. However, some planners cross the line.

Julie Schmidt, CMP, CMM, founder and CEO of Minneapolis-based Lithium Logistics Group, cites an example: "I know of one case where the person in charge of trade show space gave a vendor a free booth for a pair of diamond earrings, and it resulted in her departure from the organization," Schmidt says. "She was caught doing it by a person in the organization who told me about it when I started working with them."

Experts say planners face ethical challenges as part of their jobs. Planners get offered so much so

often that making an ethical decision can be confusing and tempting even for the most seasoned and well-intentioned planners.

Sometimes the right ethical choice is clear, sometimes it isn't. Sometimes an ethically correct decision can appear unethical or inappropriate. Sometimes a supplier's incentive looks like a bribe and sometimes it is a bribe.

Christy Lamagna, CMP, CMM, CTSM, a visionary, entrepreneur, master strategist and author with New Jersey-based Strategic Meetings & Events, cites another example: "I know a corporate planner who bills charges on-site to her credit card as I do. One day, I complimented her on her beautiful bag, and she said it was a gift from a supplier. I said, 'They

bought you a handbag?' She said, 'They don't know it, but they did.'"

Lamagna continues, "Her attitude was — she deserves it, because she works very hard. I also have seen people bury a Rolex watch in a meeting budget, because the budget was so huge and easy enough to do."

Even veteran ethical planners can be tempted. "Regardless of how moral and ethical you are, everybody is human, and there is always the nobody-will-ever-know factor just like nobody knows how hard we really work," Lamagna says.

"Word-of-mouth spreads very quickly for the bad and the good."

CATHERINE CHAULET
President and CEO
Global DMC Partners



Planners who either willfully or unknowingly act unethically can damage their reputations and careers.

According to Catherine Chaulet, president and CEO of Washington, D.C.-based Global DMC Partners, “Let’s face it. This industry is extremely connected. Word-of-mouth spreads very quickly for the bad and the good. A planner showcasing fairness and ethical behavior is highly appreciated and everyone knows them. Unethical ones are also known in the industry. Interestingly enough, they usually do not last in their positions.”

The best approach to unethical temptation — is not yielding to it. That was Chaulet’s approach to an incident she encountered.

“We had a situation a while back where a corporate planner would award a program to the company who would offer her the best personal gifts,” Chaulet says. “It was a very challenging situation as these programs were quite consequential. But we simply decided not to play on that basis and agreed to possibly lose this piece of business.”

Chaulet continues, “We wanted to be selected only on the basis of being the best. In the end, we won the program and the planner was ultimately let go by the company. Most of the time these behaviors are identified within the corporations, who act swiftly and promptly. They do not want to be associated with such unethical behaviors.”

Sometimes planners must determine when, for the good of a client, to take an action that appears unethical, but isn’t.

Says Lamagna, “I found out once that there is a line you need to cross. As a third-party planner, I was in Tahiti on a visit with two other people at a hotel we had chosen for a top-notch incentive program. I was walking through the spa and I was asking some people about their experience. They were polite, but nobody gave a direct answer.”

She adds, “After that, I took advantage of a free spa day for myself and the two others. We agreed that it was the worst massage we ever had. One might think the free spa day was a boondoggle. But had we done that before choosing the property, we would have had a better program.”

The lesson: “Ever since then, whenever I do an incentive trip,

“I also have seen people bury a Rolex watch in a meeting budget because the budget was so huge and easy enough to do.”

CHRISTY LAMAGNA, CMP, CMM, CTSM
Visionary, Entrepreneur, Master Strategist and Author, Strategic Meetings & Events



somebody on our team gets a free facial and massage to check out the spa,” Lamagna says.

Other planners may have handled the previous situation differently. There are several shades of ethical gray in planning and even veterans don’t see ethical issues precisely the same way. That’s especially true regarding an issue that is rarely discussed openly in the meeting industry — appropriating intellectual property.

‘Borrowing’ and then slightly altering creative ideas is common among planners, DMCs and others in the industry. However, actively

soliciting and then copying ideas is another matter.

According to Chaulet, “Our industry is constantly looking for new, more creative ideas and planners bear huge pressure to seek innovative ideas all the time. But a very delicate situation is taking ideas from companies you ultimately will not work with.”

She adds, “Reaching out to third parties and getting ideas through their proposals is a wonderful way to expand creativity. However, it may lead to very sensitive situations where an idea in a proposal is perfect, yet the company proposing it might not be chosen for the meeting, but the planner uses the idea anyway.”

Chaulet offers the following solution: “Be honest with the other party and explain that the idea is terrific, and you wish to replicate it, but will do so separately,” Chaulet says. “Through discussions, find mutually agreeable ways to fairly compensate for access to the idea. Most third parties will appreciate such an ethical approach.”

Handling intellectual property illustrates that it can sometimes be tricky for planners to be ethical while making the best decisions for clients.



Lamagna offers the following advice: “What I preach is that it’s never about you,” Lamagna says. “If what you are doing is, at the end of the day, in the best interests of the client, then gray areas become much easier to decide.”

She continues, “Do you need to try that fishing excursion that a client wants? You might because you need to know if the DMC recommending it understands your vision of what you need. Will saying ‘Yes’ to an iPad help the client? Not if I keep it.”

There are also instances in which planners face temptation to be unethical to cover mistakes without anybody knowing. Lamagna provides an example from very early in her nearly 30-year career.

“When I was brand new at planning, as a third-party planner, I forgot to add the taxes and service charges to the budget for a large event, and the budget had already been approved,” Lamagna says. “It occurred to me that I could hide at least half of the mistake by moving stuff around and cutting the budget. Instead, I called the client, apologized, and volunteered to eat my fee and make up the difference. But the client decided not to make me pay for it.”

Factors that contribute to ethical lapses among planners include a lack of education on the topic, ethically gray areas and a lack of uniform, defined and enforceable code of ethics, although some companies and individual organizations have their own policies.

For example, the Convention Industry Council (CIC) has an ethics code for planners who earn its Certified Meeting Professional program. The CIC’s CMP Code of Ethics asks planners to avoid using one’s “position for undue personal gain and to promptly disclose to appropriate parties all potential and actual conflicts of interest.” The code’s disciplinary policy can result in certification revocation, but that rarely happens.

Also the Professional Convention Management Association (PCMA) has

a Professional and Ethical Conduct code that calls on members to avoid conflicts of interests or activities that reflect negatively on an organization, industry or person.

The principles ask members to “refuse inappropriate gifts, incentives and/or services in any business dealings that may be offered as a result of my position and could be perceived as personal gain.”

Since there are no uniform industry-wide policies which apply to all meeting and event planners, they are

“I have a group of colleagues who think that being ethical is a highly important part of the job.”

JULIE SCHMIDT, CMP, CMM
*Founder and CEO
Lithium Logistics Group*



often left to apply their own personal ethics on a case-by-case basis.

Instead, experts say, corporate and independent planners should write and regularly update their own clear and concise ethics policies and procedures that include which gifts and services are acceptable, value limits and accountability measures. Policies should cover areas such as FAM trips, meals and entertainment, gifts, points and other perks.

Says Lamagna, “The better we are with our codes of ethics and conduct, the more respectfully we will be looked at as an industry. We have work to do until we get information out there and the industry adopts a code of ethics or a standard that is known and everyone follows.”

Some of the most common ethical challenges involve the following areas:

FAM TRIPS

Familiarization trips are valued tools planners use to select the right properties and destinations. However, FAM trips are easy and tempting to abuse.

That’s why the meeting industry has a term called ‘FAM scam’ to

describe the practice of improperly using expenses-paid trips that hotels, venues and CVBs offer planners to experience properties and destinations. Lamagna refers to planners who routinely abuse FAM trips as “professional Fammers.”

According to Schmidt, “I know there are people in the industry who think FAM trips are giveaways, but I find them to be useful tools for planners to be educated about destinations,” Schmidt says. “The place where there can be conflict is if some-

body accepts a trip to someplace that they know they will never sell, or they represent that they will be able to sell a destination knowing they can’t. It’s mostly a combination of people being unethical and suppliers not being good about qualifying people for the trips.”

Schmidt explains why FAM abuse can be tempting. “With FAM trips, the destination is basically rolling out a red carpet to someplace a planner might want to go,” Schmidt says. “Familiarization trips are easy to take advantage of because they are often to fabulous places. So, the temptation is to say, ‘Sure, I’m considering that destination even though there is a very small chance I will choose it.’ It requires ethics and a certain maturity to turn it down.”

AIRLINE & HOTEL POINTS

Hotels and airlines often award points and airline miles to organizations that usually must be credited under a person’s name. The name, in the case of meetings and events, is often that of a planner.

Some planners accept points and miles only if their organizations allow it. But other planners accept the points for their own use.

According to Schmidt, “Travel points is an issue that always comes up in the industry. Companies have very different policies. I never thought it was wrong for a planner to take travel points from hotels. When it comes to flying, it’s the

person who is flying that gets the points, so there is no question there.”

“With hotels,” Schmidt continues, “A lot of them give points to the person who pays for the rooms. So, if a company pays for the rooms of 50 people, then the company keeps the points; if a person pays, then the person keeps the points. I think that’s fair.”

GIFTS

Various types of gifts are part of the planner experience, especially when suppliers are trying to land first-time meetings.

Suppliers routinely offer gifts to planners that include iPads, spa treatments, handbags, free hotel nights, five-star dinners, free limousine rides and tickets to sporting and entertainment events.

However, experts say, planners offered expensive gifts should ask themselves the following questions: When is a gift a bribe? Should planners accept or reject a gift based on value alone or should they also consider the perceived intent of the supplier?

Some planners say that gifts are abused less frequently these days.

According to Schmidt, “The whole culture of gifting from vendors, hotels, convention centers and CVBs isn’t there in the same way. With all the issues about gifting, companies have gotten more rigid and it has given vendors and suppliers an excuse to not do it as much and save money.”

Experts say there are several reasons why planners are sometimes ethically challenged. Some planners, particularly novices, may not realize what they did is unethical. In addition, many people who plan meetings aren’t professional planners, don’t do it full time and know little about industry ethics issues.

According to Lamagna, “In many instances planners who plan meetings for companies are those who are interested in taking on the responsibility or are given it, but they have no professional experience or ethics to guide them. So, if a property says come check out a place for free and receive an iPad, they don’t necessarily know that’s not appropriate for the industry as whole and could make a mistake without knowing it.”

In addition, ethics is a topic that planners and oth-

ers in the meetings industry have traditionally avoided. In recent years, however, some industry organizations and leaders have addressed the topic through seminars, speeches and writings.

Schmidt says the topic of ethics has become more prominent in the industry than when she started 15 years ago. “Planners coming up are in a more ethical environment,” Schmidt notes. “Ethics is a topic that my colleagues and I talk about, and I have a group of colleagues who think that being ethical is a highly important part of the job.”

While planners bear the responsibility to monitor their ethics, suppliers must also police their own actions by, for example, vetting planners for FAM trips. Instead, planners say, suppliers feel compelled to keep up with competitors who offer questionable freebies and get results.

SOLUTIONS

- Address ethics topics head-on to enhance the industry’s reputation and make planners appear more professional.

- Planners, hotels, vendors and suppliers should all disclose their ethics policies to each other.

- Consult with peers, supervisors and stakeholders when faced with ethics challenges, especially those that aren’t clear and cause indecisiveness.

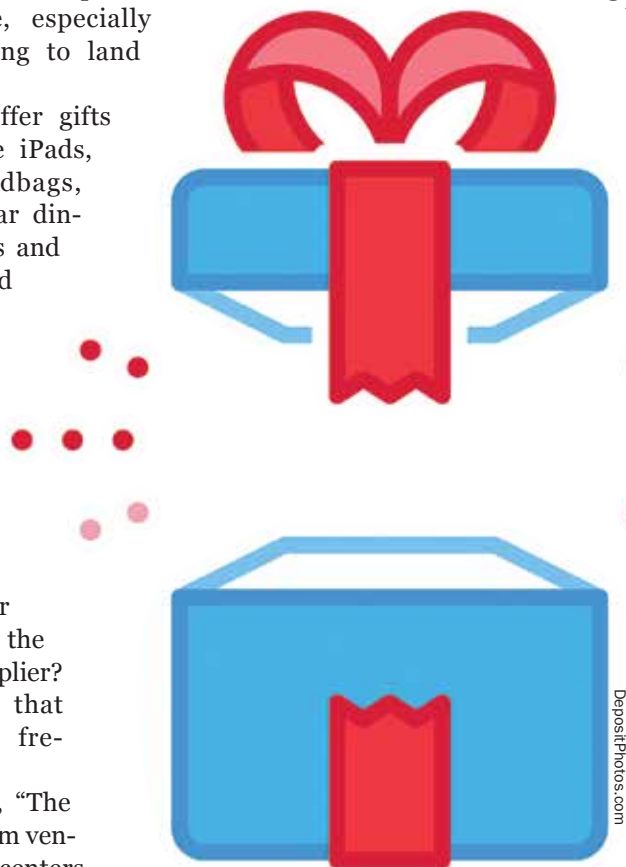
- Be aware of how the acceptance of some technically ethical gifts and favors can be perceived. Ask what you would think if your actions were published on social media.

- Corporate planners should push for the creation of written planner codes for their companies. Experts say that creating policies is especially important for third-party planners because they are perceived to face ethical challenges more often.

- Planners should educate themselves and their staffs on ethics.

Ethical education will eventually expand into new areas. According to Schmidt, “What we are talking about as ethical challenges in the industry will be different in the future. Those areas will probably revolve around technology and how it is used by planners.”

Lamagna offers this basic advice for current and future ethical challenges: “If it feels wrong, then don’t do it.” *C&IT*



DepositPhotos.com



Naturalist-guided excursions

Experience Galapagos with Celebrity Flora, the ultimate incentive.

Top performers crave premium experiences, like exploring the Galapagos Islands with Celebrity FloraSM. Come eye to eye with extraordinary creatures, while sailing in extraordinary creature comforts—intuitive service, stunning suites, locally sourced cuisine with menus by our Michelin-starred chef. It’s all included, even shore excursions led by certified naturalists, like snorkeling with the sea lions, sea turtles, and marine iguanas.

Corporate responsibility is another incentive. We designed our new ship with dynamic positioning to “anchor” without anchors and solar panels to supplement electricity, and our guests have planted 38,000 trees. Join us.

Learn more | celebritycorporatekit.com | 1-800-771-3873



©2019 Celebrity Cruises Inc. Ships’ registry: Malta and Ecuador.



Discovery Lounge



Sea lions in the Galapagos



Sky Suite with Veranda

Planners say Train is great for events because the group has a reputation for getting the attendees involved in the show.



HOT ACTS

Strategies for Landing Big Names and Avoiding Big Booking Fees

BY PATRICK SIMMS

Closing the annual meeting or incentive program with the big-name musical artist may be a cliché form of corporate entertainment, but it's also undeniably effective. Not only do such artists have mass appeal, but they also indirectly increase company engagement. An attendee will think, "Thanks to my company, I'm able to experience this dream concert." The company thus appears both attuned to an attendee's entertainment wish list and powerful enough to fulfill it. As Brad E. Bronenkamp, CMM, senior director, global events with Teradata Corporation, puts it, "Your big-name artists are going to get you the most credibility with your attendees and your employees."

Big names come with big price tags, of course, and Bronenkamp has seen artist fees rising. "They are realizing what the corporations are willing to pay," he says, observing that acts that used to command \$150,000-\$200,000 are now costing \$350,000-\$400,000. And it's not just contemporary groups making more money on the corporate circuit. Many classic rock bands, such as Foreigner and Styx, "are more popular today than they were back then," he notes. "They have a full calendar, and are getting a lot more money with fewer of the original artists."

CONSIDER THE COST FACTOR

Fortunately, there are several strategies that can help soften the financial blow for companies that want to source

Photo by Brendan Walter



Courtesy Brad E. Bronenkamp



Imagine Dragons, top, is a popular act for corporate events as is Keith Urban, left.

a top-tier act for their meeting. One approach is to look for groups whose tour schedule includes stops that coincide with the meeting date and site. Such a group may be willing to play a private event at a lower fee since logistical expenses are greatly reduced. For example, when Teradata Corporation held its incentive program in Singapore last year, Bronenkamp was able to book Nickelback, who happened to be on tour in Australia. “If you’re going to pull a band from the U.S., you’re almost paying them for four days so you’re looking at probably a lift of 30 to 40 percent on top of an

artist’s fee for them to come over to Singapore and play,” he explains, estimating that Teradata Corporation saved about \$200,000 in booking Nickelback due to their proximity.

Another cost-saving strategy is to leverage the buying power of a major entertainment company, such as MGM, AEG or Live Nation. This approach can be pursued when partnering with the entertainment company’s venues. “A year ago, we were at the MGM Mandalay Bay and Delano, and we utilized the entertainment marketing staff of MGM to book REO Speedwagon, which came in at a lower

price point just because of how much business MGM does,” Bronenkamp recalls. Similarly, Teradata Corporation is utilizing AEG’s new Mission Ballroom in Denver, Colorado this year and is leveraging AEG’s artist connections for the entertainment.

A third route to booking a big-name artist at a lower cost is to book them when they’re on the brink of becoming a big name. “You want to pick a racehorse before they win the Kentucky Derby,” Bronenkamp says. “In entertainment, it’s the same thing: If you can get somebody before they win the Grammy you’re in great shape. We had The Band Perry at the Grand Ole Opry in Nashville, and the following week they got a Grammy so their price went up threefold probably.” He advises using agents and other entertainment industry insiders to learn of the up-and-coming acts.

Even with some cost savings, the price tag for the level of artist that Bronenkamp sources is significant, but the ROI in terms of the attendee experience and reward value justifies the expense. The ROI may not work

out for other types of meetings, so it’s vital not to just assume that a big-name act will drive engagement.

Colleen Bisconti, IBM vice president, Global Conferences and Events, has found that the big-name band was actually not delivering enough ROI at the company’s annual business and technology conference, Think. Networking among peers is one of the conference’s main value propositions for attendees, and “you don’t network at a concert,” Bisconti says. Neither did a major concert cohere with the educational objective of the event. “Our conferences are really about enabling our clients or

prospective clients to understand the technology, to do more with technology, to be better at their jobs. So going to a big concert didn’t really facilitate that.” Indeed, “the percentage of attendees that were attending the concerts was going down year over year,” she relates. “So we made a really bold move when we moved our flagship conference from Las Vegas to San Francisco this year: We didn’t bring a big-name band in, and I was shocked that we didn’t get backlash on attendee post-event surveys. And then I was also shocked that I’m not seeing other IT companies go in that same direction. So as we’re planning our 2020 events, we’re thinking about entertainment in a very different way: entertainment everywhere, in unexpected places, not one big-name band that we thought in the past would have been a draw.”

BOOKING SMALLER ACTS

Her team’s new approach requires booking a variety of smaller acts. “We do lots of DJs around the spaces, so as you’re walking from session to

IBM chooses to forgo hiring big-name music acts for its annual conference, Think, and instead focuses on booking smaller acts.

session or venue to venue, there’s a level of excitement. But when you get to a reception or more of an evening destination, then it becomes a background musician or a comedian for a half hour, something that complements the environment,” she explains. That kind of entertainment

“Your big-name artists are going to get you the most credibility with your attendees and your employees.”

BRAD E. BRONENKAMP, CMM
Senior Director Global Events,
Teradata Corporation



CEO and president of Marietta, Georgia-based KLF Pro Entertainment. “And then once we understand what that is, we talk about the options that would best fit their needs, whether they need a ‘wow’ factor or something a little more subdued. We talk about the demographics of their folks, but

we also talk about what they want to see visually and make sure that comes across.” KLF offers entertainers of every stripe, from musicians, comedians and magicians to acrobats, body painters, caricaturists and cigar rollers.

Apart from agents’ savvy in helping to select acts, partnering with them can be advanta-

geous insofar as they also vet those acts. “As a planner your name is on the line, and you want to make sure you know what you’re going to get,” says Felix, who has a 31-year corporate background. “One thing I’m really adamant about as a business owner is that we make sure the artists we represent are reliable. Our name is on the line as well as the client’s.”

Regardless of an agency’s abilities and professionalism, there will inevitably be sourcing challenges when dealing with the big-name acts. “You may not get an answer

does not intrude upon networking, and ends up saving money that will be invested in other aspects of the attendee experience.

To source and negotiate with these entertainers, Bisconti relies on several agencies, although the ideas for entertainment often come from the attendees themselves. Corporate entertainment booking agents can also help a planner brainstorm these ideas. “We always start with the customer to understand the end product they’d like to look for as a result of the entertainment,” says Kerwin Felix,



Photo by Greg Baker / Courtesy of Colleen Bisconti

right away; they have big egos and they don't need the money. So they might hold you out for two months without giving you an answer," Bronenkamp says. "The artist's manager may say, 'Well, he really wants to do it, he's really interested, but we have to see what his schedule is. Can we have another week to let you know?' Everything's going positive and all of a sudden, 'He's not going to be able to make it; he has a personal commitment.' Then you're back to square one. You have to go back to your leadership team and say, 'We thought we had them, but we don't.'"

Compensating for these frustrations is the satisfaction a planner gets when landing a stellar act, and then watching attendees revel in the experience — or most of them, at least. You can't please all of the people all of the time, as the old adage goes. But you can strive for that ideal, and doing so requires close attention to shifting attendee demographics that impact tastes in entertainment, particularly music. "In our tech world, it's always been kind of '70s and '80s rock 'n' roll, but now it's changing to more of the DJs and '90s/2000s bands," Bronenkamp observes. A top-tier DJ, such as Zedd or Marshmello, will certainly be a hit with many younger attendees. But while more millennials are entering Teradata Corporation's sales force, most of incentive qualifiers are still middle-aged, and so classic rock remains the entertainment focus, he explains.

Bisconti's team also faces the challenge of appealing to a mixed demographic. "Our demographic is a lot of young techie types, but it's also men and women in their 40s and 50s that are line-of-business leaders or IT leaders. It seems you need to find something that is appealing to both, but what we found is you don't," she says. Whether booking an iconic act like Aerosmith or booking two bands that would appeal to different age groups (e.g., The Chainsmokers and Train, which Bisconti booked for a past meeting), her team has found it hard to captivate attendees across the generational spectrum.



Courtesy Brad E. Bronenkamp

Nickelback takes attendee engagement seriously, a planner says, even bringing audience members onstage during the concert.

It's also challenging to find an act that will engage a multicultural audience, such as Teradata Corporation's incentive participants. "You really need an international name if you want people to stay, but I can tell you the moment dinner's over and the band steps up on stage, I don't care who I booked, I probably lose 30 per-

cent either from Asia or from the Middle East," Bronenkamp says. "They're just not into the music."

SEEK AN IMPACTFUL VENUE

For that reason, it can be very effective to combine the entertainment with an impactful venue that will engage attendees who don't hap-

pen to be drawn to the performer. Teradata Corporation had Keith Urban perform at the Louvre in Paris one year, for example. "You can't go out and buy that," Bronenkamp says. "We hit two major milestones for people, and they're just blown away." He gives a similar example from his time at Anheuser-Busch: The company booked Styx to perform at SeaWorld.

Apart from the venue, the entertainment can also be enhanced with an interactive element. For big-name artists, meet-and-greets are a traditional way to provide added value for attendees, and agents can advise the planner on which artists are inclined to agree to that. Performances that involve the audience are also becoming more popular, Felix observes. "Many corporations spend a lot of money on events, but people tend to check out if you don't have some kind of connectivity. Whether a band or a magician, they have to have ways to connect with the audience," he says. "One way is going out into the audience and getting them involved, bringing people on the stage. There are a plethora of ways that you can really entertain folks and keep them involved — obviously singalongs, dance contests, etc." He adds that Latin dancers tend to be a cost-effective and visually impactful form of entertainment: "People like the high energy, the interaction; the costuming."

Engagement is also increased when the performer personalizes the act, or at least the onstage remarks, to the host company. "If you have a band that wants to be engaged, that makes all the difference in the world," Bronenkamp says. "But you have some that don't even care; they may say your corporate name wrong. But then you have some great guys like Train or Imagine Dragons who are really into the corporate world. And Nickelback was great too; they pulled a guy on the stage that probably knew the words as well as they did." Bisconti



Photo by Matt Barnes

Barenaked Ladies is a favorite of planners for its attendee engagement. The band has played at many of IBM's annual meetings, conventions and events.

notes that in her experience, bands very rarely go the extra mile and personalize. "We've only had one band that's taken that seriously — Barenaked Ladies. And I know they do this for other IT shows as well. They actually wrote a song about IBM and IBM's clients. It was a wonderful song about big

guys came out and were cursing," Bronenkamp says. He doesn't book comedians as he believes there is a greater chance they will say something objectionable, if not offensive. "It's very high risk and very low reward," he says.

Most of the surprises with corporate entertainment are positive, however.

"They actually wrote a song about IBM and IBM's clients. It was a wonderful song about big data, and really pulled the audience in."

COLLEEN BISCONTI

Vice President, Global Conferences and Events
IBM



data, and really pulled the audience in. It sends the message that you're not just here playing your standard 10 songs; you're here because you want to be here with IBM. So that completely changed the experience of the attendees versus other groups that you're lucky if they say anything between songs."

On occasion, inappropriate things will be said on stage, and unfortunately, there isn't a recourse apart from not booking that act again. "We've had some bad experiences where we've put a PG rating on our contract and the

The main act itself can be a surprise, which is a traditional way of creating a buzz throughout the event with rumors swirling. And there is nothing quite like the moment when a name act is revealed and takes the stage. Such acts may not be right for every meeting — such as

IBM's conference — but when the environment is right for an enthralling performance, it's best to put your attendees in the hands of an act with an illustrious career. By the time Foreigner finished playing for Teradata Corporation, many attendees remarked, "I knew every song they played," Bronenkamp says. "You can't go wrong with acts that have a lot of major hits; they can light it up for an hour. If you have a big-name act, it's like going to the Masters. Did you ever hear anybody complain about going to the Masters?"

C&IT

DESTINATION DECISIONS

BY
MAURA
KELLER



There is Much to Consider When Trying to Pick the Perfect Destination

Finding the ideal destination for an incentive group meeting or event — is part art, part science. There are people to placate, program objectives to identify and logistics to manage. Understandably, a destination can set the tone for the entire trip and can play a significant role in making lasting impressions on attendees.

Craig Dooley, senior vice president at SDI Meetings and Incentives in Chicago, says it is important to start the destination selection process with the “Why?” — namely, what is the driving purpose of the meeting for the sponsors and the participants?

stakeholders along the way. Alignment ensures success.”

Kelsey Anderson, CMP, CMM, founder and managing director at Lynn David Events LLC in Minneapolis, Minnesota, says when choosing a meeting destination, it’s imperative to know your group and the event’s goals. If the goal is to reward attendees, such as for an incentive or sales trip, meeting planners would want to consider destinations that are more leisure focused. Access to activities, excursions, spa, pools, dining and nightlife would all be important to consider. “If the goal is to bring a group of people together to network and work on business matters, a property with less

“What is the impact, outcome or result that this meeting should deliver — that is, how will you know it was a success?”

CRAIG DOOLEY

Senior Vice President, SDI Meetings and Incentives



“Equally important, start with the end,” Dooley says. “What is the impact, outcome or result that this meeting should deliver — that is, how will you know it was a success?” It’s slightly nuanced or completely different for every meeting, so Dooley defines those factors upfront with key stakeholders, including executive sponsors, internal partners and participants.

“We keep them top of mind every step we take,” Dooley says. “As we pick the right meeting destination, we check criteria against them, including the practical aspects of availability, functionality, convenience, cost and participant preferences, and we check-in with those key

distractions and less ability to wander off the property may better support the objectives of the event,” Anderson says.

Also think about who is attending this event. What’s the average age? What are their values? What are their motivations? As Anderson explains, if your attendees are seniors, conservative, or value relaxation and getting up early, you wouldn’t want to hold the event in the heart of Bourbon Street in New Orleans.

UNIQUE DESTINATIONS

Simone Maxwell, adjunct professor of hospitality at Purdue University Global, has extensive experience in the field of hospitality. She says there are many



Second-tier cities like Austin, Texas and the Austin Convention Center are often more cost effective for destination meetings and events.

Other issues to consider include the time of year, budget, accessibility and desirability — all of which can play a big role in deciding the best location. If a lower room rate is important to the group but they want to be at high-end properties, consider what destinations will be in low or shoulder season over the event dates.

Kelly Woo, meeting and event manager at Special D Events in Ferndale, Michigan, says other issues to evaluate include:

- Changes in time zones.
- Attendee demographics and preferences. Will the attendees feel comfortable at the destination that is being considered?
- Are the attendees seasoned travelers? If most attendees have never flown before, a drivable location may be preferred.
- What other meetings, events or festivals are happening in the city that you're considering during the time of your meeting?

"A client of ours didn't take into consideration the preferences and lifestyle of their employees when choosing the meeting destination," Woo says. "They decided to host their meeting at the Fontainebleau Miami Beach and their attendees were very out of place."

Sydney Wolf, director of sales for metroConnections in Chaska, Minnesota, agrees that understanding the demographics of attendees is paramount in strategically selecting meeting destinations. "Are you a young company of millennials? Perhaps a trendy destination like Nashville or Austin would appeal to your audience. A lot of young families? Maybe hosting an event at a Walt Disney World property would provide a great perk to your audience and allow them to extend their trip to bring their families," Wolf says. "Where do your attendees live? Picking a tier two or three city that requires connecting flights could make a destination more difficult, costly and timely to get to."

unique strategic destination options. For instance, Maxwell says that due to the breakdown of formal business culture and the demand for events in unique spaces, there is an increased desire for nontraditional venues. Meeting planners are now selecting more intimate venues in destinations such as boutique hotels, art galleries and warehouses for smaller events and meetings.

"For larger events, meeting planners are now utilizing nontraditional hotel areas such as outdoor spaces and rooftops to facilitate the need for fresh event and meeting spaces," Maxwell says. "Nontraditional venues also allow for meeting or event attendees to experience more of a destination rather than being in a traditional hotel or convention center the entire time. It is also assumed that these nontraditional venues create more engagement and a deeper level of curiosity among the attendees."

And while typically first-tier cities such as Chicago and New York were the first choice for destination meetings and events because of all the perks they offer, due to the increased authenticity, culture and improved transportation accessibility in second-tier cities, these locales are now more in demand. "Second-tier cities such as Austin, Portland and Nashville are also considered more cost effective for destination meetings and events," Maxwell says. "These cities are also continuously improving their infrastructure and the destination organi-

zations tend to be more eager to work with meeting planners."

In addition, today's meeting and event attendees are more concerned with health and wellness. Therefore, meeting planners are now tasked with selecting destinations that offer organic, fresh and locally sourced foods. "Dietary restrictions or preferences such as vegetarian, gluten free, keto, pescatarian and religious dietary requests are also key considerations for meeting planners when selecting destinations," Maxwell says. "Meeting planners should also select destinations where they can leverage experiential catering. So that way, attendees can experience local gourmet meals if they desire to do so — for instance offering Nashville-style barbecue options for the banquet."

CONSIDERATIONS TO MAKE

Dooley says meeting planners need to consider both the strategic and the tactical factors of a destination and the myriad of details that go into creating every single moment of the experience. "Again, staying aligned with the purpose and goals of the meeting and the destination's ability to support the desired outcome most effectively, planners can then dig into the destination's features and benefits around its resources, functionality and fit with the meeting," Dooley says. Planners also need to consider that things change — from the purpose to the budget to the participants, and be ready to pivot throughout the process.

In that case, finding a destination with direct flights for the majority of your audience would provide the best experience. Know your attendees and make wise buying decisions that fit your group when considering a destination. Also, consider leveraging a multiyear deal. If you are contracting multiple programs, consider the same hotel or hotel brand to leverage a multiyear contract to improve your concessions and negotiation power.

MISTAKES TO AVOID

Planners bring their own, very valuable experience to the destination selection process, and a misstep can happen if that personal experience inadvertently influences the process. As Dooley explains, a meeting planner's own preferences and 'hot buttons' are of course helpful in evaluating options for a meeting. "We know what to look for and what to ask. We can avoid the mistake of letting that experience influence the choice by making sure we keep the 'why' and the 'end' for the meeting in front of us as the filter for our recommendations and choices," Dooley says.

Due diligence also plays a key role in destination selection and can range from legal to financial to functional. Make sure you research the tentative destinations and for what they are known. For example, in a tourist-heavy

destination like Las Vegas, rates will be statistically higher on the weekends to cater to vacationers, so a meeting planner can negotiate a better group block sticking to the weekdays, while if you're trying to book something in Washington, D.C. in the middle of the week in the fall, you'll be fighting higher rates because of all the government workers that come Monday through Friday.

"Need a low room rate but have more flexibility with food and beverage spend? Know that going in," says Sarah Buchbinder, meeting group broker at Meetings Made Easy in Middletown, New Jersey. "Need to fit 100 people, but any setup will work? Put that in your request for proposals.

"Just by shifting one day forward or back can save you money by helping a hotel fill an occupancy gap."

SARAH BUCHBINDER

*Meeting Group Broker
Meetings Made Easy*



Have to have a four-day program, but not set on a specific pattern or arrival day? Just by shifting one day forward or back can save you money by helping a hotel fill an occupancy gap."

As Buchbinder explains, you're rarely ever going to find the perfect destination at the lowest rate, offering all of your concessions, but knowing what things you would like, versus what things you absolutely can't live without

are important distinctions to getting your event as close as possible to perfect.

As an example, Buchbinder recently helped out a company that was struggling to find a home for their international leadership meeting. They waited until less than six months out and wanted to find a hotel in the center of Rome, Italy for 200 people for 150 euros per night. So, they ultimately wanted three things in a hotel: a central location, a capacity large enough to accommodate their group and a low room rate. After preliminary research into availability in the city, Buchbinder asked them to prioritize two out of the three 'wants.'

"I could get them a central hotel that could accommodate their group, but it was higher than their preferred budget," Buchbinder says. "There were larger hotels with enough space at a great rate, but they were way out near the airport; and there were beautiful

central hotels where I could negotiate a great rate, but they only had availability for half the group. They ended up choosing location and rate, and cutting the attendee list in half. The meeting was an incredible success, but without knowing what their deal breakers were, they would have ended up in a stalemate and still searching for a home for their event. You don't always have to choose between all the things you want, but knowing which are deal breakers for your specific program, and which you have a little more leeway with before you go in — will help a lot when sifting through choices and negotiating. "

In addition to evaluating the 'must haves,' other key steps include:

- Reviewing your own experiences with how a destination has performed, or tap into references from others you trust.

A second-tier city like Nashville, Tennessee and the Music City Center offer more experiential activities.





Courtesy Sarah Buchbinder

•Looking at multiple destination options to compare and contrast which would best fit the meeting. Go through legal due diligence with every agreement and contract.

•Confirming crisis management and support plans and resources, both internally and with the destination, to be prepared for as much as you can.

•Evaluating parking. Will you have a lot of drivers? If so, try to avoid places where you can't negotiate free parking.

•Determining reservation strategy. Will you be reserving rooms through a rooming list or will attendees call in? That can determine whether you need a lower attrition and a farther-out cutoff date, and make sure the hotel can create a booking link if that's how the guests will book.

•Evaluating the atmosphere of the locale. Can the local history and culture of the destination tie into your message? For example, by considering a destination like Puerto Rico, you can automatically build in a corporate social responsibility (CSR) component by bringing business to a city that is rebuilding after a disaster.

"Whenever possible, do a site visit. The site visit is invaluable. Make sure you take the time to walk the path your attendees will take," Anderson says. "Experience the airport in the destination. Is there or will there be construction during your event? What is public transportation like? How long does it take to get from the airport to the venue? What's in the area for the attendees to do in the evenings or free time?"

Buchbinder agrees. She stresses that all the information in the world on paper cannot rival experiencing a destination and venue in person. "Come in a day early on your own to see the property through the eyes of a regular guest. How long are lines for baggage at the airport? What is traffic really like downtown? What is the hotel check-in process like? How is the phone signal in the meeting space? How long does it take to get food from room service, and is it edible?" Buchbinder says. "All these details can separate an 'OK' destination from your perfect venue."

"The events industry is robust, and I've found that other planners are often very willing to help and share advice."

KELSEY ANDERSON, CMP, CMM
Founder and Managing Director
Lynn David Events LLC



So what are the key mistakes to avoid in selecting a strategic destination? Wolf says the most common mistakes she sees meeting planners make include:

- Not identifying a budget early.
- Not working with a site selection or planning partner on the contract. It's important to have partners review the contracts in order to protect yourself from construction clauses, relocation, cancellation, etc.
- Not booking enough meeting space to match the production and event needs of the event. If you are expecting an impressive general session setup

Planners can also choose a destination that allows for corporate social responsibility projects.

with enhanced A/V, make sure the partners review the meeting space to ensure expectations can become a reality with the meeting space that's been reserved.

And don't forget that you are not alone. Tap into the convention and visitors bureau in the destination or selected city. They can offer insight, deals and advice when it comes to the destination as well as help organize the logistics of your site visit. "Reach out to your peers. The events industry is robust, and I've found that other planners are often very willing to help and share advice. Join industry LinkedIn or Facebook groups and post questions about particular destinations you're interested in," Anderson says. "And remember it's easy to think about what destination you would like to hold your event. Try to push your own opinions and biases aside, and think of your attendees and stakeholders."

Tools and resources used in the destination identification process come from many sources, not the least of which is a meeting planner's own collective experience and knowledge of destinations and working to support clients' businesses.

"Looking outside our team, we benefit from strategic guidance and research on trends, motivators and key issues," Dooley says. "We read industry publications for news and developments, we attend forums and we network and share with our peers. There are, of course, fantastic online sourcing tools that streamline the tactical elements of the process, allowing us to put more energy into the strategic. We lean into strong relationships with partners in both brands and independent networks of properties and destinations to be sure we are basing our evaluations on the best information — relationships make the difference." **C&IT**

HOSTING A GREAT CONVENTION

• A SERIES OF HELPFUL TIPS •

No. 5

Denver, Colorado



THE SKY'S THE LIMIT IN DENVER.

DOMESTIC FARES NEARLY 20% BELOW U.S. AVERAGE

NONSTOP FLIGHTS TO 25 INTERNATIONAL CITIES

EASY, AFFORDABLE TRAIN TO DOWNTOWN

With airfares 20% lower than the national average, direct flights to more than 200 worldwide destinations and a direct train to downtown, it's easy to see why both *The Wall Street Journal* and Skytrax named Denver International Airport (DEN) the #1 airport in the U.S. DEN makes it easy and affordable for your attendees to get where they need to be.

Explore Denver at CONVENTIONSELEVATED.COM



Photograph provided courtesy of Denver International Airport.

Planning Accessible Events

Experts Share Ideas to Make Events More Accessible for the Disabled

BY SOPHIA BENNETT

Accommodating people with disabilities is the law, but there are plenty of reasons for companies to go above and beyond to create a welcoming environment for these folks. The number of people with disabilities is far higher than you might expect. It's estimated that one in five Americans has some type of physical or mental disability. As the population continues to age, even people who don't identify themselves as disabled may deal with a decrease in their physical ability, hearing or eyesight. In addition, thousands of people deal with a temporary disability every year due to a surgery, injury or accident.

By not meeting the needs of people with disabilities, companies are potentially leaving a lot of money on the table. They may also be giving people a less-than-optimal experience, which can impact both their satisfaction with their employer and their likelihood of attending that event again.

"It's really frustrating, as a person with disabilities, to want to participate in these things, to want to put time and money into them, and not be able to get everything out of them that everyone else can," says Christine Selinger, founder and owner of Creative by Christine. She is also a contractor for the Abilities Expo, which hosts events for people with disabilities and their friends, family and healthcare providers in several major cities. "It feels like you're paying for something you're not getting."

If you're looking to design events that are more accessible, our experts share ideas about how to make the registration process, physical space, off-site events and other features more accessible for everyone.

"Nothing About Us, Without Us"

"Within the disability community there's a saying: 'Nothing about us, without us,'" says Elisa Hays, CSP, of Empathy Fueled Solutions and a speaker, author and consultant who works with event venues all over the country. "One of the things that happens is that a lot of planners without disabilities have great ideas about how they want to create solutions, but they don't include attendees with disabilities, so their solutions can be misguided."

Both Hays and Selinger highly recommend asking at least one person with a disability to get involved in the planning process and assist with evaluating all physical spaces. "The people who know this the most are people with disabilities," Selinger says. "Include them and ask them for feedback. They will give you tons."

But what if a company doesn't have a disabled person amongst its staff or volunteers, or the one wheelchair user isn't comfortable with being singled out? "The easiest and fastest way for a meeting planner

to connect to the disability community is to call their national ADA center,” Hays says. Known officially as the ADA National Network, this organization provides information, guidance and training to help companies comply with ADA requirements. Though one of its major roles is to clarify legal aspects of the ADA, staff can connect planners to local disability advocacy groups. These organizations often have people who are willing to consult on making venues and programs comfortable for people with disabilities.

Before the Event

There are several other things planners can do ahead of gatherings to ensure they are ready to serve disabled attendees. “When sending out the announcement, give participants a few different ways to request an accommodation before the event,” says Michelle “Mell” Toy, COMS, CLVT, assistant director of the Northwest ADA Center. “People with disabilities will tell you what they need, and event planners will probably want to know what to prepare ahead of time, including creating large print or braille materials, or scheduling American Sign Language (ASL) interpreters, etc.”

Including a questionnaire with the registration materials is a good idea, but it needs to be carefully considered before and during event preparation. “The questions that you put there need to be structured so they’re not asking people what their disability is, because that’s really none of their business, but that they’re asking about their needs and then following up on it,” Hays says. That second piece, she emphasizes, is just as critical. “Often that information seems to go nowhere.”

According to Tracy Stuckrath, CSEP, CMM, CHC, owner of thrive! meetings & events in North Carolina, any event website needs to be designed so that it is ADA compliant. In addition to online resources, provide a phone number where visually-impaired people can



Courtesy Elisa Hays

Elisa Hays recommends planners ask at least one person with a disability to get involved in the planning process and assist with evaluating all physical spaces.

things like the difference between saying, ‘Here, let me help you’ and saying, ‘How can I assist you?’”

Creating a Welcoming Physical Space

Planners are often quick to confirm that venues have accessible features such as wheelchair ramps and elevators. One thing they may not realize is that flooring can pose a real challenge for attend-

ees in wheelchairs. Selinger uses a manual wheelchair, and propelling herself across large stretches of carpet is exhausting. Check the flooring of any potential venue and communicate that information ahead of time if needed.

Regardless of the flooring, “try to avoid long distances between rooms if at all possible,” Selinger says. “If you’re having an event at a convention center and there’s one thing at one end and something else at the complete other end, it makes it hard for those of us with disabilities to access everything.”

Make sure doorways and hallways are at least 36 inches wide so wheelchair users can travel comfortably. Check to see how doors open. “If doors are too heavy, attendees with disabilities have trouble opening them, so make sure there’s push-button access or there’s someone there to open doors,” Selinger says. That person should stay in place during a whole session to ensure a wheelchair user isn’t trapped if they need to leave early. Doors can also be propped open, but if you do that, make sure the doorstop won’t become an impediment to a wheelchair user.

Another thing that’s often overlooked is truly accessible washrooms. “They need to have level access, a large

stall and all the things outlined in the ADA. But beyond that, make sure the washrooms are accessible in every way,” Selinger says. “If there are paper towel dispensers but they’re up too high, make sure there are paper towels sitting on the countertops so attendees can reach them.”

If an attendee needs to bring a service dog, make sure there’s a spot for the dog to relieve itself. If a participant needs to bring another person to the event to help them, offer their helper a free registration. Another detail that’s easy to miss is the availability of refrigerators for people who need to store medication. “Most hotels will give them to you if they’re medically necessary, but make sure the hotel has plenty of them,” Stuckrath says.

Off-site venues also need to be completely accessible for guests. “Off-site venues have two major problems,” Hays says. “One is how you get there, so making sure you have wheelchair-accessible transport is a big thing. It needs to be integrated so a wheelchair user doesn’t feel weirdly set apart. Two, if you’re going to a park or a beach or anywhere that has surfacing that would be awkward for a wheelchair, you need to look at setting up an area of networking or activity in an accessible area. Everyone needs to be able to get to food and drinks and other attendees. Or you can look at renting temporary surfaces to lay down and create a path of travel.”

Toy says, “I would advise planners to include accessibility into their contract agreements with the venues to clarify who is responsible for details such as ensuring physical access.” That will help cut down on mix-ups, and may even cut down on the expenses for which the company is responsible.

Transportation issues should also be considered as part of space

“If you can exceed the standards to make moving within the path of travel easier for a person who uses a mobility device, all the better.”

MICHELLE “MELL” TOY, COMS, CLVT
Assistant Director, Northwest ADA Center



requirements. Eva De Leon, director of Accessible Design and Innovative Inclusion, encourages planners to think ‘outside-in.’ “Oftentimes, when we first think about physical access, we think about restrooms,” she says. “But accessible restrooms are not going to be helpful if you can’t get into the building in the first place. Think first about transportation to and from the venue. What is the route like from the bus stop to the entrance? What about routes from the parking lot to the entrance? What’s the entrance like? When you look up the 2010 ADA Standards for Accessible Design, remember that minimums are just that — minimums. If you can exceed the standards to make moving within the path of travel easier for a person who uses a mobility device, all the better.”

Make sure the venue has enough handicap-accessible parking, and make sure those restrictions are strictly enforced. “If you’re providing

transportation via bus, is your bus handicap accessible, or are you providing some other form of accessible transportation?” Stuckrath asks. “Where is the entryway if it’s not through the front door?” and ‘How will people determine where that entrance is?’ See if the transportation pro-

vider can drop them at that entrance so they don’t need to travel far to enter the building.”

Seating for Sessions and Meals

There are a few things to keep in mind when setting up session rooms. For spaces with classroom seating, make sure every third row has enough chairs missing that a person in a wheelchair can comfortably pull up to the table. They will need at least 60 inches to make their approach and turn their chair. If only one seat is missing, the person will not have enough space to maneuver, Hays says, and may be forced to sit in the aisle. Rather than feeling like they’re in the way, many attendees default to sitting in the back of the room.

“The No. 1 thing I encounter with events is they set up 10 top rounds, and they set them so close that for an attendee who is a wheelchair user, their only choice is to sit in the back on the fringe,” she adds. “The No. 1 thing planners can do is create more space



DepositPhotos.com

in the room. If they're using rounds, have more circulation space or have a designated path of travel to get to the middle of the room or the front of the room." Don't set up one wheelchair-accessible table in the back of the room with no seating for ambulatory attendees. Doing that leaves disabled attendees feeling isolated and left out.

"Planners do need to ask about food sensitivities," Selinger says. "A lot of people with disabilities have different food sensitivities." Stuckrath recommends labeling food with at least the top eight allergens, and providing a complete list of ingredients. Signs should have 16-point font so attendees with vision impairments can easily read them.

"It's often easier for attendees to eat things that are more compact and don't involve holding utensils," Selinger says. "Things like sandwiches are easy to eat. Avoid things with lots of packaging."

Tammi Olson, conference coordinator of the University of Washington's Center for Continuing Education in Rehabilitation adds, "If you have quite a few attendees with physical disabilities, it is easier to serve a plated meal. If you are serving a buffet meal, ask the venue for additional staff

to assist attendees with food items and plates when needed."

For buffets, consult an expert to make sure the tables are the appropriate height and food is set at the right depth. "When the food isn't accessible, an attendee in a wheelchair needs a tremendous amount of help," Hays says. "The goal is that an attendee in a wheelchair can not only access it, but have as much independence as possible. Because independence is dignity."

"When the food isn't accessible, a person in a wheelchair needs a tremendous amount of help."

ELISA HAYS, CSP
Speaker, Author and Consultant
Empathy Fueled Solutions



Make sure tablecloths on buffets and tables don't overflow onto the floor. "If it gets caught up in our wheels, it's only a matter of time before we pull it off the table," Selinger says. For receptions and mixers, make sure to include a few tables with traditional heights. "I've been to receptions where they only have bar-height tables, and for those of us who sit, it means we're looking up at everyone else and trying to lift our drinks overhead."

Vision, Hearing, Mental Health

All events need to be inclusive of attendees with vision problems, hearing loss and mental health barriers. "When my office puts on an event, we set up a microphone for the presenters, and we use additional microphones if there will be comment from the audience," Toy says. That helps ensure everyone can hear. "We also give the option to attend the event via telephone or video conferencing. It is common for us to schedule ASL interpreters, and Computer Assisted Real-Time (CART) captioning, so that people with hearing disabilities can follow speeches made at the event. I would also encourage businesses to ask everyone to make their events fragrance-free."

Selinger adds, "For attendees with anxiety or who are on the autism spectrum, it helps to have a space to get away. Make sure everybody knows there's a quiet space to go to and what it's used for."

Says Hays, "For attendees with intellectual disabilities, the biggest issue is communication barriers." They typically need more time to process what people are saying, which means it's critical that speakers talk slowly. "Meeting planners can give a reminder to presenters, and everybody who gets up in front of an audience, to slow down."

Finally, says Selinger, "Make sure there are handouts or copies of the presentation so attendees follow along or take something with them in case they can't absorb everything right away. Basically, just give attendees as many ways as possible to interact with the presentation. Regardless of disability or diagnosis, it allows everybody to retain as much as possible and get as much as possible from the experience." **C&IT**

American Sign Language (ASL) interpreters and Computer Assisted Real-Time (CART) captioning allow people with hearing disabilities to follow along with speeches.



DepositPhotos.com

FEEL FREE TO HAVE ONE HULL OF A MEETING.

When you book your Corporate Meeting or Incentive Travel Program with Norwegian Cruise Line, you can relax. That's because we guide you through the planning process, so your attendees can easily go from team meeting to teambuilding. Whether you're throwing a posh cocktail party with the Mediterranean as your backdrop, or basking under the Caribbean sun by day and hosting an awards gala on board by night, you'll enjoy the freedom and choices to customize your group function just the way you like.



NCL NORWEGIAN *Feel Free*
CRUISE LINE®

©2018 NCL Corporation Ships' Registry: BAHAMAS and USA 37807 7/18

LOOK WHAT'S INCLUDED:

- **Freestyle Dining** - Up to 27 delicious dining options (with up to 11 FREE).
- **Destination Variety** - Choose from 3, 4 and 7-day itineraries from around the world to create the perfect, awe-inspiring experience.
- **The Best Variety of Entertainment at Sea** - Broadway shows, live music, comedy clubs, parties and more at no extra cost.
- **Flexible Accommodations** - From the luxury and exclusivity of The Haven by Norwegian® to our well-appointed Studios priced for solo travelers.
- **Customizable Group Functions** - Complimentary venues, state-of-the-art AV equipment, catered refreshments, cocktail parties, entertainment and dining.

CONTACT US AT 1.866.NCL.MEET | 305.436.4465 | EVENTS@NCL.COM OR VISIT NCL.COM/EVENTS

VARIETY OF EVENT SPACES



THE BEST ENTERTAINMENT AT SEA



COMPLIMENTARY DINING VENUES



Lagniappe
Brass
Band in
New Orleans.

Photo by Chris Granger

DESTINATION: LOUISIANA

New Orleans Remains on Top, While Baton Rouge and Shreveport-Bossier Create Their Own Niches

BY DEREK REVERON

Every Louisiana destination puts its own unique spin on the state's one-of-a-kind mix of culture, cuisine, music and friendly service. While groups frequent all Louisiana destinations, New Orleans remains the most popular choice due to its reputation for delivering successful and memorable meetings to groups from around the world.

New Orleans

No other city in the world can match New Orleans' singular uniqueness. That's why small and large corporate meetings and events return to the 'Big Easy' again and again.

Visitor growth received a boost from a steady stream of companies that meet in New Orleans for the first time and then return, including the Bronner Brothers Inc., an Atlanta-based producer and marketer of beauty products for consumers, beauty businesses and professionals.

Bronner Brothers Inc. held its annual meeting and show at the New Orleans Ernest N. Morial Convention Center (ENMCC) earlier this year. The company also booked 10 hotels, including The Roosevelt New Orleans, A Waldorf Astoria Hotel and Ritz-Carlton, New Orleans.

The three-day event included more than 30,000 beauty shop owners, retail customers and employees. Bronner Brothers Inc. had previously met annually in Atlanta before bringing the event to New Orleans for the first time this year. The city's welcoming culture played a large role in the decision.

According to Erika Respress, Bronner Brothers Inc. trade show manager and meeting planner, "It was the city in which we felt most comfortable. It allowed our attendees to be their authentic selves in a comfortable and safe place. That's important because we have a lot of gay, lesbian and transgender attendees, and it was important for them to feel at home. New Orleans made them feel like family first. I could tell they really appreciated us."

Respress says New Orleans & Company bent over backward to meet every need. "It's the little things they did," Respress says. "For example, you usually pay for the banners you need to advertise around a convention center but

not in New Orleans. They also provided a band to greet us at the airport."

Respress adds, "We were also the first group to have a parade inside the convention center. I asked for the parade and I thought I was pushing the envelope, but they did it. I'm telling you, you can't beat New Orleans, and I have been all over the world."

In addition, the ENMCC's space perfectly fit Respress' needs. "I had over 100 breakout sessions in the center and we occupied four halls," Respress says. "I had a VIP reception in the ballroom as well as a church service and a comedy show."

The most popular event took place off-site. "We hosted our welcome reception event at Mardi Gras World, a float-building studio and venue that provides Mardi Gras experiences year-round," Respress says. "It was by far one of the highlights of the event. Then we had after parties at some of the hotels."



"New Orleans made them feel like family first. I could tell they really appreciated us."

ERIKA RESPRESS

Trade Show Manager and Meeting Planner
Bronner Brothers Inc.

In all, the meeting was a huge hit. "Attendees filled out a survey after the show and 91% of people wanted to go back," Respress says. "We didn't get any negative feedback."

The high satisfaction level prompted Bronner Brothers Inc. to sign a long-term deal to return to New Orleans.

"We decided to go back right after holding our post-conference meeting," Respress says. "We signed a three-year contract for 2021, 2023 and 2025. Our vice president loved the experience and decided to go back because of our amazing relationship with the CVB."

Respress raved about the long-term deal. "We got amazing value from the contract," Respress says. "We were actually grateful and humbled that the city welcomed us and wanted to bring us back."

New Orleans' ever-growing range of activities and experiences are driving its increasing popularity.

According to Cindy Hayes, CMP, DMCP, director of sales for PRA New Orleans, "Having a variety of activities in proximity to meeting hotels allows a company to bring multiple groups and have different, unique experiences that match the objectives of each program."

Hayes adds, "With so many different off-site options available, and more available every year, and the way

experiences can be customized to a group's needs and wants, a participant would be hard pressed to repeat that same event or activity on their own or returning for a different meeting."

Hayes offers an example of a company that held two different meetings in New Orleans last year just three months apart.

"The first meeting was a training program for 85 people who had their evening reception and dinner off-site on a riverboat paddle wheeler," Hayes says.

"The second program three months later was for 700 leaders of the company with a second-line jazz parade from the host hotel to their welcome dinner, which was a New Orleans tailgate party," Hayes says. "The second meeting also included interactive entertainment and a fireworks show over the Mercedes-Benz Superdome.

Incentive groups commonly plan extensive, detailed programs for attendees to enjoy all that New Orleans has to offer. Hayes provides an example of one company that planned an incentive for 375 executives.

"The company's planners made three pre-planning site inspections at different times of the year prior to the incentive," Hayes says. "One pre-planning trip was dedicated just to tastings."

Once the incentive was planned, Hayes and her team tracked the arrival of VIPs using technology.

Says Hayes, "The program consisted of some complicated transportation moves for which our PRA New Orleans patented transportation app was a godsend because it notified us and the client's transportation team with a text message 10 minutes prior to the arrival of VIPs, making it easy track guests."

After the attendees arrived, they enjoyed a smorgasbord of local expe-



Richard Nowitz

riences and activities. "There was one afternoon of seven different activities and excursions for the participants to choose from, and several VIP lunches and dinners at different venues," Hayes says.

There was also a night of dine-arounds at 10 different restaurants for the entire group, which was divided into several sub-groups.

"The trip was an unforgettable experience that was appreciated by guests."

CINDY HAYES, CMP, DMCP
Director of Sales, PRA New Orleans



"The final night gala dinner was at one of our most desired off-site venues, ending with a fireworks show on the Mississippi River," Hayes says. "The trip was an unforgettable experience that was appreciated by guests."

New Orleans expects to attract even more groups as its meeting infrastructure continues to expand.

According to Stephanie Turner,

The French Quarter is a popular part of New Orleans to visit.

vice president of convention sales and strategies at New Orleans & Company, "Within the last year, millions of dollars have been invested in infrastructure and river-front developments. Among the most exciting projects is a \$60 million Linear Park development and transportation hub along Convention Center Boulevard, bringing dining, entertainment and retail to the convention center in coming years."

In addition, New Orleans continues to expand its inventory of more than 25,000 hotel rooms. "Thousands of sleeping rooms are within walking distance of the convention center, which in 2024, will offer a connected headquarters hotel anchoring the up-river end of the building," Turner says. "New hotels are in the pipeline throughout the downtown area, many with on-site meeting space and within walking distance of major attractions and other venues."

The Ritz-Carlton, New Orleans, located near the French Quarter, has been undergoing a \$40 million renovation it calls a "redeaux."

The project includes the property's existing 35,000 sf of meeting space as well as new furnishings and décor. Treatment rooms and the 25,000-sf spa will

also undergo renovations. The project is scheduled for completion by the end of the year.

Another popular property, The Roosevelt New Orleans, A Waldorf Astoria Hotel, plans to complete renovation for all the property's guest rooms by the end of this year. The Roosevelt recently remodeled 60,000 sf of meeting and banquet space as

well as the rooftop pool. The entire makeover is part of a \$20 million project The Roosevelt has undertaken.

Earlier this year, Virgin Hotels New Orleans broke ground on its latest lifestyle property in the city's Warehouse District. The 14-story, 225-room hotel is expected to open in 2021 at a cost of \$80 million. The hotel will have a rooftop bar, a pool deck and multiple dining options, including the Commons Club on the ground floor, which will be open to the public and have a secondary entrance fronting Lafayette Street.

The plans also include a 2,049-sf ballroom and flexible meeting space on the second floor. It will join seven other properties in or planned for the Virgin Hotel portfolio. The brand opened its first hotel in Chicago followed by San Francisco earlier this year. Hotels are also in the works in Dallas, Nashville, New York and Las Vegas.

The Higgins Hotel & Conference Center, Curio Collection by Hilton recently opened on the campus of the National World War II Museum, with 18,000 sf of meeting space. The recent opening of the Higgins Hotel New Orleans offers a great option for smaller corporate meetings seeking a Warehouse District location.

The hotel offers 230 guest rooms and specialty suites, and premium amenities and services include: Cafe Normandie, Rosie's on the Roof, Kilroy's at the Higgins, Provisions Grab-and-Go Market & Cafe, a 24-hour fitness club, a private concierge lounge and a business center.

In addition, developers are negotiating with Ernest N. Morial New Orleans Exhibition Hall Authority to build a new 1,200-room Omni hotel

with 150,000 sf of meeting space to serve as a headquarters hotel for the ENMCC, the sixth-largest convention facility in the nation.

Current properties combined with new and expanded hotels will provide a range of fresh options for meetings of all types.

According to Turner, "The opening of the Four Seasons Hotel next year will add to hotel options for higher-end corporate and incentive travel

As we continue to grow, New Orleans is an option for us because it has the space we need with walkable hotels nearby."

MINDY GRUBB, CMP
Executive Director of Events, Keller Williams



meetings. The newly-opened AC Hotel New Orleans Bourbon, a first-of-its-kind product, is a great option for the pure incentive groups not needing meeting space but looking for butler-type service."

Many of New Orleans' most popular meeting hotels were among the 16 properties that hosted the Keller Williams real estate company's annual meeting earlier this year at the ENMCC. The meeting included 19,000 franchise owners, employees and real estate agents.

Keller Williams returned to New Orleans after holding its last meeting there almost 10 years ago. Two years after the meeting, Mindy Grubb, CMP, the company's executive director of events, made a site visit to the city.

"At that time, we noticed a big difference in the city in its recovery from hurricane Katrina," Grubb says. "They had implemented a city-wide customer service improvement program and the quality of service went up significantly. I had sat in on some of the program's training sessions."

Grubb continues, "They told me they were very serious about the program. After, that we decided to move forward in contract negotiations and signed a deal for our next open date, which was this year."

Most of the company's meetings and events took place at the ENMCC, where Grubb had 30 breakouts.

"I love the convention center because it is so flexible," Grubb says. "We take up about 1 million sf. As we continue to grow, New Orleans is an option for us because it has the space we need with walkable hotels nearby."

Like Respress, Grubb also attributes a major part of the meeting's success to New Orleans & Company.

"We couldn't have done it without

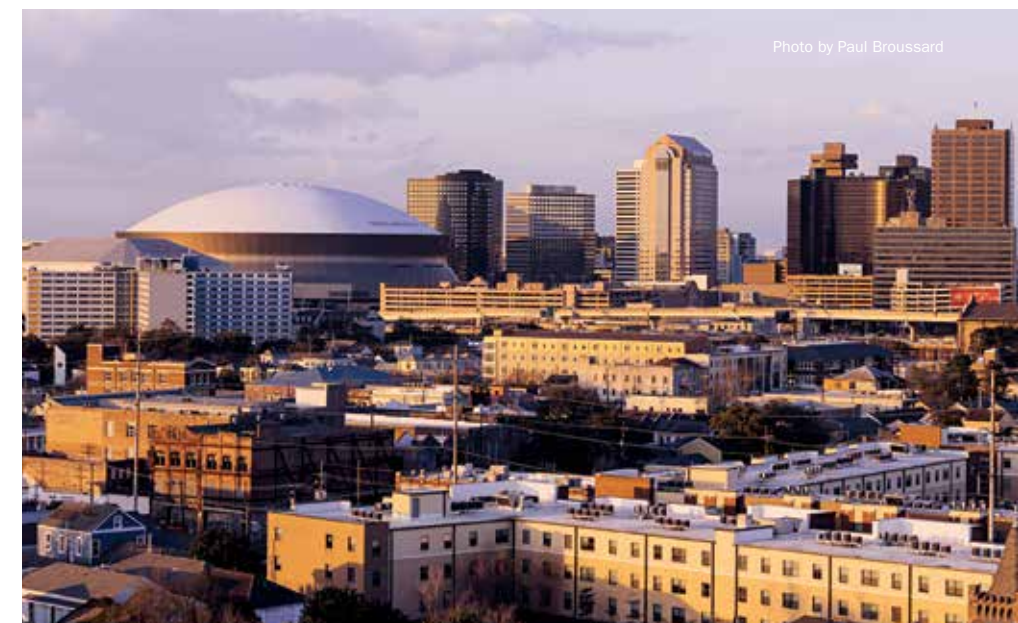


Photo by Paul Broussard

The Mercedes-Benz Superdome is an iconic part of the New Orleans skyline.



Traveling Newlyweds



Joyce Bracey

A muffaletta sandwich, left, and jambalaya are examples of the unique cuisine for which New Orleans is famous.

them,” Grubb says. “They helped us negotiate with hotels by letting them know what kind of economic impact we would bring to the city.”

The CVB also gave Grubb a tour of off-site properties to help her decide where to hold an off-property event for more than 4,000 attendees. “The venue we chose was Generations Hall, a multifunctional event venue,” Grubb says. “We rented the entire facility and streets in front of it. We had different sections of the hall designed and decorated like different neighborhoods in the city”.

Grubb plans to return to New Orleans. “We are negotiating 2028 right now,” Grubb says. “We signed our letter of intent and we are negotiating with the convention center and hotels.”

In coming years, Grubb and other

planners will have even more options to improve every aspect of their meetings. According to Turner, “New Orleans is always innovating. The city is reimagining many of our cultural and infrastructure offerings, joining the old with the new, to present a completely new meetings experience. In the next five years, New Orleans will have a new, world-class airport terminal, a variety of new luxury hotel brands, including the Four Seasons and a convention center headquarter hotel, both overlooking the Mississippi River, and more than 5,000 rooms in the pipeline,” Turner says.

In addition, “There will be a new entertainment district surrounding the convention center with new shopping, dining and venue opportunities,” Turner said. New Orleans will also eventually have one of the larg-

est continuous public riverfronts on the Mississippi River, and it will connect five New Orleans neighborhoods within a walkable, 2-mile area.

Baton Rouge

Although New Orleans gets the lion’s share of the state’s meetings and events, Baton Rouge is holding its own. About 80 miles from New Orleans, Baton Rouge offers convenient access to the Big Easy and its own unique destination advantages.

Baton Rouge offers rustic, historic mansions, museums and other structures with scenic views of the Mississippi River that also serve as unique and memorable venues. Creative venue options include floating casinos and meeting spaces at the ever-popular Louisiana State University football



Raising Cane's River Center, left, features 17 breakout rooms and more than 100,000 sf of meeting space. Hilton Baton Rouge Capitol Center, right, offers nearly 30,000 sf of meeting space and is just steps from the River Center.



games. Baton Rouge also offers its own version of an annual Mardi Gras that attracts people nationwide. There are also several annual culinary, music and cultural events. In addition, Baton Rouge is constantly expanding its restaurants and venues.

Recently opened venues include White Star Market in the Mid-City neighborhood, which offers local unique food and drink as well as contemporary urban gourmet food. White Star Market is located within Square 46, a new mixed-use development.

The centerpiece of Baton Rouge’s meeting space is the expanded Raising Cane’s River Center, which features 17 breakout rooms and more than 100,000 sf of meeting space. Nearby meeting hotels include the recently renovated Baton Rouge Marriott, with

nearly 30,000 sf of meeting space, and the Hilton Baton Rouge Capitol Center, with 20,000 sf of meeting space, next to the River Center.

Shreveport-Bossier

Due to its location in the northwestern corner of Louisiana near the Texas and Arkansas border, Shreveport-Bossier attracts mostly mid-size groups from all three states.

Looking to market its location, the Shreveport-Bossier Convention & Tourist Bureau (SBCTB) promotes the destination as “Louisiana’s Other Side” and extols its “wide-open Texas spirit” Cajun cuisine and culture.

Shreveport-Bossier’s meeting space anchor is the 350,000-sf Shreveport Convention Center, along with 10,500 hotel rooms, including

those provided by several 24-hour resort-style, riverfront casinos featuring top-notch entertainment.

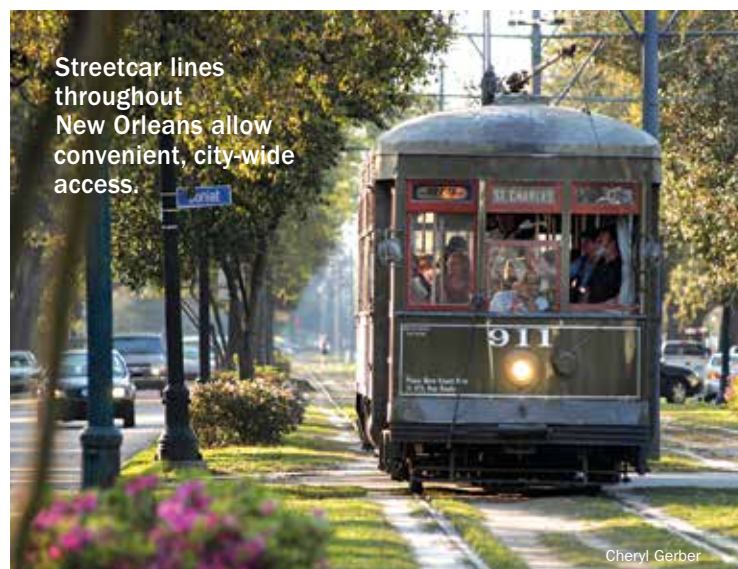
Event space is also available at several indoor and outdoor attractions, including Gator Raceway at Gators & Friends, which features a challenging high-speed go-kart raceway that provides team-building and leadership-training opportunities.

Other attractions with event space include the 2-year-old Shreveport Aquarium, which also features catering through its on-site restaurant.

Louisiana is one of the surest bets for planners in the world because its destinations offer the properties, meeting space and venues necessary for successful meetings. Most of all, Louisiana offers destinations sure to provide indelible memories. **C&IT**

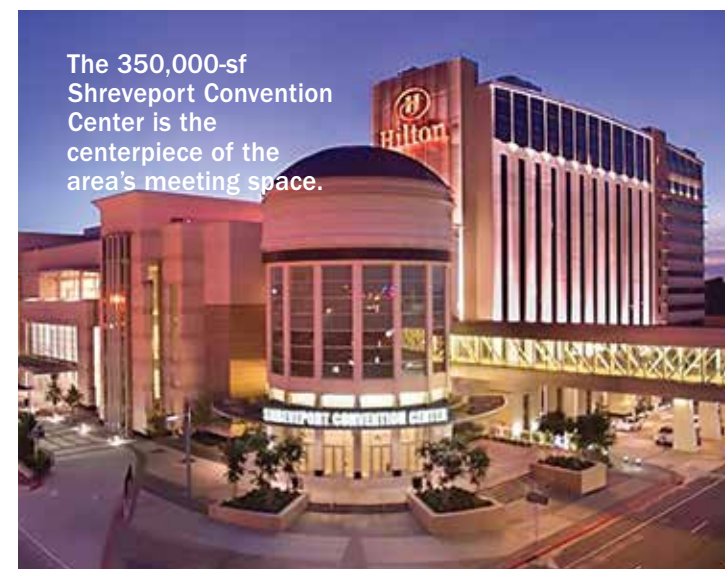


The Ritz-Carlton, New Orleans is undergoing a \$40 million renovation.

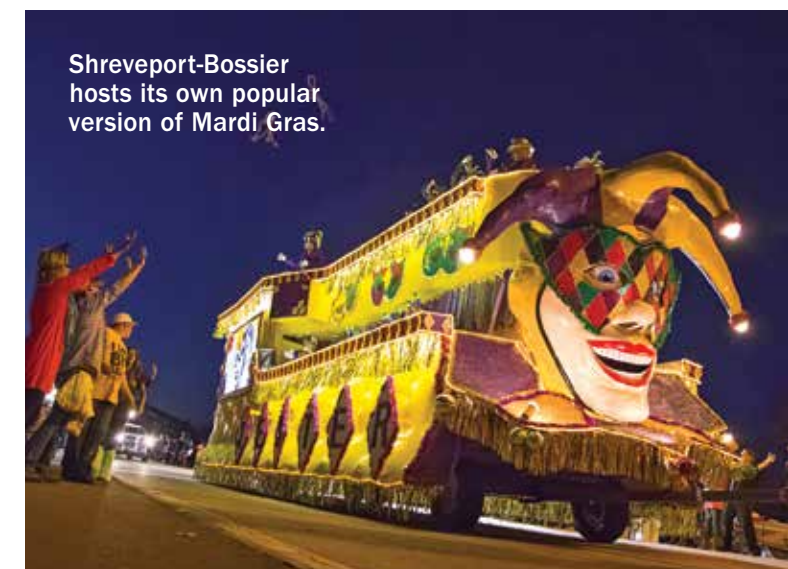


Streetcar lines throughout New Orleans allow convenient, city-wide access.

Cheryl Gerber



The 350,000-sf Shreveport Convention Center is the centerpiece of the area's meeting space.



Shreveport-Bossier hosts its own popular version of Mardi Gras.

CHICAGO SHINES

The 'Windy City' Offers Many
Unique Venues Attendees
Are Sure to Enjoy

BY DEREK REVERON

The Chicago skyline is reflected on the Cloud Gate sculpture — more commonly known as 'The Bean' — at Chicago's Millennium Park.

When it comes to meetings, Chicago isn't a 'Second City,' because it has everything planners need to plan any type of small or large event.

Chicago offers one of the nation's top, big-city combinations of nightlife, entertainment, airlift and cultural and culinary experiences. Most of all, the 'Windy City' provides a large collection of hotels with ample meeting and guest room space.

Conde Nast Readers' Choice Awards recently named Chicago the "Best Large City in the U.S." for the third consecutive year. In addition, Chicago ranked No. 3 after Las Vegas and Orlando on Global DMC Partners' 2018 Global Destination Index of the most popular North American meeting and incentive destinations.

It's no wonder that Chicago has developed a reputation for attracting groups nationwide and worldwide. Chicago's expanding infrastructure will attract even more visitors and groups in the future.

Growth and Modernization

According to David Whitaker, president and CEO of Choose Chicago, "The city continues to grow as a destination, having surpassed 58 million visitors a year in 2018, up 5.7% from 2017, including achieving a record 31 million overnight visitors and record leisure visitor volume of 44 million, an increase of 6.4%.



Photo Courtesy of Choose Chicago

Chicago's The Magnificent Mile offers an array of famous shops, hotels, restaurants, coffee shops and more to keep attendees busy.

"An eight-year plan to expand O'Hare International Airport is in motion, as is a \$400 million modernization program at Midway International Airport, giving Chicago the needed capacity to receive rising numbers of visitors, and giving planners and delegates more options to get in and out of the city," Whitaker says.

O'Hare and Midway offer flights through a combined total of more than 80 carriers. The expansion of O'Hare marks the first improvements to its terminals in over 25 years. Construction is expected wrap up by 2026.

The growing popularity of Chicago among planners stems partly from efforts by Choose Chicago to attract a wide range of meetings, conventions and events. While Choose Chicago's sales team works diligently to secure

long-term, multiyear meetings, there's also a focus on short-term bookings.

Overall, says Whitaker, "The primary goal is to educate prospects on the multiple factors that make Chicago an excellent place to convene and to showcase its attributes, such as airlift out of our city's two international airports, convenience and accessibility throughout the downtown core and surrounding neighborhoods, the wide array of unique venue options, and an increase in hotel inventory among other factors."

Choose Chicago also ensures that efforts to provide value accompanies the growing variety of properties. "We work closely with our partners to provide competitive pricing and incentives to best facilitate meetings looking to host their groups in Chicago," Whitaker says. "Our dedicated team works with clients every step of the way to ensure they have the best possible meeting."

One of Chicago's biggest attractions for groups is its multitude of offerings.

According to Whitaker, "It's a diverse destination and this gives corporate meeting planners variety and flexibility when planning meetings for groups both large and small. The diversity also allows planners to account for options and experiences available to

The O'Hare International Airport's expansion marks the first terminal improvements in more than 25 years. Work should wrap up in 2026.

their attendees outside of the meeting – cultural attractions, food and drink establishments, theater and entertainment, and neighborhood explorations. Moving throughout the city is also manageable and easy, and the connectivity available through Chicago airports makes it an ideal choice."

Easy Access

Jessica Jonas, client engagement manager, BCD Meetings & Events, has held several corporate meetings in Chicago. "We choose Chicago based on ease of travel," Jonas says. "For one particular event, the company had a clear goal of allowing attendees to quickly utilize and implement the meeting content following the event. Chicago proved to be the best destination for a variety of reasons: Its centralized location has countless hotel options, while O'Hare and Midway offer plenty of airlift, including international."

Chicago was also ideal because the headquarters of the company was located within short driving distance of the hotel. "These attributes allowed meeting attendees to quickly travel in and out of the city, easily get to headquarters and extend their stay to visit with clients," Jonas says. "Whether they needed to implement their knowledge in their home office, at the corporate office, or immediately onsite, Chicago delivered."

Chicago's many meeting hotels offer spacious rooms that allow the creation of imaginative attendee experiences.

During the 2018 Winter Olympics, for example, Tracy Gleason, general manager of Hosts Chicago, planned a reception for a corporate group at a popular Chicago meeting property. "We were charged with bringing the ballroom to life and delivering an experience filled with Olympic spirit," Gleason says. "We brought in live coverage of the Olympics to play throughout the space and pulled together activities that mimicked a variety of winter sports."

Hosts Chicago also provided snowboarding and skiing simulators, an après ski bar, transformative lighting effects, celebratory music and flags

from around the world. "It was truly amazing and so festive. Guests were very engaged and loved the opportunity to participate in activities that were relevant to what was going on," Gleason says.

Venues Galore

Chicago is also popular because it is jam-packed with a plethora of unique venues that can match the needs of any meeting or event.

Heather Brown, CMP, DMCP, general manager of PRA Chicago, says venues that corporate groups enjoy include the Untitled Supper Club, which offers a contemporary revival of the prohibition era. "It's one of our most popular venues for corporate guests," Brown says. "Groups enjoy its Chicago-centric themes such as prohi-

Says Brown, "We had a smaller group looking for an off-site activity that offered a casual setting that would give them the opportunity to unwind after a long week of meetings. This particular group was tired of the formal sit-down dinner feel and Flight Club was perfect for what our client had in mind. The group was able to enjoy a fun, interactive evening of playing social darts, dining on casual bites, and taking in gorgeous views of the city. We received great feedback during and after the event."

Theater on the Lake, a restored 1920s-era performance venue, is another favorite of Brown's corporate clients. "The space can accommodate event themes and décor of just about any kind," Brown says. "This historic venue offers gorgeous floor-to-ceiling



Chicago offers activities of all kinds for attendees, including kayaking.

bition and the gangster era. Untitled offers the perfect space for receptions and seated dinners for groups of all sizes. There is ample space to add entertainment and experiential elements such as whiskey tastings."

Brown adds that corporate guests love entering the Untitled Supper Club through its unmarked doors and experiencing the feel of a true speakeasy. The décor also provides a masculine feel with exposed brick, striking bars and textured seating.

Other popular venues among corporate groups include the Flight Club, a high-tech dart bar that offers a relaxing retreat.

views of Lake Michigan and the Chicago skyline. It is a venue unlike any other and is truly unique to Chicago."

Other popular venues include The Adler Planetarium, which offers three different theaters with a total of 60,000 sf of space and distinct exhibits and views of the city's skyline. Another venue, 360 CHICAGO, formerly the John Hancock observatory, accommodates groups of up to 600 people and offers views from the 94th floor of the former John Hancock Center.

More Fine Dining

In addition to its unique venues, Chicago is also known for top

Chicago's entertainment includes comedy shows, river cruises and architectural tours.

restaurants. Popular options include: Bar Ramone, specializing in Spanish tapas; Crab Cellar, known for its all-you-can-eat Alaskan King Crab; Galit, a contemporary Israeli restaurant; The Hampton Social, inspired by the lifestyle of the well-to-do in the Hamptons area of New York; Aba, which serves Mediterranean dishes; Tao, a 300-seat multilevel restaurant; and four RPM restaurants, each specializing in steaks, Italian or seafood.

The variety of restaurants has grown greatly in recent years. According to Gleason, "Ten years ago, there were fewer options and innovative ideas. The bar has been raised and our local chefs are at the forefront of that change. From celebrated and abundant food festivals to our Michelin-rated restaurants and James Beard Award winners, Chicago's restaurants are the soul of our city."

Gleason adds, "Chicago's star chefs are continually recognized for their achievements and regularly exceed expectations of diners and critics. It's about the dining experience, the views of the city, the hospitality and the heart poured into each meal."

Brown agrees: "The Chicago restaurant scene is one that never disappoints," Brown says. "As one of the leading cities in the country for celebrity chefs and Michelin-rated restaurants, it's truly a place that offers a variety of options. Everyone can find a true 'taste of Chicago' that they will enjoy."

Be Entertained

Chicago also offers some of the nation's most iconic entertainment venues, including the world famous The Second City improv theater, the career launching pad for many "Saturday Night Live" performers.

Several stage performance options offer a change of pace



for corporate attendees. "Pairing music to this experience is incredible and the possibilities are endless," Gleason says. "There are so many amazing stages in the city, from the iconic The Chicago Theater to The Pritzker Stage at Millennium Park to the Lyric Opera of Chicago. Guests feel like they are part of something special."

One of Chicago's biggest off-site attractions for activities are those related to the Chicago River. "Chicago revitalized and redesigned 1.25 miles of the river path, running from Lakeshore Drive to Lake Street," Brown says. "This new recreational stretch has brought a gorgeous accessibility to the river with popular river cruises highlighting the city's incredible architecture, walking tours, restaurants, gathering spaces and water taxis."

Another activity corporate groups enjoy is customized brewery tours. "Going into winter," Brown says, "it's one of our most popular off-property activities for groups. We take clients through some of Chicago's most historic neighborhoods and make stops for tastings at some of our favorite breweries such as Haymarket Pub & Brewery and the On Tour Brewing Company. Groups always enjoy receiving the behind-the-scenes look at how beers are created."

Planners seeking one of the most unique meeting venues in the Midwest can't go wrong with the Navy Pier, located along Michigan Avenue near thousands of hotel rooms. Navy Pier is ideal for meetings, receptions and private events in the 18,000-sf Aon Grand Ballroom, and the 15,000-sf Lakeview Terrace, both of which offer lakefront views.

Hotel Growth

The Greater Chicago area offers over 110,000 guest rooms, including more than 46,000 in the central business district.

Greater Chicago offers more than 110,000 guest rooms, with more than 40,000 in the central business district.

And that doesn't include the nearly 3,000 rooms physically connected to McCormick Place.

Whitaker characterizes the growth in Chicago's meeting space in one word – "booming."

According to Whitaker, "Chicago opened nine new hotels in 2018 and five in 2019, providing planners more options and product categories. Between expanded hotel offerings, new city attractions, venues and restaurants, Chicago has continual growth and investment in the meeting and hospitality spaces. The added housing supply near McCormick Place alone has created greater ease and access for those hosting meetings in and near the convention center."

McCormick Place has been a key driver of Chicago's record-breaking performance. "We're pleased to say that of the meetings and events that took place in Chicago in 2018, nearly half have broken some kind of record whether it be in attendance or exhibitors," Whitaker says. "This speaks to the ongoing promotion and the rising appeal of Chicago as a meetings destination."

At least six new hotels opened in Chicago last year, including the 1,205-room Marriott Marquis Chicago, which is connected to McCormick Place, and the 466-room, tri-branded Hilton Garden Inn Chicago McCormick Place, which is divided between the Hilton Garden Inn, a Hampton Inn and Home2 Suites extended-stay property. The Hilton property is connected by a skybridge to McCormick Place. Hilton operates over 30 hotels in the greater Chicago market.

Another Hilton property, the 1,544-room Hilton Chicago, on Michigan Avenue across from Grant Park, finished a \$7 million renovation that includes enhancements to the third-floor meeting spaces and Salon C in



the 115,000-sf Stevens Meeting Center. Hilton Chicago offers a total of 234,000 sf of meeting space.

Meanwhile, Hyatt Regency Chicago added 12,000 sf of meeting space, bringing the total to 228,000 sf. Another Hilton property, the 1,631-sf Palmer House, also renovated its 130,000 sf of meeting space.

"This speaks to the ongoing promotion and the rising appeal of Chicago as a meetings destination."

DAVID WHITAKER
President and CEO
Choose Chicago



All Hyatt Chicago hotels feature the chain's Hyatt Planner Portal, which allows planners to use one tool to manage meeting details, including contracts, attendee information and costs as well as meeting history.

Nearby Destinations

There are some top-flight meeting options outside Chicago that offer convenient access to the city and its hotels, airports and convention facilities.

TINLEY PARK: Once named "The Best Place in America to Raise Kids" by Business Week magazine, Tinley Park is located 30 miles south of Chicago. The expanded Tinley Park Convention Center offers 70,000 sf of meeting space, including 21 breakout rooms. Planners have a choice of

800 rooms in the area, including the 202-room Holiday Inn Chicago-Tinley Park-Convention Center, which is connected to the convention center.

SCHAUMBURG: Located about 26 miles from downtown Chicago, Schaumburg is one of the city's newest suburbs. Planners seeking a meeting space away from the bustle

of Chicago can consider the Renaissance Schaumburg Convention Center Hotel, about 13.5 miles from O'Hare International Airport. The convention center and hotel offer 500 rooms and suites along with 160,000 sf of meeting space.

ITASCA: Located about 30 miles from downtown Chicago and about 15 miles

from O'Hare International Airport, Itasca is home to Eaglewood Resort & Spa, a popular place for business groups to focus on meeting goals amid elegance without distraction. Following the 295-room resort's \$7.7 million renovation, it offers 37,000 sf of IACC-certified meeting space and several activity options, including a golf course, bowling alley, spa and Olympic-sized pool.

While other Midwest destinations have much to offer planners, Chicago remains the biggest draw in the region.

According to Whitaker, "The city's position in the Midwest and the connectivity through O'Hare and Midway airports help make it a prime location for bringing attendees from across the nation and the world."

C&IT

OHIO HAS IT ALL

Offers Attendees
State-of-the-Art
Facilities With
Small-Town Charm

BY SOPHIA BENNETT

National Veterans
Memorial and Museum
in Columbus, Ohio.

Looking to host a corporate event in a centrally located state with amazing culture and entertainment options, high-quality food and beverages, state-of-the-art conference facilities and safe, walkable communities? There's no better place than Ohio. The major cities in this 'Rust Belt' region have undergone a renaissance in recent years, adding accommodations and attractions that meet the needs of modern consumers and planners. Find out what's new in Cleveland, Cincinnati and Columbus.

CLEVELAND

Cleveland re-emerged as a top meeting destination in 2016 when it successfully hosted the Republican National Convention. "That was a large undertaking and everything went stellar," says Craig Campbell, area director of sales and marketing for InterContinental Cleveland. "It demonstrated to meeting and event planners around the world what Cleveland's event capabilities are."

In the last several years, the city has gained a number of new hotels or had old properties go through major refreshing. Updated and new properties include the 400-room Cleveland Marriott Downtown at Key Tower, the 206-room Ritz-Carlton, Cleveland and the 600-room Hilton Cleveland Downtown. In addition, Rocket Mortgage Field-House, home to the NBA's Cleveland Cavaliers, just wrapped up a major renovation. It now has 45,000 sf of event space available to planners.

Campbell emphasizes that many properties have all of the technological requirements meeting planners need. The InterContinental Cleveland is located on the campus of the Cleveland Clinic and hosts a number of medical and healthcare conferences. The facility includes a 12,000-sf, 500-seat amphitheater from which groups can broadcast live talks or conference in speak-



In the last several years, Cleveland has gained a number of new hotels or had old properties go through major refreshing. The city is also home to the second-largest playhouse district in the country.

ers from anywhere in the world. "It really allows groups that have a very high-end nature to their programs the opportunity to do it in a setting that was built specifically for those types of conferences," he says.

People who fly into Cleveland Hopkins International Airport will find it's a short trip into downtown. And once they get settled into their hotels,

restaurants are chef-owned, there's a large microbrewing community, and plenty of boutique shops. Consider directing attendees to the Flats District, which has a number of new restaurants opening.

"There's a crazy amount of culture and history and architecture in the town that, when you look at the other cities in this state, they don't really have," says Gordon Taylor III, vice president of convention sales and services for Destination Cleveland. And no matter what hot spots guests want to check out, they should be able to find their way around. "It's easy to figure out the city because there are all these districts, like the Warehouse District and the Civic Center district.

The signage is terrific, so you never really get lost," he says.

Brian D. Stevens, CEO of ConferenceDirect, cites several of these features — notably walkability and the city's wide variety of cultural attractions — as chief among the reasons his company hosted its biannual CDX event in Cleveland. The 2 1/2-day gathering

brings many of their top customers, partners and associates together for education and networking opportunities. "The city of Cleveland is a very notable city to host a conference, with ease of distance from the airport to a variety of off-site venue options to host receptions," he adds.

The main event took place at the Hilton Cleveland Downtown and Huntington Convention Center of Cleveland. The fact that the facilities are connected made access a breeze. "Our attendees had a great opportunity to experience many features the Huntington Convention Center can provide," Stevens says. "On-site, they have a sustainability farm to help produce food in-house for catering events, which was a unique experience to offer. Additionally, we had food trucks for one of our meal functions. The space they have, made this feasible and provided yet another fun opportunity to add for any event."

Destination Cleveland was integral to bringing the event to the city and assisting ConferenceDirect as their gathering took shape. Stevens has nothing but positive things to say about them and the host facilities. "From start to finish they were amazing partners that helped coordinate and plan one of our most successful CDX events to date. The teams at Destination Cleveland, Hilton Cleveland and Huntington Convention Center were terrific in providing our attendees a well-rounded experience of what Cleveland has to offer for conventions and meetings."

Taylor has been in his position for just a few months, and since he started, he's frequently asked groups why they chose Cleveland over another city. "People tell me, 'We like coming here, because we're not just another number. When we bring our convention, we feel like we're the only ones in town. The feeling we get from the community is, they're genuinely thrilled we're here.'"

CINCINNATI

"Meetings in Cincinnati are about meaningful connections," says a former meeting planner with Cincinnati



The Cincinnati Music Hall, top, offers three performance spaces totaling about 3,200 seats. In recent years, the community has invested more than \$160 million in upgrading and expanding local theaters.

nati USA CVB. "We create a setting where attendees can connect with the city, with the meeting's content and with each other."

Creating those connections starts by establishing relationships with the CVB, potential host facilities and other partners. Cincinnati doesn't lack for great meeting venues. Accommodations include a 170-room AC Hotel by Marriott Cincinnati at The Banks, the 117-room Holiday Inn & Suites Cincinnati Downtown and the 323-room Renaissance Cincinnati Downtown. The Hyatt Regency Cincinnati recently underwent a \$23 million renovation to refresh all 491 guest rooms, and a Kimpton Hotel with 153 sleeping rooms is expected to open next year.

The Summit, a Dolce Hotel, which opened last year, is another one of the city's newer properties. The lifestyle hotel, owned by Wyndham, has 239 guest rooms, more than 52,000 sf of meeting space and an 11,600-sf terrace for outdoor gatherings. One of their areas of emphasis is providing nourishing, healthy food at multiple dining outlets, including the new Overlook Kitchen + Bar. But, people who want to venture farther than the facility's front door will find plenty of options.

"Lots of new restaurants have opened up in Cincinnati. Lots of breweries too," says Denise Bayless, director of sales and marketing for The Summit. "The bourbon scene has opened up from across the

"From start to finish they were amazing partners that helped coordinate and plan one of our most successful CDX events to date."

BRIAN D. STEVENS
CEO
ConferenceDirect



there's plenty to see. In addition to the Cavaliers, Cleveland has two other major sports teams in the NFL's Browns and MLB's Indians. And the iconic Rock & Roll Hall of Fame is a popular venue that offers special event space. The city is also home to the second-largest playhouse district in the country, a high percentage of the



Summer and early fall are ideal for visiting Columbus when entertainment includes the Creekside Blues & Jazz Festival, the Columbus Greek Festival and Columbus Oktoberfest.

river in Kentucky.”

That’s important, because the next step in finding a community where meeting participants can create meaningful connections is finding interesting off-site events or casual gatherings.

“Once attendees are here, they’ll be pleased with Cincinnati’s friendly Midwest pricing and vibrant mix of entertainment destinations and amenities,” the former CVB planner says. “We are a city built on beer — literally. A network of lager tunnels below the streets of downtown

Cincinnati help tell the story of our region’s rich brewing past. The first phase of Cincinnati’s Brewing Heritage Trail broke ground this year, which will provide a new opportunity to learn about the historic buildings, breweries and beers that shaped downtown Cincinnati. The microbrewery scene here is erupting, bringing us back to our roots and back to what makes us a great city.”

There are plenty of interesting things for art enthusiasts to check out as well. “With a quick walk or ride on the Cincinnati Bell Connector streetcar, attendees can experience a variety of unmistakably Cincinnati features like the hundreds of public art murals around town,” the former planner says. The Cincinnati Museum

Center at Union Terminal recently reopened after a \$224 million renovation. In recent years, the community has invested more than \$160 million in upgrading and expanding local theaters, including three popular venues

“The CVB was probably the strongest I’ve worked with in terms of communication and working together as a unit with the entire city.”

JASON SIGALA
Director of Events
New Avon Company



in the Over-the-Rhine neighborhood.

Cincinnati’s Duke Energy Convention Center has played host to many National Training Conventions for Pure Romance because the company’s headquarters is located downtown. Jenna Miller, the company’s event manager, has plenty of love for her hometown partners. “The Cincinnati CVB is always such a huge help with our events,” she says. “Pam Boeing-Rogers, the CVB’s director of convention services, helped me find our location for our block party event and even helped with some logistic pieces. I really enjoyed working with her. She was always available and always extremely helpful whenever I needed her.”

The convention center also provides an exemplary level of service,

Miller says. “Food and beverage is always what we expect it to be. The convention center is always so easy to work with and mixes it up every event, every year. Prestige AV & Creative Services has always gone above and beyond for us. We love working with them and have an incredible partnership.”

Miller recommends that event planners look at the community’s many great restaurants and sports teams when plugging entertainment options or looking for off-site venues. Depending on the time of year, sports fans can enjoy a performance by MLB’s Reds, the NFL’s Bengals or Major League Soccer’s FC Cincinnati, which began play earlier this year.

Many business owners are also willing to create personalized experiences for groups so attendees can get a glimpse of Cincinnati’s authentic culture. “We have great relationships with a lot of the businesses here, which makes it fun to let the consultants experience some of the things we love,” Miller says.

One more thing: Getting to Cincinnati is easier than it’s ever been. “The Cincinnati/Northern Kentucky International Airport is one of the top-ranked and most-affordable airports in the country, and the Cincinnati region is within a day’s drive of 60% of the U.S. population,” the former planner says.

COLUMBUS

Columbus is the capital of Ohio and also holds the distinction of being its largest and fastest-growing community. “People often think of us as a small city, but we’re not,” says Lexi Sweet, CTA, public relations manager for Experience Columbus. “We’re the 14th-largest city in the country and the fourth-fastest growing city in the U.S.”

Despite its size, Columbus still has some of the benefits of a small town. The John Glenn Columbus International Airport is 10 minutes from downtown. The Greater Columbus Convention Center encompasses



Photo by Larry Hamill / Courtesy of Experience Columbus

1.8 million sf and offers 75 meeting rooms. By 2022, there will be 2,700 hotel rooms connected or adjacent to the Convention Center, and the city center will have a total of 5,000 hotel rooms. New properties within a mile of the convention center include Moxy Columbus Short North, a boutique property under the Marriott flag, and Canopy by Hilton Columbus-Short North, both of which opened this year.

Companies looking to glean some best practices from their peers will find plenty of firms to reach out to in Columbus. “We have five Fortune 500 companies and 15 Fortune 1,000 companies, which is the largest concentration of any city in the country,” Sweet says. On the entertainment front, the city has a thriving arts district and college district around Ohio State University. The National Veterans Memorial and Museum — the only such facility dedicated to telling the stories of veterans from American conflicts in all eras and countries — opened last year.

Sweet notes that summer and early fall are an ideal time to visit because there are festivals every weekend. They include the Creekside Blues & Jazz Festival, Columbus Greek Festival and Columbus Oktoberfest. These special events give meeting attendees a chance to experience the community on a more unique, intimate level.

Groups interested in art might consider the Hilton Columbus Down-

Country music star Brad Paisley closed out ASAE’s 2019 meeting at the Greater Columbus Convention Center in Columbus.

the past couple years and we’ve sort of grown out of the single property,” says Jason Sigala, director of events. “This was our first citywide event in a long time. We wanted to pick a city where we felt our representatives would feel safe.” The host city also needed to offer accommodations that met a variety of price points, and be a place where attendees could easily walk from their hotels to meeting spaces, restaurants, shops and entertainment venues. Columbus fit the bill on all of those fronts.

New Avon Company had its product expos, meals and breakout sessions at the Convention Center and Hyatt Regency Columbus. Nationwide Arena hosted its general sessions and a concert. The CVB helped bring together all of the partners and also served as housing coordinator for the event. “Everyone was very easy to work with,” Sigala says. “We found them very accommodating. The CVB was probably the strongest I’ve worked with in terms of communication and working together as a unit with the entire city. The newly renovated convention center was very impactful. It was nice and open and people didn’t feel cramped like you do in a convention center in a hotel. They were able to spread their wings.”

C&IT



New Avon Company held last year’s Avon Convention General Session at Nationwide Arena in Columbus.

ON THE MOVE //



ALLISON



CAVANAGH



DOLAN



FALTER



HAENI

Heather Allison has been appointed complex director of sales and marketing for New York Marriott Marquis and Sheraton New York Times Square. In her new role, Allison will be responsible for overseeing all sales and marketing efforts for these major New York City hotel properties. She brings more than 25 years of hospitality experience to her new role.

The Lodge at Spruce Peak has appointed **Patti Bradley** as national sales manager, overseeing sales initiatives for both group and incentive business from key markets throughout the country. Bradley brings more than three decades of experience to this role and was most recently account director, Group Sales for the SLS Baha Mar.

ACCESS has welcomed **Jim Cavanagh** as senior vice president of sales. Cavanagh will be responsible for leading and directing the ACCESS National Sales team to take a broad, hands-on approach to building and enhancing key client relationships. He brings to his new role more than 15 years of meeting and event experience as a professional sales leader and marketer.

Omni Orlando Resort at ChampionsGate has named **LeAnn Davis** director of sales and marketing. In her new role, Davis will be responsible for overseeing the direction of the sales team, drive revenue streams for the resort, contribute to the group and convention sales strategy and provide executive leadership.

White Lodging has appointed **Thomas Dolan** as director of sales and marketing of the first JW Marriott in the Carolinas, opening spring of 2021. Dolan will focus on opening the JW Marriott Charlotte and supporting economic growth for tourism, travel and convention business in the local Charlotte marketplace. He brings nearly 30 years of hospitality experience to his new role.

L'Auberge Del Mar, the iconic destination seaside resort just north of San Diego, has welcomed **Sher Downing** as senior sales manager. In her new position, Downing will be responsible for overseeing the hotel's group sales and strategic outreach in San Diego/Palm Springs, the Northeast and Canada.

Sawgrass Marriott Golf Resort & Spa has named **Andrew Falter** director of group sales. Falter will be responsible for overseeing new and existing sales strategies for large groups; maximize revenue, sales activities and catering; and work closely with the director of sales and marketing on promotional campaigns designed to drive revenue and exposure to the resort.

Atlantis, Paradise Island in the Bahamas has appointed **Bryan Gay** as senior vice president of sales. Gay will be responsible for overseeing group and leisure sales, wedding and event planning and conference planning for the resort. He brings more than 20 years of experience in the hospitality industry to his new role.

Royal Caribbean has welcomed **Marc Haeni** as senior manager, International MICE and Charter Sales. Haeni brings to his new role more than 20 years of experience in the global travel, meetings, incentives & events industry.

Hersha Hospitality Management Group has named **Amy Hussmann** director of sales at The Plaza Hotel Pioneer Park, scheduled to open in early 2020 in downtown El Paso, Texas. Currently Hussmann serves as a lead on the property's pre-opening team, dedicated to restoring the historic, 19-floor boutique hotel that dates back to the 1930s.

C&IT



BRADLEY



DAVIS



DOWNING



GAY



HUSSMANN



Rock Solid Meetings

From two championship golf courses, private casitas and a 33,000 sq. ft. luxury Spa, to five award-winning restaurants and meeting spaces with breathtaking desert views – the Boulders is a place of unprecedented beauty where inspiration comes naturally.

Let us customize your next group experience!

“Best Golf Resort in the Southwest”

- Golf Digest

“Best Hotels in Arizona”

- U.S. News & World Report

“Top Resorts in the Southwest”

- Readers' Choice Awards, Condé Nast Traveler

“Best Arizona Hotel”

- Travel + Leisure



480.488.9009 | theboulders.com f t i



Elevated *Excellence* It's in Our Nature

Our reputation was built on delivering incomparable experiences. Creativity and unlimited resources are just two of the many reasons why industry leaders and legendary companies trust their important events to us. **New to Wynn Las Vegas** is 300,000 square feet of seamlessly integrated space bathed in natural light overlooking the Wynn Golf Club, an 84,000-square-foot column-free ballroom and 40,000 square feet of outdoor event space. From boardroom to ballroom to bringing natural elements of the outdoors in, experience excellence, elevated.



(888) 320-7117 / WYNNMEETINGS.COM