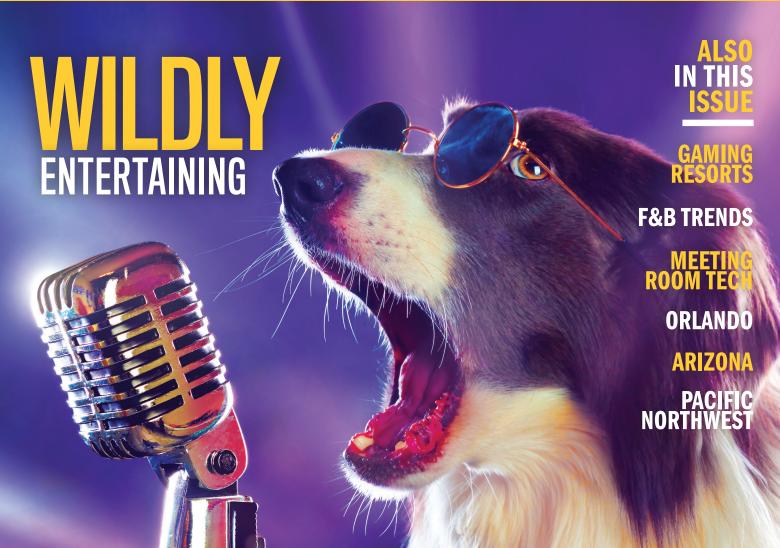
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How to Add an Engaging Edge to Your Next Event

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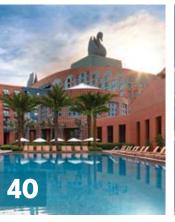
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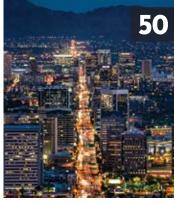
66 ..... People on the Move















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#### PUBLISHER'S MESSAGE //

## **Have You Thought About Improving Your Leadership Style?**

For much of my publishing career, I have managed others and, as an active leader today, I can relate to what leaders must contend with even though it is a challenge in most organizations. However, in my opinion, being a leader is a very rewarding opportunity.

Like the old saying, leaders aren't born, they're made. What makes a great leader? If you ask your colleagues or others, you will get various opinions about the qualities necessary to become a great leader. I think we become leaders as

a result of hard work and by building our personal and professional skills. Leaders need to build trust, be confident and, in the meeting and incentive travel business, be creative. Your business team can only be as successful as its leader.

As a leader, you're the one in charge. Regardless of your longevity as a meeting planner, you can always benefit from input from others, including new ideas and changes that will keep you, as a leader, at your peak. Managing a creative and productive staff to complete projects can easily become a reality if your leadership is enlightening and revitalizing to experience.

Today, the key to leadership success can be achieved by taking the latest techniques in managing to reflect today's workplace attitudes.

In this issue, check out gaming resorts that offer a good balance of exceptional meeting facilities with fun-filled amenities your attendees will truly enjoy.

Also check out appealing destinations like Orlando, which never disappoints groups of all sizes; Arizona, with its range of western ranches to luxury resorts; and the Pacific Northwest, where Seattle and other destinations are sure to satisfy your needs.

Publisher

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#### NEW CONSTRUCTION

#### **Raleigh Moves Ahead With Downtown Headquarters Hotel**

RALEIGH, NC — Raleigh will soon be home to a new downtown headquarters hotel with a separate office/mixed-use tower, located on a 2.5-acre site within walking distance of the Raleigh Convention Center, which houses a 150,000 sf Exhibit Hall. City leaders are in talks about the project, which will change the city's skyline. They have approved the first phase and are now seeking developers. The hotel will include meeting space, in addition to a second site for an office tower and mixed-use space. The towers at the proposed hotel are zoned for up to 40 stories tall.



#### **INDUSTRY NEWS**

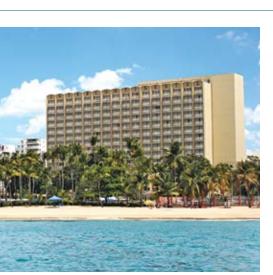
#### **Hello! Destination Management Opens New Location in Colorado**

DENVER, CO — Based in Denver, Hello! Colorado offers full destination management services in Denver and Colorado Springs. This is the 11th location for Hello! Founded in Orlando in 1986, Hello! has since expanded throughout the country with more than 260 full-time employees. Their award-winning teams are known nationwide for providing outstanding guest experiences in more than 37 world-class destinations coast to coast, with offices in Orlando and Hollywood, FL; Nashville, TN; Dallas and Austin, TX; Scottsdale, AZ; Las Vegas, NV; Washington, D.C.; and San Diego and San Francisco, CA. The opening of Hello! Colorado has been spearheaded by Melissa Zorko, regional vice president, and Kerry Sauber, senior account executive. In addition to Zorko and Sauber, Hello! Colorado also will be supported by local operations and product development teams.

#### RENOVATION

#### **Hyatt Regency St. Louis at The Arch Undergoes Renovation**

ST. LOUIS, MO — Hyatt Regency St. Louis at the Arch announced that a \$2.6 million renovation to its meeting space is slated to be completed this year. The renovations will refresh everything from the carpets to the furniture to add a more modern spin, including USB charging stations. The project will complement the property's previous \$11 million renovation. Hyatt Regency St. Louis at The Arch features 83,000 sf of indoor and outdoor space for group functions. The hotel also features the 20,000 sf Grand Ballroom designed for large events, as well as the 16,800 sf Regency Ballroom perfect for medium to large sized functions. Both the Grand and Regency ballrooms are flexible and can be partitioned into smaller meeting spaces to fit the size requirements and preferences of any group. The newly reimagined Gateway Arch National Park is outside the hotel's doorstep. Also, groups can enjoy more than 6 miles of hiking and biking.



#### RENOVATION

#### **InterContinental San Juan Reopens After Multimillion-Dollar Transformation**

SAN IUAN, PR — The InterContinental San Juan on Isla Verde beach has reopened following a multimillion-dollar renovation. The 398 room seaside oasis has been outfitted with the latest in design, technology and comfort, and each new touch reflects the rich culture of Puerto Rico and

reinstates InterContinental San Juan's status as a top destination for business travelers. It offers 24,000 sf of meeting and event space, and offers attendees an outdoor lagoon pool with a swimup bar; seven restaurants, including Ocean Breeze; and bars and the fullservice Akua Spa. The largest meeting spaces include the 6,036 sf Preciosa Ballroom, 5,065 sf Grand Ballroom, a 2,850 sf Caribbean Ballroom and a 2,344 sf Atlantic Ballroom. It is situated minutes from the nightlife of Old San Juan overlooking the palmfringed Isla Verde beach.

#### INDUSTRY NEWS

#### **LVCVA Celebrates Completion of** The Boring Company Tunnel

LAS VEGAS, NV — The Las Vegas Convention and Visitors Authority (LVCVA) recently announced that excavation is complete in the first of two vehicular tunnels



that will comprise TBC - The Boring Company d/b/a Vegas Loop underground transportation system located beneath the Las Vegas Convention Center campus. After tunneling 40 feet underground for nearly a mile over the past three months, the boring machine broke

through the concrete wall located near the 1.4 million sf West Hall convention center expansion, currently under construction, signaling the official completion of excavation for the first of two one-way tunnels.

#### CAREER

#### **Kaitlin Eskelson Named Visit Salt** Lake's President and CEO

SALT LAKE CITY, UTAH — Visit Salt Lake (VSL) announced the appointment of Kaitlin Eskelson as its new president and CEO, the fourth individual to hold this po-



sition in the organization's 36-year history. Eskelson will lead VSL's efforts to improve and increase Salt Lake's visitor economy by attracting and providing support to meetings, conventions, events and leisure travelers while being a leader in environmental responsibility. Eskelson's career within the visitor economy is extensive and varied, including a seven-year stint with VSL from 2006-2013 as director of

tourism sales and marketing. Following her initial time with VSL, Eskelson was the director of partner relations and international strategy for the Utah Office of Tourism from 2013-2017 and, most recently, executive director of the Utah Tourism Industry Association.









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#### RECOGNITION

#### **Mohegan Sun Among Top 10 Best Workplaces for Diversity**

UNCASVILLE, CT — Joining leading brands and organizations such as Cisco, Progressive Insurance and Adobe, Mohegan Sun, which is Mohegan Gaming & Entertainment's (MGE) flagship destination, lands among the top 10 on the recently announced "100 Best Workplaces for Diversity" by Fortune magazine. They ranked No. 6 on the list with a workforce comprised of 48% women, 49% minorities, 29% from the baby boomer generation or older, 13% with disabilities and 4% who are LGBTQ. Within the category of people with disabilities, Mohegan



Sun works with several community and organizational partners for career transition, development and advancement for disabled people, including

Project SEARCH, United Cerebral Palsy of Eastern Connecticut and the Norwich Transition Academy, which have offices at Mohegan Sun.



#### RENOVATION

#### **Hyatt Regency Phoenix Reveals Revamped Ambience**

PHOENIX, AZ — Hyatt Regency Phoenix has completed its multimillion-dollar, floor-to-rooftop renovation. From the minute attendees arrive, they will see a revamped ambience, including the front desk and lobby area. The transformation extends into the meeting spaces as they offer four new meeting rooms among its 50,000 sf of meeting and event space, spanning 35 rooms. They also have added two new onsite venues: Bar-

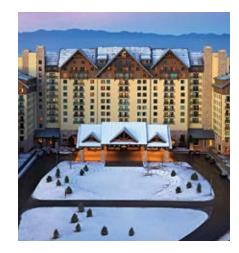
rel & Bushel, a casual American eatery with a street-side patio, and B&B Market, an expansive market offering freshly made grab-and-go options. All of the rooms have a modern look with bold colors reflecting the vibrancy of the sunsets on Phoenix's desert and cityscape. Even the lighting has been redone. The large chandeliers in the lobby include new LED lighting that can be dimmed based on the time of the day. The pool features new furniture and the rooftop courtyard has been expanded and can be used for events for up to 200 attendees. The hotel is located across the street from the Phoenix Convention Center.

#### **EXPANSION**

#### **Gaylord Rockies to Expand Resort Near Denver Airport**

AURORA, CO — The 1,501 room Gaylord Rockies Hotel & Convention Center has announced it is adding 317 more rooms as part of an \$80 million expansion. Construction is slated to begin this year and be finalized in 2022. Once complete, the resort will boast more than 1,800 rooms. When this location opened two years ago,

it became the fifth-largest Gaylord Hotels property and one of the largest in the world to debut under the Marriott International brand. This 85-acre site already features 486,000 sf of meeting space; eight food and beverage outlets; a 17 room spa and salon; a fitness center; a 75 foot viewing screen for game-day celebrations; and a 22,000 sf swimming complex that includes indoor and outdoor pools, a lazy river and three water slides, as well as an arcade, miniature golf, bike rentals and pickleball.



#### NEW CONSTRUCTION

#### **Resorts World Las Vegas and Hilton Partner to Introduce Multi-Brand Resort**

LAS VEGAS, NV — Resorts World Las Vegas and Hilton have partnered to bring three of Hilton's premium brands together for the first time when the \$4.3 billion integrated resort, which is currently being developed, opens in summer 2021. The partnership marks Hilton's largest multi-brand deal in company history and will include three Hilton premium brands, Hilton Hotels & Resorts, LXR and Conrad, into Resorts World Las Vegas. The 3,500 room resort will



also be part of Hilton Honors, the award-winning guest-loyalty program for Hilton's 18 distinct brands, offering members direct access to instant benefits for guests, including flexible payment options, exclusive member discounts, Digital Key and more. Attendees will have access to the resort's premier facilities, including a 5,000 capacity, state-of-the-art theater which is scalable to host Alist celebrity residencies and corporate events; 350,000 sf of meeting and convention space; a 220,000 sf pool complex with seven unique pool experiences; a spa and fitness center; an extensive collection of casual and fine-dining F&B concepts, and more.

#### TIPS + TRENDS

## **Here Are Five Trends Set to Transform Meetings This Year**

Ted Davis, Benchmark's chief sales and marketing officer, has announced five trends that will transform meetings this year. These trends have been observed by the company's portfolio of meeting properties coast to coast. "We've seen this coming, but this year millennials have become the dominant force in meetings," he says. "This is having a transformative influence on how we approach the group meeting experience this year and beyond."

#### **TREND 1: MILLENNIALS HAVE MOVED** INTO MEETINGS MAINSTREAM

Conference attendees this year will increasingly average 30 to 45 years old. They are so tech savvy that this is reflected in their expectations when meeting for business and pleasure. With millennials comes an accompanying demand for advanced technology, increased dietary requirements, personal enrichment experiences curated to individual interests, and privacy concerns going well beyond technology and toward individual wellness.

#### TREND 2: SUSTAINABLE FOOD & **BEVERAGE 2.0**

Creative, sustainable and plantbased cuisine are the new go-to food choices, as are special diets with an emphasis on accommodating a growing list of dietary restrictions. What meeting attendees put into their bodies impacts attentiveness and productivity, so healthy refreshment breaks are a priority. Planners want to know where a property's food ingredients are sourced — this includes at the bar for such items as organically produced liquors — how food and beverage selections are prepared and that an executive chef can easily accommodate a growing number of diet requests.

#### TREND 3: DEMAND HOLDS FIRM

Meeting demand is holding firm this year, despite economic, political and business concerns. Planners are slower to commit, perhaps waiting to see what else is coming down the pike. That said, pricing has not taken a hit, and is, for the most part, on the increase with planners actively seeing the value of meeting packaging. Meetings remain, on average, three days, and average group size is increasing.



Millennials have become the dominant force in meetings.

#### **TREND 4: GIVING BACK WHILE COMING TOGETHER**

Team building is the most popular inclusion in meetings this year, and planners are looking for initiatives that involve community and charitable activities. Giving back enhances personal and group empathy, which helps develop a productive team. There is also the strong desire for group experiences that inspire positive change and leadership development, especially in the tech industry.

#### TREND 5: GET OUT AND EXPLORE

Wanderlust and the desire to explore and discover is a flourishing element of meeting agendas this year. Moving off property and experiencing local color or, if in an urban location, historic and cultural sites, cutting-edge restaurants or micro distilleries — is an essential request of planners for their groups this year even if for an evening. Planners and properties are curating these experiences for individual and group enrichment. Everyone returns to the meeting refreshed and having learned/ experienced something unique in the destination in which they have come together for their meeting.

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# Conversation Marketing Hacks: 8 Ways to "Speak Human" and Change the Game

#### BY MERILEE KERN, MBA

new book written by Kevin Lund entitled "Conversation Marketing: How to be Relevant and Engage Your Customer by Speaking Human," reveals how companies can "Make and maintain more meaningful, impactful and enduring connections within the marketplace, tell an authentic story, foster maximized customer engagement and breed brand loyalty."

Nobody starts out automatically caring about your products or services. They care about how you can make a difference in their lives.

No matter the context, all relationships begin with a "handshake moment", whether literally or figuratively – those first few introductory moments that reveal a great deal about the character of the person standing before you. Why should company interactions with current and prospective customers, or clients, be any different?

So, how can brands make and maintain meaningful connections with and create a lifetime value for customers in ways that'll set them apart in a noisy, increasingly jaded

and discriminating marketplace? How can businesses tell an authentic story so as to foster maximized marketplace engagement and breed brand loyalty? According to Lund, the proverbial key to the kingdom is for companies, no matter their size and scope, to simply "speak human".

In this new book, Lund, CEO of T3 Custom - a content marketing firm helping brands learn to speak human and supercharge ROI, provides an in-depth analysis of what's required to succeed in today's modern marketing era.

companies large and small become more engaging and relevant with customers and the marketplace at large:

#### 1. Earn Attention

To gain attention in today's crowded marketplace, it's prudent to do the opposite of what almost everyone else is doing. That means don't deliver clichéd, boring content written for robots - search engines or otherwise. It's unsustainable for you and your brand, as well as frustratingly futile for the audience you're trying to reach. Instead, speak human by engag-

> ing your audience with eyelevel language to gain their attention and set apart your brand. Learn to use language that educates and entertains the audience. Assume vou're meeting the person on the other side of the screen for the first time. Think of what you can say that's new, memorable, stands out and is jargon-free. Also, understand and adapt to your audience. You wouldn't talk the same way to a baby boomer as you would to a teenager.



Find your company's voice to get customers to understand your company's message.

#### 2. Tell a Story

How do you hold someone's attention long enough to break down a topic and engender his or her trust,

but also in a way that's unforgettable and leaves that person feeling more knowledgeable? The answer lies in good storytelling. Good conversations are filled with good stories and anecdotes. But be mindful that the hero of the story isn't your company or its products, but rather how your product or to make too much noise about products or services and brag about themselves. In conversation marketing, speaking human dictates that your customer's needs, not your own, are top priority. Your audience wants to know what you can do for them, and that means stop talking about yourself. Instead, embrace a different approach that thoughtfully and humbly explains why you do what you do and why it can make a difference in someone's life instead of focusing on your bottom line. Tell stories that inspire and resonate with their life experiences.

#### 4. Pick Your Party

Equally important to the how of your conversation is the where. It should all fit seamlessly and feel natural and organic. Part of learning how to talk to your audience and engage them in any form of conversation is deciding where to talk to them. This means doing the footwork to learn where your potential customers gather and meet-

ing them on their own ground. Where do your potential customers hang out on social media? What are they saying, and what challenges are they discussing? Easily available research tools can help you consistently join the right conversation at the right time and in the right place.

#### 5. Be Relevant (on a Molecular Level)

True listening is about far more than hearing words. It's also about fully understanding the message and concepts being imparted — whether they're needs, wants, desires or even

complaints. Being relevant means making sure you're talking about topics that are of interest to your audience, and that's often achieved by addressing their pain points. It can be dangerous, expensive and ultimately futile for companies to presume to inherently know what should be said in conversation marketing.

#### 6. Start the Conversation

How do you gain audience attention in a way that prevents you from just being part of the noise? It's no longer a question of whether you should insert yourself into the world of content marketing. It's a matter of when you're going to start talking, what you're going to say and how you're going to say it. One good approach is to base that initial conversation on your unique value proposition for the given audience. It's important to always remember that your target audience doesn't care about you. They care what you can do for them. If you've done your research, you'll be familiar with their pain points and better prepared to offer answers that address their needs. Don't be a "me-too" marketer who dishes out the same information as everyone else. Instead, develop a unique angle with a thought-provoking headline that sparks attention — even better if it disrupts conventional thinking.

#### 7. Stop Talking

66 Once your

message is out, take a **STEP** 

**BACK** and

read the room.

Unlike a monologue, a conversation is a two-way endeavor. Knowing when to stop talking is as important as knowing what to say and when to say it. Once you hear preliminary reaction, you can respond to questions and concerns before

> moving ahead or otherwise course-correct as needed. Once your message is out, take a step back and read the room. Don't consider a negative response or lack of response necessarily a failure. Instead, see it as an opportunity to adjust, make changes and, perhaps, find ways to better meet your audience's needs.

#### 8. Ditch the Checklist

Before every takeoff, airline crews work through an extensive checklist. There's a detailed set of tasks to cover before the plane can even push back from the gate. However, in an ebb and flow conversation marketing context,

this adherence to a certain protocol can pose limitations. Indeed, one problem with simply sticking to a checklist is that a content marketing strategy will never evolve with the times or differentiate itself in any way from what everyone else is doing.

Lund also suggests finding sources of inspiration. "Explore some of the successful content marketing plans that showed passion, ditched the tired old language, zeroed in on what customers needed and started a real conversation with the market," he urges. "Then, scrutinize your own strategy and see where it might be lacking, so that you can continually refine your own checklist." C&IT



#### MERILEE KERN, MBA

Branding, business and entrepreneurship success pundit, Merilee Kern, is an influential media voice and lauded communications strategist. As the executive editor and producer of "The Luxe List International News Syndicate," she's a revered trends expert and travel industry voice of authority who spotlights noteworthy marketplace changemakers, movers and shakers. Reach her online at The LuxeList.com. Follow her on Twitter at Luxel istEditor and Facebook at TheLuxeList.

3. Stay Humble Being humble begins with letting go of ego - that instinctual part of the psyche that screams for a marketer

service will have a positive impact in your customers' lives. Below are eight of Lund's tactical strategies that can help

March 2020 | Corporate & Incentive Travel | The Meeting Magazines.com

# A Match Made in Heaven: How Group and Meeting Planners Can Find the Right Venues

BY LAUREN HALL



et's take a glimpse inside the mind of a modern event planner. On any given day, they're likely consumed with thoughts of budgets, guest lists, event size, space requirements, locations, venue options, amenity requirements, contracts, confirmations and, of course, steadily shrinking timelines. Cue the checklists that never end, and clients' complete reliance that the meeting, event or party they've imagined will come to life in a few weeks' time. No pressure, right?

Perhaps, contrary to popular belief, event planning isn't all glitz, glamour and Hollywoodesque parties. Sure, it might be some of that, but mostly it requires a lot of work, meticulous planning and attention to detail, a collaborative approach and a little (or a lot) of help from technology. Rewarding? Absolutely. But the modern event landscape, especially with the continued rise of small meetings and corporate events, provides a long list of demands for event planners and venue spaces alike.

#### Finding the Perfect Venue

Arguably one of the most important items on that list of demands? The venue. In our world, an event can only exist when a venue has been secured. Oftentimes, the venue will make or break the event, helping to curate the perfect backdrop to the gathering, meeting, celebration or party in question. In the case of a wedding,

the bride and groom might have dreamed about their ideal venue space for years, with no detail spared. In the case of a corporate meeting or conference, the venue will play a critical role in ensuring attendees are comfortable, supported, engaged, and leave the event feeling inspired and connected to their company.

In the past, this pivotal step was also a notoriously difficult one. Event planners were tasked with vetting and booking the perfect venue, while hotels and venues were tasked with marketing their space to prospective

planners. Supply and demand sounds pretty simple, right? Well, it wasn't. Burdened by the limitations of manual processes, the time required to identify, tour and book a potential venue for an event simply took too long, while venues' sales teams struggled to keep up with RFPs and basic inquiries. Both parties were subject to the arduous process of email catch-up and phone-tag, repetitive questions and a far-too-complicated path to booking. Within a landscape that is oftentimes ruled by tight deadlines, this way of doing things simply wasn't cutting it for planners or venue spaces.

#### A Better Way of Doing Things

Fortunately, venue management technology is changing the game. Closing the gap between planners and venues/hotels, management technology acts as an integral central platform to ensure the process.

tral platform to ensure the process of securing a venue is, dare we say it, easy.

Planners: picture a virtual one-stop-shop marketplace. With a few clicks of your mouse, you can find everything you need that relates to a prospective venue. First, you search by location and date. From there, you scan the list of available venues, gauging their aesthetic, capacity details and price. Once you've narrowed it down to a few options, you delve a little deeper, taking a 3D virtual tour of the grounds and floor plans, viewing options for customized packages, detailed descriptions of amenities, FAQs and

more. The information doesn't stop there, though. Without having to send a single email-borne RFP, you can generate an instant quote, capitalize on a last-minute booking opportunity, send (and receive a reply to) an automated RFP in minutes, book and pay online. No missed phone calls, no days lost between correspondence — ultimately, no headaches at all. With floor plans, 3D tours, packages, real-time rates and availability all displayed online within a user-friendly platform, booking becomes entirely painless. Those tight deadlines we spoke of? No problem. You've got

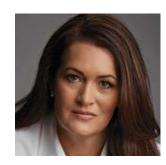
this under control.

From the perspective of the hotel or venue, we realize a similar benefit. Freeing their sales staff from the confines of manual RFP follow-up, each member of the team can better serve prospective clients, answer questions in a timely fashion and provide personalized, attentive service. The function space receives real-time global visibility and the platform can be accessed from anywhere, 24/7. Staff are able to easily manage the sales pipeline and compare budgets to actuals while ditching spreadsheets in favor of instant automated reports and built-in resource management. This ensures space is yielded effectively, and venues can spend time cultivating meaningful, memorable relationships with event planners that encourage future partnerships (and glowing reviews).

Let's face it, from planning the event itself to managing budgets, getting permits, confirming transportation and catering, booking security and/or entertainment, and ensuring attendees have everything they need, event planners have enough to worry about. Venue management technology makes it easier for event managers to organize great conferences, events and meetings, whilst ensuring hotels and venue spaces can effectively market and yield their space any time of the year. Suddenly, venue management technology becomes the middleman that venues and planners didn't know they needed, and that middleman is very good at his job.



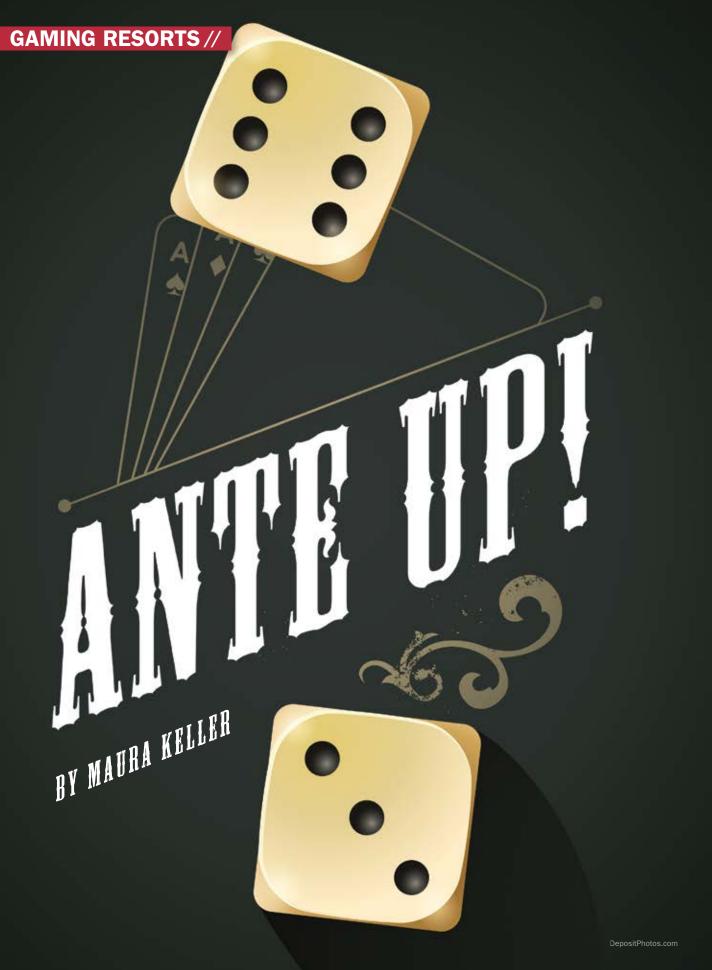
Venue management



#### LAUREN HALL

Lauren Hall is the award-winning founder and chief executive officer of iVvy. Hall is a passionate entrepreneur with more than 25 years of business management experience at the executive and board level, successfully building multiple companies from startup to strategic and financial exit. With a background in programming, accounting and marketing, Hall's expertise spans manufacturing, retail, advertising and technology industries in both South Africa and Australia. She co-founded iVvy in 2009, overseeing its growth to 1,000 clients in 13 countries and expansion to New Zealand, Asia, Europe and North America. Visit ivvy.com.

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# Gaming Resorts Continue to Offer Attendees Everything Under One Roof

hen selecting a location for a corporate meeting or incentive program, planners often seek venues that offer a good balance of exceptional meeting facilities with fun-filled amenities that attendees truly will enjoy. As such, more and more meeting planners are turning their attention to gaming resorts.

For Tiffany Gravelle, CMP, CUDE, president and CEO at Hello Tiffany, hosting meetings and events at casinos

and other gaming resorts offers a wealth of inclusive onsite resources, such as plenty of hotel room choices, full-service spas, workout facilities, several onsite restaurants, live entertainment, gaming credits, banquet and meeting rooms, alternative locations for receptions like pools or upscale lounges, ample valet parking and concierge.

"Gaming resorts specialize in keeping a captive audience with over-the-top service and experiences," Gravelle says. "It benefits them to keep their attendees onsite, enjoying the facilities and spending their money in the casinos. Casinos also have the unique opportunity to create their own raving fans and repeat guests after the conference is over."

Take the MGM Resorts International properties, for example. From Mandalay Bay Resort and Casino to MGM Grand Hotel & Casino to the Borgata Hotel Casino & Spa, there are

many different types of gaming properties offered by MGM that will suit the exact preferences of event attendees. And MGM makes a concerted effort to renew, refresh and redefine many of its properties by adding interesting dining and entertainment options, and expanding their reach to the meetings market. Recently, MGM Resorts completed the expansion of its Grand Conference Center, adding 250,000 sf to the facility. Now MGM resorts boasts more than 4 million sf of meeting and convention space. In addition, proper-

Casinos also have the unique opportunity to create their own raving fans and repeat guests after the conference is over.

> TIFFANY GRAVELLE, CMP. CUDE President and CEO

ties such as Mandalay Bay, ARIA Resort & Casino, and Park MGM also recently underwent expansions to offer more space to meeting planners.

What's more, Park MGM recently partnered with Cisco to establish a state-of-the-art meeting space for collaborating, white boarding, video calling and file sharing using unique innovative technology. Called the Ideation Studio, this unique meeting space offers an exceptional collaborative environment that includes four distinct layouts and 10 rooms for groups of six up to 24. The variety of options provide

the right solution for that next strategic planning session.

Of course, maintaining a healthy work/life balance is also taking center stage at The Mirage Hotel & Casino, which now features MGM's Stav Well Meetings concept. Featuring a video with guided meditation narrated by new-age guru Deepak Chopra, the Stav Well Meetings concept also uses air purification to reduce allergens and fumes, optional aromatherapy to support attendee relaxation, and advanced lighting systems to provide circadian light-

> ing to emulate natural light throughout the day. Chroma therapy, or different color themes, is also used to boost energy or inspire moods. Stay Well Meeting attendees also are given access to the Cleveland Clinic Wellness online programs tackling nutrition, stress and sleep problems. The Cleveland Clinic also consulted on

meeting menus and nutrition.

Spanning more than 90 acres on the south end of The Las Vegas Strip, M Resort Spa Casino also has proven to be a favorite destination for meeting and event attendees. The more than 92,000-sf, state-of-the-art conference and meeting space at the M Resort includes a pavilion, grand ballroom, multiple reception areas and a convenient business center.

Equipped to meet the needs of smallto mid-sized meetings and events, the M Resort also features a plethora of gathering spots throughout the resort, including LUX, the expansive 16th-floor function space, a wine cellar and the Villaggio Del Sole Pool and Entertainment Piazza, which includes outdoor event terraces. Of course, no visit to M Resort Spa Casino would be complete without spending time in the casino or the award-winning spa - a 23,000-sf oasis to rejuvenate mind, body and spirit.

#### **HIGH-QUALITY PRODUCT**

Emily Murnen, founder of Wild Elm Events, an event planning company, recently held an event at the M Resort. Murnen says meeting planners should consider gaming resorts for a meeting or event because they can often offer a higher quality product for less than

other comparable hotels or resorts. "Concessions, such as suite upgrades, amenities, food and beverage discounts, or A/V discounts, are easier to come by than at other resorts that don't bring in revenue from gaming," Murnen says. "Gaming resorts also tend to frequently update or renovate their facilities, and they have restaurants, entertainment, and spas onsite, which is a benefit to the attendees."

Murnen says that while gaming resorts aren't right for every event, they can be a great fit for planners that are looking to host a high-quality event

for less money. "Make sure to do a site visit to know the layout and condition of the meeting space and guest rooms," Murnen says. "Don't be shy asking for concessions. Let your attendees know what to expect and some options to do in their downtime."

Gaming is also at the heart of the AAA Four Diamond-rated Seminole Hard Rock Hotel & Casino in Hollywood, Florida. The resort wrapped

Don't be shy asking for concessions. Let your attendees know what to expect and some options to do in their downtime.

**EMILY MURNEN** Founder Wild Elm Events

up a \$1.5 billion expansion in the fall and is now home to three hotel towers, including the world's first and only iconic, guitar-shaped hotel tower with 638 luxury guest rooms and an adjacent 168-room tower overlooking a new pool lagoon. The property also unveiled an expanded gaming floor boasting nearly 200 table games and more than 3,000 slot machines, a new Rock Spa, 13.5 acres of recreational waterscape, an entertainment venue, retail shops and much more. Of course, when it comes to getting down to business, the Hard Rock's 120,000 sf of meeting space, including



a 38,000-sf Exhibition Hall, offers the perfect place for trade shows, large corporate groups and social fundraisers. The resort's flexible meeting space can also be reconfigured to accommodate groups as large as 5,000 attendees or smaller, more intimate meetings.

Of course, no consideration of gaming resorts as a meeting spot would be complete without evaluating The LINQ Hotel + Experience. A meeting

> or event experience at The LINQ includes cutting-edge technology and 31,000 sf of meeting space, which can be configured many ways. The LINQ can accommodate up to 1.000 attendees.

> CAESARS FORUM is directly connected to The LINQ. This much-anticipated venue is a \$375 million, stateof-the-art conference center

debuting this month. Offering 550,000 sf of space able to accommodate 10,000 attendees, the conference center will be the first facility of its size built on a single level. In addition to featuring two massive, pillar-less ballrooms, CAESARS FORUM will include two additional 40,000-sf ballrooms and 100 breakout rooms, along with the Forum Plaza, Las Vegas' first 100,000-sf outdoor meeting and event space.

#### **GAMING AND BEYOND**

As an event coordinator in Las Vegas, Tia Coward, of Snap Events, has planned and been to many events held at casino resorts on The Strip and throughout the valley. "Although they sometimes tend to be more expensive, they offer so much more bang for your buck," Coward says. "It's very convenient for you and your attendees who have easy access to entertainment after your event — at the slots, movie theaters, restaurants or clubs without having to leave the venue."

Indeed, in today's fragmented work environments, companies and organizations need to maximize the time their meeting attendees spend face-to-face. That's why Mohegan Sun is a favorite of sorts among planners interested in balancing the gaming experience with the business at hand. The resort, in Uncasville, Connecticut, is considered an integrated resort - housing two meeting facilities under one roof. With 275,000 sf of indoor space, the resort offers plenty of meeting space options. In addition, Mohegan Sun also boasts a 10,000-seat arena and an 18-hole championship golf course.

With more than 40 dining venues and an array of entertainment options, meeting attendees can continue their networking well after the formal meeting has ended for the day. The choices include 14 unique venues from private restaurant dining rooms, a variety of bars/lounges to a comedy club and country-western themed venues.

"The gaming resort experience is well worth it thanks to all of the lavish amenities and variety of activity options in one location," says Heather Harrington, meeting planner and corporate training and development manager at Engineering Consulting Services (ECS). "Planners should pay attention to a gaming resort's entertainment calendar to try and align their events with upcoming performance acts. Those who are used to hosting events at smaller hotels should make sure to be aware of and take advantage of the resort's larger meeting dimensions."

ECS recently hosted an annual, three-day administrative staff training event at Live! Casino & Hotel in Hanover, Maryland. Approximately 60 ECS employees attended and there were general sessions along with breakout sessions for more individual training. "We chose Live! Casino & Hotel because our Baltimore location did some work with the property when their flagship Live! Hotel was under construction a few years ago," Harrington says. "It was a no-brainer to choose Live! and show our staff the final project."

Live! Casino & Hotel features more than 40,000 sf of meeting and event space. In addition, The Hall at Live! is the resort's new 75,000-sf, three-story multiuse concert and event venue featuring some of the nation's best touring acts,

comedians, championship boxing and other entertainment. And the venue's configurable event space can accommodate from 54 to 1,600 attendees.

The hotel's location to the company's flagship office in Chantilly, Virginia - only an hour away - along with the venue's variety of amenities played a major role in Harrington's decision to host the training at there. "Our admins loved the Las Vegas-style atmosphere of the property," Harrington says. "The casino itself was a draw for our staff and they also enjoyed the catering from the property's deluxe steakhouse."

As Harrington explains, the draw of a gaming resort is that everything - dining, entertainment and nightlife — is in the same location as the event. "Meeting planners don't have to coordinate with multiple vendors, and attendees can unwind after a productive day without having to leave the property," Harrington says.





Positioned at the south end of the The Strip is M Resort Spa Casino, a boutique Forbes Four-Star retreat, perfect to host your next meeting or conference. With over 92,000 square feet of open and dynamic conference space, state-of-the-art technology, impeccable service and breathtaking views, M Resort delivers a unique experience sure to impress your guests. Attendees will enjoy the uniquely-designed guest rooms, suites, seven signature restaurants and award-winning spa

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"Live! Casino & Hotel was also a great location because it gave our staff something to do at night as a team. Getting dressed up to celebrate with your colleagues at a casino steakhouse with live music is more exciting than having dinner at a hotel restaurant," Harrington adds. "We noticed increased teamwork and bonding, such as when some of our admins with more gaming experience showed other team members how to play blackjack and pick out the best slot machine."

#### **ALL UNDER ONE ROOF**

Of course if combining

an exotic locale with gaming amenities is more appealing, consider Atlantis in Paradise Island, Bahamas. The ballrooms gracing Atlantis' expansive grounds can accommodate up to 4,000 attendees and features the 50,000-sf Imperial Ballroom, with more than 40,000 sf of pre-function space. The resort's Conference Center can host up to 4,000 attendees and boasts 30 breakout rooms, three boardrooms, a large staging area and a banquet kitchen equipped with additional pan-

tries and state-of-the-art facilities for groups of all sizes.

When not in meetings or enjoying the casino amenities, event attendees at Atlantis can participate in various teambuilding activities. For example, Atlantis offers a Build a Boat & Hope It Floats Regatta. Team participants build a cardboard boat in the hopes

that it will be a seaworthy vessel that will float across open water. The setting of Atlantis on Paradise Island also provides a wealth of memorable activities for attendees.

If Southwestern charm is more apropos of the group, consider the Scottsdale, Arizona favorite, Talking Stick Resort. This Four Diamond property features more than 100,000



sf of flexible meeting space, ideal for everything from full-scale trade shows to intimate board meetings. Looking for configuration options aplenty? The hotel conference center's 12 meeting rooms can be configured into several setups fulfilling every aspect of a meeting to create highly productive settings.

What's more, Talking Stick offers both indoor and outdoor meeting venues, providing a beautiful backdrop of the Sonoran Desert all while boasting

Although they sometimes tend to be more expensive, gaming resorts offer so much more bang for your buck.

TIA COWARD **Events Coordinator** 

award-winning catering; an awardwinning spa; championship golf; live entertainment in the 650-seat showroom, Degree 270; Players Sports Bar; and Shadows, an elegant martini and cigar bar. For meeting planners looking to a variety of meeting options, Talking Stick includes the Salt River Grand Ballroom, which accommodates 2.000 attendees. The Showroom at the

Seminole Hard Rock **Hotel & Casino** Hollywood completed a \$1.5 billion expansion last fall.

resort can accommodate 650 people and is an ideal location for large gatherings and keynote speakers.

Another Southwestern gem is the Inn of the Mountain Gods Resort & Casino. Located in the heart of New Mexico, this gaming resort offers an ideal location for guests who want to experience the beauty of the great outdoors, while also delighting in the indoor amenities.

Well equipped to handle any group, Inn of the Mountain Gods presents award-winning accommodations with luxuriously appointed rooms and suites, a convention center with theater-style seating for up to 3,000 and technological capabilities to suit almost any need.

There's an abundance of recreation options, including an awardwinning, 18-hole championship golf course, an indoor pool and workout facility, horseback riding, hiking and

paddle boating, kayaking and fishing on Mescalero Lake. For a truly exhilarating experience, the Apache Eagle ZipRider and the Apache Wind Rider ZipTour at Ski Apache each offer unique and breathtaking rides yearround. Winter months bring snow to the surrounding Sierra Blanca, inviting guests up for an afternoon of ski-

ing and snowboarding at Ski Apache. From a gaming perspective, the Inn of the Mountain Gods offers a fun respite for attendees to try their hand at some of their favorite casino games.

The array of gaming resort options throughout the U.S. and Caribbean means planners have hundreds of options to please attendees no matter which activities they prefer.





#### BY SOPHIA BENNETT

hen it comes time to evaluate F&B options for meetings and incentive trips, flavor and price may be at the top of your list of priorities. But, for attendees, perhaps no component is more important than the experience of eating and drinking items that have an engaging story to go along with them.

"That was the biggest takeaway from our annual look at F&B trends for corporate meetings. As attendees travel more, try different types of cuisines and learn about food, they care more about both what they eat and how they eat it," savs Aron Schwartz, executive chef at the Marina Kitchen at the Marriott Marquis San Diego Marina. "Especially in a reception setting, attendees don't want the chafing dish anymore. They don't want a huge mound of cheese on a plate. They want individual cheeses and a story about each of them. They want to see a chef cooking and talking to them."

He adds, "Chefs need to think outside the box and think more about providing a restaurant setting than anything else. They need to think about the experience you have in a restaurant that serves 40 to 50 people and how you translate that to a party for 1,000 people."

"No meat" and "no allergens" of all kinds may be the biggest specific food trends to which chefs have to pay attention. And, ironically, "no alcohol" may be the most important thing bartenders have to take into consideration when planning an event menu. "Alcohol is sort of on the outs," Schwartz says. "Not on the outs like no one is drinking, but people want to have the option of a non-alcoholic drink to go with their dinner or reception – something unique, with complexity, like a cocktail but with no alcohol in it."

#### Focus on the What and the How

With every event, John Silva, founder, sherpa and chief visionary at Culinary Eye Catering & Events in San Francisco, likes to dig into a group's background and interests and determine what will get the attendees excited about dining. With that information, he builds experiences that are interactive or have an interesting design component.

Silva has created edible bird nests and put them in a tree in a reception hall; made a "Filet Mignon" from beets and served it alongside a confit, made with fingerling potatoes and asparagus mousse; and done "make your own ice cream sandwich" stations, where attendees can scoop vanilla or Ovaltine ice cream onto homemade cookies for dessert. Foods like these spark an emotion as much as they quell hunger, and that's his whole goal.

"We want to create a moment that takes someone somewhere," he says. "It can be reminding them of a childhood experience with a dish, or taking them to a location through touching and eating that food. With our corporate clients specifically, they're trying to get people to open up. How do you get an engineer to have a conversation with a group? You create these "wow" moments and give them something to talk about."

Nathaniel Beaver is the owner of Infinity Hospitality Group in Nashville, Tennessee, a full-service event planning firm that also owns three event spaces — The Belltower, The Bridge Building and The Quarter — and a catering company. He also gets excited about serving food in creative ways and creative places. "At meetings and especially incentive trips, the goal is to get attendees to socialize, not to provide a formal experience," he says. "We do a lot of high-end cocktail-driven recep-

I like the idea of giving someone food right as they come in the door.

**NATHANIEL BEAVER** Owner Infinity Hospitality Group



tions, interactive food stations and creative passed appetizers."

A popular appetizer for events, he says, is tequila-infused watermelon. Staff will put the fruit and an empty liquor bottle on a serving platter. Besides the obvious eve appeal, this informs people that there's alcohol in the dish and lets them know what kind of spirit is being used. One of the company's signature dishes is a homemade waffle cone filled with fruit and whipped cream. Servers place the cones in rustic blocks of wood with holes that fit the food perfectly. Beaver also likes to serve candied bacon on top of a shot glass filled with porter-style beer from Nashville's Yazoo Brewing Company.

"In our buildings, we've found new locations to serve food that we never thought of before," he adds. "The Bridge Building has three floors with a rooftop bar. We've started putting someone with a tray of food in the

> elevator and calling it 'elevator bites.' I like the idea of giving someone food right as they come in the door."

More formal meals at today's events may also focus on miniaturized servings rather than huge plates of food. "Smaller, shareable plates that are served as they're ready as opposed to set courses is a

newer trend that's really developed in recent years," says Tejesh Patel, director of food and beverage at The Daytona in Daytona Beach, Florida.

Another popular way to serve sitdown meals is with large dishes that have to be passed. "With family-style dining, more attendees are able to interact with each other and have the option to try different things," says Victor Miguel, executive chef at the Los Angeles Airport Marriott. "It is important because when you have attendees interacting with each other, it allows them to share their experience with the food or the memories they connect with it."

Buffets have yet to go out of style, according to Beaver. But when his company does them, there's a staff member at each protein and vegetable station who dishes up the food. "It's not about controlling portions because everyone can have as much as they want. It just

Aron Schwartz (right), executive chef they're eating.

**Infinity Hospitality Group also offers** homemade waffle cones with fruit and whipped cream.

feels more formal," he says.

For the groups that prefer plated meals, Rafael Corniel, executive chef at the Coronado Island Marriott Resort & Spa in Coronado, California, says the focus is less on creating elaborate designs on the plate and more on creating really good food. "We're more about taking what you'd eat at home and perfecting it, and making it really good. Plates are basic food but done really well. We're trying to bring

attendees back to their memories, when they were home and their grandma or their mom made something. We just want them to think, 'Wow, that's really good," Corniel says.

#### Meatless. Mushrooms and More

From the Impossible Burger at fast food chains to Instagram shots where the dishes are front and center, the meatless craze is showing up everywhere. In Southern California, plant-based or vegan meals are very popular, Miguel says. "We have actually added vegan dishes to all of the outlets here on property."

Corniel has also seen a rise in requests for meatless meals. He attributes it to the growing health craze in America. "People are just more conscious of what they're eating and how balanced

of a meal they're getting," he says. That means more vegetable-centric dishes, more alternative proteins, such as beans or lentils, and more requests for plant-based meat substitutes. When people do request meat, they're more likely to ask for chicken or seafood than red meat, he says.

Beaver and Schwartz are getting fewer requests for fully meatless meals, although planners are increasingly con-



cerned that their vegan and vegetarian attendees have a good alternative. The nuance that Schwartz has noticed is some pushback against manufactured and highly processed meat substitutes.

"I think people are starting to wake up and go, 'This Impossible Burger is something that's made in a lab, and I want to eat vegetables and something that I know where it's coming from," Schwartz says.

You create these "wow" moments and give them something to talk about.

**JOHN SILVA** Founder, Sherpa and Chief Visionary Culinary Eye Catering & Events



Rather than offering a meatless meal because it's meatless, he believes the more important trend is to offer creative meals. That may mean serving a meal where a vegetable is the centerpiece and it's prepared in a way that people have never seen. The Marriott Marquis's Marina Kitchen recently created a dish where a head of radicchio was brined, grilled and then finished in the oven, much the way a steak would be cooked.

Beaver also believes attendees are looking for more creative food options. They are much more knowledgeable about food and culinary practices these days, and they've eaten or seen a lot more types of food in real life or on TV shows. "It raises the bar," he notes. In order to really impress them, "You have to take a classic dish and put your spin on it so someone says, 'I have not seen it served like that." Hot chicken and waffles has been a popular dish in Nashville for years, but his company is now doing hot chicken bites in a waffle rolled into a cone topped with rose-

mary maple sweet tea syrup.

The idea of food having a story is another important shift that Schwar tz has noticed. For example, if a chef serves carrots at dinner, attendees have questions about them like "Why that carrot? Why did you make this dish? Is it seasonal?" "The days of a chef just putting food on a table is going away," Schwartz says.

Some of this is tied to the growing

interest in experiencing the location where a meeting is held. Rather than eating food that has come from thousands of miles away, attendees want to eat food that comes from local farms and has a tie to the local community. They want veggies from the farm where the chef shops and pork from the ranch where they

buy meat for their family.

People are also still very committed to the idea of farm to table. "I'm not sure farm to table is a 'trend' anymore," Silva says. "On the coasts and in the south, it's an expectation. It's become muscle memory."

Patel feels very much the same way. "The sustainability trend reigns supreme — from sourcing ingredients and produce from local farms and



at the Marina Kitchen at Marriott Marquis San Diego Marina, perfects his presentation with Kitchen Supervisor Daniel Luong. Schwartz says attendees increasingly want to know the story behind the food

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vendors to utilizing ingredients from root-to-stem in both dishes and cocktails," he says.

As planners and participants gain a deeper understanding of how what we eat impacts the planet, questions about food waste are increasing. "No one used to ask about food waste and now people are asking about it," Beaver says.

Besides environmental concerns, food waste touches on issues of community impact and fiscal responsibility for sponsor organizations, as well as a desire to simply take better care of the resources we have. "Personally, I believe food is a commodity and we should respect it and take care of it," Schwartz says. "I think we all grew up with, 'Finish what's on your plate, don't let it go to waste."

Planners concerned about food waste should talk to the chef and sales manager about overage percentages, portion sizes and programs to deal with any leftovers. "People don't eat as much anymore, and we as chefs need to watch that," Schwartz says. "We need to make sure we're not overproducing." Many venues and caterers, including Beaver's properties, make leftovers available to staff. The host company can typically pack up leftovers and take them home, or ask the venue about programs to deliver food to homeless shelters or social service organizations.

Food labeling is another topic that's important for planners to discuss with venue staff. Attendees these days place high value on knowing what their food contains, both because of food allergies and changes in diet. Many of the technology companies that Silva works with are start-

ing to require not just allergen labeling, but full ingredient lists. They may also expect servers walking around the room with appetizers to be able to produce information about what's in the food without too much trouble.

#### Mocktails and Other Beverage Trends

Most agree that mocktails are one of the biggest trends. "That's all tied in



Planners can mitigate food waste by communicating with the chef and sales manager about overage percentages, portion sizes and programs to deal with any leftovers.

with people being healthier and watching what they're putting in their body," Corniel says. "People still want to feel like they're having a nice cocktail but they don't want the alcohol in there."

For people who do want alcohol, there's increasing interest in craft spirits — something that's getting more popular as more local distilleries open

Chefs need to think outside the box and think more about providing a restaurant setting than anything else.

**ARON SCHWARTZ** 

Executive Chef Marina Kitchen at the Marriott Marquis San Diego Marina



around the country. As was true of the craft beer movement that boomed before it, people like the higher quality that can come with an artisan product. They like supporting local businesses, and don't want to drink the same things they can pull out of their liquor cabinet at home. "They want new experiences, and they like a story," Miguel says. "What is the spirit? Who makes it? Where does it come from?"

With this desire for storytelling comes the need for more bartender education. That's something Beaver is providing to his staff. He's also looking for ways to provide attendees with more alcohol-based experiences.

"At the Belltower, we have what's called The Tasting Room, where we have 95 bourbons, scotches and whis-

> kies. It's a tasting experience, so you're not paying for every drink. You can try anything and hear the story about it."

> Patel adds, "Our cocktail culture is a big part of The Daytona's identity, as we're focused on beverage trends that pertain to groups, such as non-alcoholic cocktails, cocktails with unique spices, superfoods and other

unique ingredients," Patel says.

Storytelling is big here too. The hotel bar's name, Blue Flame, comes from the legend that moonshine was once lit on fire to determine its quality. A yellow flame meant tainted, a blue flame meant it was fine. The bar offers a signature moonshine-lighting ritual for attendees to enjoy, along with reassurances that, today, the flame is iust for show.



# Technology, such as large-format video boards, has brought meeting rooms into the 21st century. MEDIA STRATEGY March 2020 | Corporate & Incentive Travel TheMeetingMagazines.com

# ROOMS EVOLVE TO MEET THE NEEDS OF TODAY'S ATTENDEES

#### BY MAURA KELLER

hen you think of the meeting rooms of a few decades ago, what comes to mind? Carousel slide projectors for presentations? Certainly. Poster-sized easel paper for brainstorming? Absolutely. A centralized speaker phone for collaborative discussion with those not in attendance? Definitely. Luckily, today's meeting rooms have dramatically changed to become technologically advanced settings that help facilitate better engagement of meeting attendees.

According to Linda McNairy, global vice president, Americas - American Express Meetings & Events, the definition of meeting room has evolved over recent years to support various meeting types.

"With alternative spaces, indoor, outdoor, experiential, virtual, etc., the options are endless, based on ongoing demand from meeting organizers and attendees to deliver on event experiences and individual attendee personas," McNairy says.

Although in-person meetings are still far and away the standard format, hybrid/virtual meetings are growing in some regions according to American Express Global Business Travel's 2020 Global Meetings and Events Forecast.

And comparing last year's survey results to the 2020 results of the percentage of planners who use hybrid/ virtual meetings in more than 10% of meetings, North America has seen an uptick in that number, going from 43%

to 58%. Europe has seen an even larger increase, jumping from 49% up to 66%.

"Adjustments like having cameras built into TV monitors or installing better audio systems improve the effectiveness of virtual/hybrid meetings by supporting more seamless communication," McNairy says.

Indeed. As Jason Vossler, product line manager, Dell Large-Format Monitors explains, meeting rooms have evolved from being a physical space that only facilitate face-to-face meetings to one that allows for collaboration from anywhere in the world with participants joining meetings virtually.

"Modernizing the meeting space and simplifying the end-user experience is also necessary to attract and retain millennial talent in the workplace," Vossler says. "This year, millennials will make up 50% of the global workforce. They're drawn to environments with comfortable spaces, outfitted with modern technologies that will improve their productivity."

#### VIRTUALITY AT ITS BEST

Today's meeting rooms are all about the sights and sounds of the event. Visual attributes are vital components to engage meeting attendees but so, too, are the sounds within the space - whether it is an expansive meeting room that holds 200 or an intimate boardroom for 12.

As Peter Herr, associate director of Global Marketing, Systems Group, at Shure Inc. explains, meeting rooms have evolved to become virtual meeting

rooms from multiple locations, bringing in participants from other parts of the world or co-workers who are working from home. This requires a reliable collaboration technology that allows for seamless sharing of information.

"While videoconferencing is popular, the most critical part of a virtual meeting is audio," Herr says. "Seeing someone on the screen is nice, but if you can't hear them properly, the meeting is likely not going to be productive." Capturing the audio from a speakerphone on the table of a conference room has limitations, so many meeting rooms are being networked to include dedicated microphones that are placed on the tabletop or even mounted overhead to capture audio from meeting participants without picking up the shuffling papers, vibrating cell phones and sliding of materials that can disrupt audio on some tabletop microphones.

Shure recently commissioned a study of 401 business professionals and IT decision-makers with Illuminas, a firm specializing in market research in the tech industry and found that 87% said virtual meetings were critical and 86% confirming that they are growing in importance. In fact, three out of four said their businesses plan to allocate bigger budgets next year to accommodate virtual meetings.

As such, Herr stresses that virtual meetings are growing in importance and, as a result, there are four key areas that meeting planners need to focus on to make this virtual undertaking a success:



DonocitPhotoc

- Network The first step is to ensure the meeting room is configured with a network and is ready to support networked audio.
- Security Of course, when discussing the network, one crucial consideration is security. Many audio devices can be password protected, and it is also possible to encrypt the networked audio stream.
- Acoustics Once you're happy that everything is as it should be with the A/V gear and the network, it's time to look at the meeting room itself. The importance of room acoustics should never be underestimated. After all, if you were designing a music studio, you wouldn't just throw a pair of loudspeakers in any room and expect them to sound amazing; you'd want to make sure that the room was treated properly so that the loudspeakers sounded their best in the space. The same thinking should also be applied to conferencing systems. No amount of technology can fix your outbound audio if the room itself is acoustically poor, so invest time in this at the early stages. What makes a good sounding space depends on your needs, so it's worth speaking to acoustic consultants if your budget allows.
- Microphone selection Central to the quality of audio is the microphone being used. Meeting planners want to make sure everyone in that room has a voice. There are a number of different methods to cover everyone effectively, whether wired, wireless, table or ceiling arrays, and a number of innovations that can make achieving reliable, highquality audio much easier.

Herr also thinks technology will play a greater role in overall ease of use within the meeting room environment. It has to be simple for the users to participate in the meetings without worries about setup.

"What we're seeing now is technology really improving audio quality of meetings, so people are able to hear each other in a much clearer way," Herr says. "Only 36% of business professionals surveyed believe their organizations have the right technology to support virtual meetings."

# WHERE DESIGN & FUNCTIONALITY MEET

Connecting, presenting and collaborating effectively are universal business concerns. As Vossler explains, ease of use, quick start up time, on-screen annotation with data capture, wireless casting and remote collaboration capabilities are the top five requests within a 21st century presentation solution.

"Meeting planners and attendees are looking for easy-to-use technology that drives a seamless user experience in the meeting space," Vossler says. "When we use our computers and smartphones, we expect a fast and seamless experience. This includes being able to instantly share information, chat over video and connect accessories that boost our experience or productivity." And, yet, when it comes to conference rooms and other shared spaces, meeting planners often struggle to find the same straightforward, uncomplicated experience.

Whether in a room with 200 or 12, good visual and audible components are important to engage attendees.

Recently, Vossler has seen companies moving from the use of traditional white boards and projectors to large-format monitors in meeting rooms and classrooms for their collaboration needs. "In today's fast-paced work-places, collaboration is paramount and central to the culture and work-flow," Vossler says.

And while connectivity is key within today's meeting environment, high-quality meeting spaces play a big role in the overall meeting experience for meeting planners and attendees alike. As McNairy explains, if the business portion of an event takes place in a stuffy, windowless room, even the most engaging offsite activity cannot make up for that.

"This is an ongoing issue for meeting professionals. Many of our 2020 Global Meetings and Events Forecast survey respondents cited the need for more inviting spaces with natural light," McNairy says. American Express' Meetings Express platform, which provides users with a consistent global program for sourcing small, simple and recurring meetings, allows users to add specific filters when searching for a venue including accommodation and natural daylight.

Matt Woodburn, co-founder of ESP Presents and Exchange 312, adds that, with offices heading toward a more collaborative open seating community floor plan, it's even more important now to have private spaces that exude creativity, comfort and flexibility, while keeping the meeting focus the top priority.

"We're seeing an advancement in built-in-technology, improvement of sound treatments and overall a more creative approach to the design," Woodburn says. ESP Presents is an event production firm that creates innovation-driven experiential events. The company works alongside national brands, creative marketing agencies and major nonprofit associations.

Take the Oregon Convention Center, which recently completed a \$40 million renovation. Part of that momentous project was updating the venue's

meeting spaces. As Craig Stroud, executive director of the Oregon Convention Center (OCC) explains, the OCC team has found that meeting attendees today expect venue interiors to be design-forward with bright, updated surroundings, locally made artwork and plenty of natural light.

"Attendees want to be inspired by

their surroundings, so a huge focus of the renovation was a design refresh inspired by Oregon's natural beauty," he says. "The focus included incredible ceiling installations, such as a reverse topographical map of the Cascade mountain range as well as separately hung honeycomb pieces in the Oregon Ballroom. The ceiling installation in the ballroom creates the effect of looking up through a forest canopy to those below."

These design touches serve functional purposes as well. OCC leadership has also found that attendees and planners want technological flexibility from their

meetings — namely flexible projection capabilities, various lighting formations and colors — but they don't want to have to view the equipment itself.

So as part of the OCC renovations, state-of-the-art A/V, projection and lighting equipment have been expertly hidden behind the ceiling installations. OCC has also created hidden wall panels, adorned with upholstered wallpaper picturing a forest grove, that are able to open. "The unsightly equipment can then be hidden behind the panels until its needed, out of sight and out of mind," Stroud says.

#### COVETED DESIGN ATTRIBUTES

With technological designs aside, the interior of today's meeting rooms are also dramatically changing.

"The boardroom narrative that was iconic of meeting rooms in the past is being replaced by an inspirational turn that aims to create a more unique residential experience," says Kellie Sirna, co-founder and principal of Studio 11

The Oregon Convention Center's
Oregon Ballroom was refreshed with
ceiling tiles to mimic looking up
through a forest canopy.

Design. "We're seeing a shift toward residential-style furniture, plusher textiles and artwork, and we always design flexible configurations that can accommodate many different guest scenarios."

Stacy Elliston, co-founder and principal at Studio 11 Design, also adds that meeting rooms should feel like collaborative work environments that are flexible to how peoples' needs change throughout the day.

"By integrating technology into the design approach, we're able to create spaces that feel intuitive," Elliston says.

Our clients are never going back to meeting rooms with four solid walls.

CAROL GALLE, CMP

President and CEO
Special D Events

Examples of elements that create this sense of ease and modernity include dimmable lighting and furniture with built-in charging convenience. "It has become important to provide a place or places for those that must step out of a meeting to take a call be able to do so in a more private, quiet area," Elliston says.

Carol Galle, CMP, president and CEO at Special D Events, says meeting planners know it's a challenge for properties to be all things to all people. "We have

some clients that respect the uniqueness of a historic property, for instance, and so we help them incorporate that vibe into their event. Other clients prefer a blank slate and consider a property's uniqueness to be a distraction if it carries over to the meeting space," Galle says. "Hotels have adapted by keeping their character in the open spaces but ensuring meeting rooms are sleek, flexible and have natural light. Natural light, by the way, is something that most of our clients cannot live without. It's not a trend. Our clients are never

going back to meeting rooms with four solid walls."

It's a fine line to walk because Special D Event's clients, for example, expect the venue to provide a true experience and/or be a destination that authentically represents the area. Galle and her team share their clients' frustration with large cookie-cutter type hotels where you could fly in, meet and fly out without ever get-

ting a sense of the community. "But," Galle says, "as much as we love the creativity and style of boutique hotels, sometimes we simply need a larger property that offers multiple meeting rooms of different sizes."

She adds, "Successful evolution for larger properties means incorporating character into the building design and open spaces while offering meeting rooms that are modern, high tech and have natural light."



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Modern meeting rooms have the latest technology to make communicating remotely with other workers through video and audio easier, which fosters creativity and collaboration.

When it comes to the technology gracing today's meeting rooms, Galle says the affordability and flexibility of flat screen displays allows planners to configure the meeting room set any number of ways.

"Even when the monitors are built in, which we love because it saves our clients money, the look is much

cleaner," Galle says. "Years ago, we worried that windows in a meeting room would compromise A/V. But, now, the exceptional brightness of the newer flat-screen monitors eliminates any concerns about daylight. The intersection of monitors that tolerate daylight with a global interest in

healthy work environments changed the conversation about meeting space."

#### ON THE HORIZON

Engagement within the meeting room environment is still the central theme of the meeting industry today. As McNairy explains, meeting planners are tasked with making sure that attendees are fully engaged with an event so they are using a variety of strategies. "Whether that means choosing an outside-the-box venue, introducing local culture and food to attendees, or incorporating wellness into the meetings program," McNairy says.

"Also, many clients are requesting sustainable choices across all elements of their meeting, so I'd say this is something that is certainly being expected of the meeting room environment," continues McNairy.

In addition to sustainability, security and data privacy will continue to be a focus area for the meetings environment, especially elevating venue privacy, and having secure Wi-Fi for

Modernizing the meeting space and simplifying the end-user experience is also necessary to attract and retain millennial talent in the workplace.

JASON VOSSLER Product Line Manager Dell Large Format Monitors

meetings and events where confidential information is being shared. "I believe technology will also drive meeting room design and enhancement, as engagement and technology are closely linked," McNairy says. "For example, meeting rooms will have to support growing utilization of augmented reality and holographic technology."

McNairy recently presented to a room with more than 800 attendees via holographic technology, and could both hear the audience and see them so that she could interact naturally even though she was in a capture studio outside of the general-session room.

"Other elements in meeting rooms will have to evolve," McNairy says. "For example, the holographic technology carried very specific lighting and connectivity requirements. We would not have been able to utilize this technology if our meeting space was not equipped to support these requirements."

According to Sarah Neukom, cofounder of ESP Presents and Exchange 312, technology will continue to advance as more companies are exploring remote work environments. So coming together from various locations will remain at the forefront. "And making sure that creativity can be inspired through productive conversations and tools to get there - digital white boards, comfortable chairs, easy access to healthy snacks and drinks," Neukom says. "A successful meeting is when everyone is engaged, productive and leaves with more inspiration than they started with. The environment that's created is what fosters all of that."

Moving forward, Vossler foresees meeting rooms will evolve to include frictionless technology that is more intuitive and user-friendly. "Imagine walk-

> ing into the meeting space and the display technology automatically detects that you're in the room through the use of proximity and biometric sensors so your presentation is automatically cued up to start without fiddling with the settings," Vossler says. "Coupling this with analytic data capture

allows administrators to tailor their presentation environments based on the user experience, providing valuable ROI data to justify their investment."

As technology evolves, more meeting rooms will be better synced with other elements. "A key thing to remember is that achieving high-quality audio in rooms of different shapes and sizes doesn't have to be a difficult task," Herr says. "By following a number of guidelines, both technical and non-technical, it's possible to improve the acoustics of a room and create a space that is not only comfortable but fit for a purpose - facilitating communication and collaboration, sharing information and making decisions." C&IT

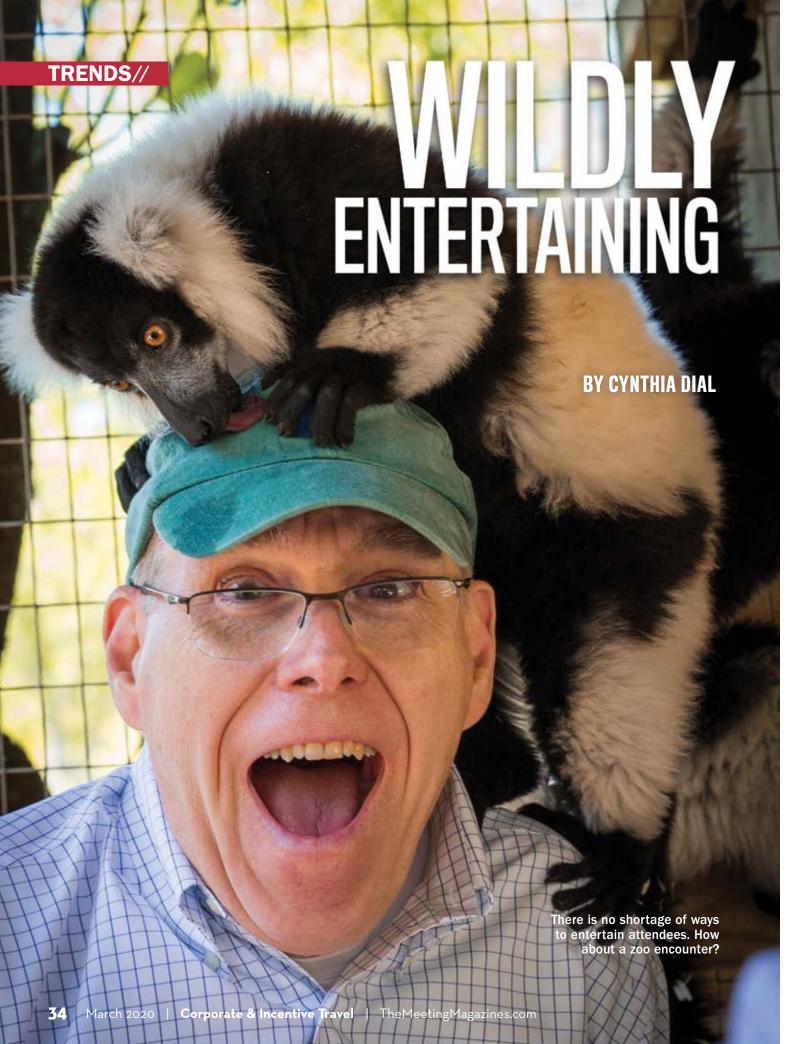




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# How to Add an Engaging Edge to Your Next Event

uestion: What single element in a corporate or incentive event can best transform it from ordinary to extraordinary? If your answer is entertainment, you're correct, so keep reading for insight from the experts.

"The demographic of the attendees is always what I think of first when it comes to entertainment," says Jaclyn Trainor, CIS, associate program manager with Bishop-McCann, a specialist in the production of national and international meetings, incentive programs and events.

She asks, "Who are my stakehold-

ers in this event? What are my clients and their executive team comfortable with, and can we push them outside their comfort zone to create a great experience for the overall demographic? Or can we do something they've never seen before?"

"Most events are boring," says Dr. Elliott B. Jaffa, a behavioral and marketing psychologist, principal of Dr. Elliott B. Jaffa Associates. "Try to ensure your event is not." To do that, consider the audience's age. For a mature audience, for example, the doctor suggests hiring an oldie singer; but, rather than having them sing, have them tell stories about people with whom they've worked. His suggestion: Kenny Vance, founder of Jay and the Americans, who was also the

musical director for Saturday Night

Live and whose wealth of knowledge

on the early days of rock and roll is

beyond entertaining.

"For meetings with heavy-duty business content that last several days, entertainment can be an excellent way to alleviate the intensity of a hard-hitting business agenda," says Rich Gibbons, president of Speak Inc. He elaborates that utilizing a humorous emcee, as well as a late afternoon or evening entertainer, can help break up intense sessions and allow attendees a chance to regroup and better focus.

#### **CONSIDER YOUR BUDGET**

Trainor says the next step after considering the demographic of attendees is considering your budget. She asks, "What can we afford – big name enter-

They are the ones we work so hard for and if the audience doesn't have a good time, then we didn't do right by them.

> **JACLYN TRAINOR. CIS** Associate Program Manager Bishop-McCann



tainment or a great interactive DJ with atmospheric entertainment to enhance the experience?"

Although budgets always drive the level of entertainment, Trainor says you can get great performers at every monetary level. Thus, while tighter budgets may be best served with local talent, more generous ones tend to be a lot trickier. "You have their tech rider, personal rider, travel, entourage, meet and greets, etc. Then you must dedicate a team from your side to handle the big name, so ensuring that your staffing is properly equipped to deal with big name entertainment is a key factor, too," she says.

One of Trainor's more innovative methods of entertaining involved video mapping and the utilization of travel images projected onto the walls and ceiling of an all-white room — a threecourse adventure that 'transported' the group to Spain with appetizers, Italy with the main course and France with dessert. Conceived for a recognition program in Miami and paired with food, music and atmospheric performers, talent included Flamenco dancers to represent Spain, LED ballerinas for France and an aerialist during the Italy portion. Even the wait staff participated by first wearing Spanish-style hats and red kerchiefs, then Italian-inspired

> chef toques and aprons and ending with berets.

> She says, "Audience is everything. They are the ones we work so hard for and if the audience doesn't have a good time, then we didn't do right by them." To best appeal to your audience, she suggests starting the celebration at the curb

with such embellishments as a living champagne wall or even using a graffiti artist as she did to add edge to a corporate incentive trip in New Orleans. "At the end of the event, it's always about how they feel."

#### **F&B ALSO ENTERTAINS**

Food can be entertainment too. "We work with people who are foodies," says Melissa K. Land, director of sales and marketing with Table Topics, a custom tabletop manufacturer for the hospitality industry headquartered in Elberta, Alabama. "They are about the food and anticipate great food with great wine. Their expectations are high, and we always want to exceed them."

Explaining the selection of Perdido Beach Resort on Alabama's Gulf Coast for the company's National Rep Meeting, Land says, "With so many of our manufacturer reps from land-locked, cold weather states, this region's cli-

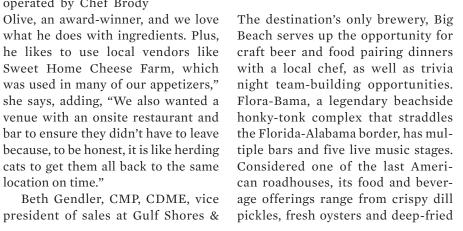
giving them the 'wow' factor." She adds that this property is a customer and that Table Topics likes to promote resorts/ facilities that have purchased their product. "We knew that Voyagers, the resort's restaurant committed to authentic Gulf Shores cuisine, was operated by Chef Brody

Olive, an award-winner, and we love what he does with ingredients. Plus, he likes to use local vendors like Sweet Home Cheese Farm, which was used in many of our appetizers," she says, adding, "We also wanted a venue with an onsite restaurant and bar to ensure they didn't have to leave because, to be honest, it is like herding cats to get them all back to the same location on time."

Orange Beach Tourism, concurs with Land's commitment to the F&B scene. "The best way to help attendees truly immerse into the destination is by incorporating local food and beverage tastings into their experience," she says. Among this Alabama area's renowned venues are Big Beach Brewmate and views play a huge part in ing Co. and the Flora-Bama lounge.

> The best way to help attendees truly immerse into the destination is by incorporating local food and beverage tastings into their experience.







Twinkies to its signature Bushwacker drink. But in addition to its food and venue appeal, Gendler urges planners to capitalize on the region's greatest assets – its beach and water.

#### **BIG NAME OR NOT?**

Regarding celebrity versus lowerprofile talent, Gibbons, who is a spe-

> cialist in speaker entertainment, thinks that if the audience's attendance is obligatory or a given, incredibly talented performers with no celebrity sizzle typically blow the spectators away. "In this dynamic, modest expectations at the outset are wildly exceeded, leaving the audience pleasantly

surprised and delighted. The warning, however, is that the exact opposite frequently happens with big-name celebrities as outsized expectations can be challenging to meet."

Jordan Langer, president and founder of Non Plus Ultra, a company that manages and operates such San Francisco Bay Area event space venues as The San Francisco Mint and The Palace of Fine Arts, adds, "In my experience, working with celebrities or influencers can often be a poor choice as it may not be a good value." He says that not only do large performers typically demand big fees, but that their production and riders are also massive investments. "In the Bay Area, people typically like to work with local artists, so sometimes the less-famous person will actually bring in a bigger crowd and a much more positive vibe to the event."

Trainor adds that some of her favorite and most well-received entertainment choices have been the most unexpected, citing the example of getting a local music legend to perform for a gathering of incentive attendees in Hawaii. "No one knew him by name but, as soon as he started to play, the

Nothing beats the Flora-Bama lounge for a deep immersion in local culture and entertainment near the Florida-Alabama border. Food, whether by presentation or by cooking classes and demonstrations, has long entertained attendees.

entire room was electrified, and the attendees were glued to him more than I've seen for even big-name entertainment," she says.

The exception to this non-famous person rule might be the keynote speaker booked for the annual meeting of a corporate tech company coordinated by Cindy Y. Lo, DMCP, owner and chief event strategist of Red Velvet Events Inc. Set on having an A-List celebrity, the company's selection process was guided by Red Velvet's Lo and Extraordinary Events, a Los Angeles-based event management company. While the tech company was pretty committed to having a high-profile speaker, she realized two things when digging further and ask-



ing the purpose of the keynote: 1) They were using the keynote's fame to help secure a sold-out conference and 2) They wanted an inspirational message. "By coincidence, this was the last year the Obamas were in the White House, so I went out on a limb and suggested

Michelle Obama. I had to preface that she was not within their initial budget and asked how open they were to a budget increase. The other caveat was that Mrs. Obama was not accepting public speaking engagements at that time. So, we took our turn - it was like

# THINK EXPERIENTIAL

Hands-On Entertainment Gives Planners a Leg Up

ith "experiential" the buzz word in today's arena of entertainment, here's what has worked for the pros.

Jordan Langer, Non Plus Ultra: "We've had major success with event entertainment that is interactive." He elaborates that there's a trend right now where people want to truly engage with one another. Mixing in activities for attendees to mingle and talk might be much more successful than a big, loud performance. "I think it's safe to say that deep down people want to get off their phones and have a real conversation with real people. Souls are craving interactive fun."

Shannon Byck and Lynne Coyne, Intuitive Conferences + Events: Entertainment options that have experiential components and are immersive experiences are always a success. "Attendees love be hands-on and be a part of an



experience." A recent success the team cites is a social event at a nightclub with Rock the Stars. This is a team-building experience that gives participants the opportunity to write songs and perform them in costume with real instruments and even write lyrics to popular songs based on meeting themes and debut them with the backup of a live band. Final assessment: The group was so engaged, there was a line to be a part of the band.

Beth Gendler, of Gulf Shores & Orange Beach Tourism, says, "We strive for everything we promote as a destination to be experiential." One program that can be easily integrated into corporate and incentive agendas is found in the region's new Signature Experiences — from learning to fish or the art of making gumbo to kayaking with dolphins — all participatory entertainment. C&IT

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### **MUSIC MAKES MEMORIES**

Want to Leave a Lasting Impression? Locals Know Best

ome destinations are simply destined to be musical magnets for meeting planners. Many are obvious and some not so obvious, so here's what you need to know from those in the know about locales ready to set your stage with the best.

#### **CREATIVITY AND CULTURE** IN THE CRESCENT CITY

"There is music around every corner in New Orleans," says Stephanie Turner, vice president/convention sales and strategies, New Orleans & Company. Known for its festivals, celebrations and creative culture, this city is packed with one-of-a-kind entertainment venues from the new Fillmore New Orleans to the nearly 70-yearold Preservation Hall. Nowhere else in the world will you find a place like Mardi Gras World, where it's possible to host events among genuine Mardi Gras floats with live entertainment, such as aerialists, stilt walkers, musicians, tarot card readers and more. And it's also not unusual to see second line parades with music and revelers walking through the city any day of the week. Many groups use this local tradition as a fun way to transport attendees to and from venues, as well as kick-off or closeout larger events. Add such distinctive inclusions as the Mardi Gras Indians, Merry Antoinettes, 610 Stompers and Black Magic Drumline, and other New Orleans-style entertainment is unmatched.

#### **MEET IN "MUSIC CITY"**

Known around the globe as "Music City" is Nashville. "We always encourage groups to incorporate live music into their events and meetings," says Adrienne Siemers, senior vice president of sales, Nashville Convention & Visitors Corporation. As home to all genres of music, as well as many musical professionals, this southern city has no shortage of live entertainment enticements. "From songwriters, rising acts, A-list talent and award-winning artists to intimate venues like the Bluebird Cafe and The Listening Room Cafe, to historic spots including the Ryman Auditorium and the Grand Ole Opry, Nashville has music venues and talent to fit every genre, every audience size and all musical tastes," Siemers says. Serving up details, she adds that songwriters, whose names you may not know but you'll recognize their hits, are great at adapting any corporate theme or highlighting preferred messaging during meetings and events.

#### **CALIFORNIA DREAMIN'**

While not at the top of most planners' list of well-known music hubs, Montage Laguna Beach, a resort known for its backdrop of the Pacific Ocean and the property's classic craftsman-style architecture, should be a consideration due to its Southern California location. "In general, our planners are looking for different and more unique choices," says Deanna Jones, director of catering and conference services at Montage. Some artists booked through Montage's entertainment broker include dueling pianos, an electric violinist, a harpist, Chapman stick, steel drums and even a Cirque du Soleil-style troupe, which performed on the ocean-fronted lawn. "Current trends tend to be those outside the box and, with our proximity to Los Angeles, the 'Entertainment Capital of the World', accessing these unique performers can be quite easy." C&IT

The Grand Ole Opry — an institution in Nashville — continues to entertain attendees who visit that destination.

buying a house for the first time in a hot market. Extraordinary Events suggested that our client's executive team write a letter detailing why we wanted her as the keynote and then to wait patiently. She accepted our offer and, to this day, I can honestly say this was one of the best keynotes our team has been involved in securing," Lo says.

Regarding the pocketbook, Lo underscores that budgeting is not simply the cost of the entertainment. "It's all the costs associated with the entertainment. Do we need an extra generator? Do we need special backup dancers? Do we need distinctive lighting? Unique staging? Additional green rooms?" Her advice: If you're on a budget don't bring in a celebrity; get creative and think about options. She adds that you should not hire a celebrity without asking if they've done a similar job before because not all celebrities are created equal, and vou don't want to end up losing your client or job over a mismatch.

#### **SET CLEAR GOALS**

Shannon Byck, CMP, managing partner, and Lynne Coyne, CMP, CITP, manager, event services - both with Intuitive Conferences + Events, a full-service meeting, conference and incentive travel planning company - list their top five entertainment considerations in

1) Event goals and objectives - What are the clients trying to achieve with this particular portion of the event

order of importance:

and how does that fit into the overall objectives of the meeting/conference? "When we have our planning meetings with clients, we always get them to think about the components of the event and that they're not doing it 'just because.' We get them to think about the fit and purpose of each element to ensure it fits the overall big picture."

storming ideas for social events, the Intuitive team suggests you stop and assess who is the audience, what is the company mandate and will the entertainment reflect this. "We once booked a musical duo for an annual conference that was entertaining but was not a fit for the group as the attendees were looking to dance. The entertainment did not lend itself to joining in, so all sat during the entire

I can honestly say this was one of the best keynotes our team has been involved in securing.

evening or left early. This taught us the importance of matching the entertainment to the client."

3) Budget — There are entertainment choices for all financial spectrums. The important step is ensuring you know your budget parameters before presenting options to guarantee you and your client/executive team

cost-effective possibilities and working on a lean budget, you can consider such options as an interactive DJ or even put attendees in the spotlight with karaoke. Whereas, with more flexibility you can contemplate trendy items that can be customized and are exclusive.

4) Theme - Is there an overriding event theme that entertainment can support? And, if so, consider using taglines.

> 5) Past experiences -"We're always looking to showcase something new and unique. The end goal is to provide them with experiences and entertainment choices they have not had before." They suggest looking at what has already been done and what types of entertainment they liked and did not like.

"We cannot say enough about immersive experiences being a current trend in event entertainment and all aspects of event design," concludes Byck and Coyne. "Outside of the box is becoming the norm, and planning events can really keep you on your toes in the attempt to ensure each social event is better than the last."



CINDY Y. LO, DMCP and Chief Event Strategist Red Velvet Events Inc.

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# ORLAND

# From Theme Parks to Pro Sports, This Destination **Thrills Attendees**

#### BY KEITH LORIA

hile Walt Disney World Resort and Universal Orlando Resort may be the main attractions bringing people to Orlando each year, most are surprised to find out how many other activities there are to experience. Whether employees travel on their own to corporate meetings or with their loved ones, they can enjoy the resort beaches between meetings, visit the Gatorland wildlife preserve or go shopping at the enormous The Florida Mall and much more. With more than 60 million visitors to Orlando annually, it's one of the most popular destinations for meetings and incentive programs.

Sarah Brady, CITP, senior sourcing manager for the Schaumburg, Illinois-based Creative Group, notes Orlando offers great airlift, upscale hotels, good weather and a variety of activities of which to take advantage during free time.

> The Dr. Phillips Center for the **Performing Arts** in downtown Orlando features the 2,700-seat Walt **Disney Theater for** Broadway musicals. as well as a 300seat Pugh Theater for smaller shows and events.

"The ability to bring large groups to a destination with direct flights from many U.S. destinations starts meetings off on a positive note," she says. "Having a large convention center with enough rooms within walking distance to accommodate extremely large groups is a great value. The cost of doing business in Orlando is lower than at most Florida destinations and the service in this destination is outstanding."

Not that the theme parks should be ruled out. With both Walt Disney World and Universal Orlando theme parks within the greater Orlando area, there is a lot for groups to do either as a planned group event or at the attendees' leisure.

Tonya Roberts, HMCC, global sourcing manager for Kansas City, Missouri-based Bishop-McCann, says, "Orlando offers

endless options, such as walkable entertainment districts and vibrant nightlife, including eclectic lounges and bars with live local music, highenergy night clubs, and headlining concerts and events."

She adds, "With stunning backdrops vou won't find anywhere else, only Orlando can offer incredible oncein-a-lifetime experiences that attendees will be talking about for years to come," Roberts says. "Orlando is the perfect place for meetings of all types and sizes. From the great year-round weather, to more than 450 hotels and

resorts, and the second-largest convention center in the country, along with easy accessibility, Orlando combines all of the special ingredients to make for a unique meeting destination unlike any other in the world."

Orlando is also an excellent location to host incentive programs as it has an air of magic which draws people to it. Even the city's NBA team, the Orlando

It is an easily accessible area. which also makes planning convenient.





"The city has a desirability about it which is still present when you discount the theme parks; it is somewhere that people want to visit for a host of reasons, making it an ideal location for an incentive program," says Toni Caracciolo, vice president of marketing for Visit Orlando, the official tourism marketing organization. "If you host your

After all, Orlando provides a plethora of activities to offer guests, ranging from professional sports, such as the

Magic, is named after this unique vibe.

event here, then it's likely those invited will do everything they can to get here."

aforementioned Orlando Magic and

Major League Soccer's Orlando City Soccer Club, to countless live events at the Dr. Phillips Center for the Performing Arts and the Amway Arena.

Jenny Bayer, head of operations for Orlando-based GET Destinations, has managed everything from large pharmaceutical and medical conferences to national sales meetings for large corporations.

> "The best part of planning an event in Orlando is its infrastructure. The city has been set up to run meetings," she says. "It allows an easy flow for event logistics due to the airport, numerous dine-around options, and the Orange County Convention Center, as they are all within 15 to 20 minutes of each other."

Leveraging 10 years of event planning experience, Libby Long has planned, coordinated and produced both internal and external events with audience sizes ranging from 400 to 1,800 attendees in Orlando.

"Our events attract executives from around the world, and Orlando is such a convenient location that really has it all - an international airport, countless golf courses, spas and entertainment. What more could you want?" she asks. "From an attendee perspective, Orlando brings a one-stop shop for a large array of interests, while being very convenient. As a planner, you get to work with the best of the best in venue and vendor partners. Essentially, it is where you want to go."

Callie Cleary, senior event manager for Charlestown, Massachusetts-based The Castle Group, notes offsite event options also provide unique ways to privatize them for large events, including the theme parks, SeaWorld Orlando and fun large-scale venues, such as Topgolf Orlando, shopping at Pointe Orlando and music at The House of Blues Orlando.

"We've had many conferences and meetings in Orlando and have great, trusted partners in the area that we've

Topgolf Orlando is one of many to host private events for large

built relationships with over the years," Cleary says. "Both within the hotels and with local DMCs, everyone is very knowledgeable about the area and easy to work with. There are many hotels, activities, venues and experiences to select from, so we have the option to go back to the same places for repeat events, if it worked well, or enough flexibility to change up the program year after year. It is an easily accessible area, which also makes planning convenient."

#### **CONTINUED GROWTH**

Jennifer Nelson, director, business development and global event services for American Express Global Business Travel Meetings and Events, notes the company's 2020 Global Meetings and Events Forecast predicts that Orlando will again be the No. 1 meeting destination in North America.

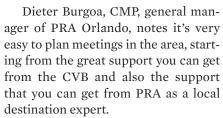
"With the volume of corporate meetings that are hosted annually, Orlando has some of the most experienced suppliers and workforce to help make sure meetings run successfully," she says. "Orlando's airport also provides nonstop service from more than 150 cities around

the world, and Orlando airfares are among the lowest of major destinations, according to Visit Orlando."

Joe Ostertag, director of national accounts for San Diego, Californiabased Access Destination Services, says no matter what your group size, Orlando is home to over 150 meeting hotels and

offsite venues that can accommodate groups from 10 to 20,000, adding that few destinations offer such a unique combination of ideal weather, travel ease, hotel options and venue space.

"I have been planning meetings and events in Orlando for almost two decades and it's safe to say that I've never seen this destination go through such an explosive time of growth, development and change," he says. "New hotel and venue offerings are coming online all the time and Orlando International Airport is undergoing a significant terminal expansion and renovation. Orlando continues to reinvent itself all the time."



"This is a great destination that offers multiple options, a variety of price ranges that allow a planner to get the most out of their budget and also be surrounded by very talented people that have the expertise and are

Orlando has some of the most experienced suppliers and workforce to help make sure meetings run successfully.

JENNIFER NELSON Director, Business Development and Global Event Services, American Express Global Business Travel Meetings and Events

seasoned enough to help them make their event a great experience for their attendees," he says. "We have helped our clients to plan their events in multiple ways. One of the most important is the variety of tours and activities that could be offered to the attendees. We have plenty of options, from visiting the theme parks to going down in a zip line over live alligators and crocodiles, or enjoying a day off at the spa or the lazy river."

#### **EVENTS IN ACTION**

A specific example of Orlando being the perfect place to host any event



Orlando is known for its many golf courses, several of which have hosted official PGA Tour events.

comes from Bayer, with one of GET Destination's clients hosting not one, but two, national sales meetings in January.

"It all began with the ease of traveling to their meeting destination. With direct flights from numerous destinations in the United States, and only two terminals, arrival day ran smoothly for our attendees setting them on the

> right path for a successful event," Bayer says. "After an easy travel day, most of our attendees got to spend an evening at a beachside welcome reception on a private beach in January - something unheard of for most of our northern attendees."

To add to their already memorable experience,

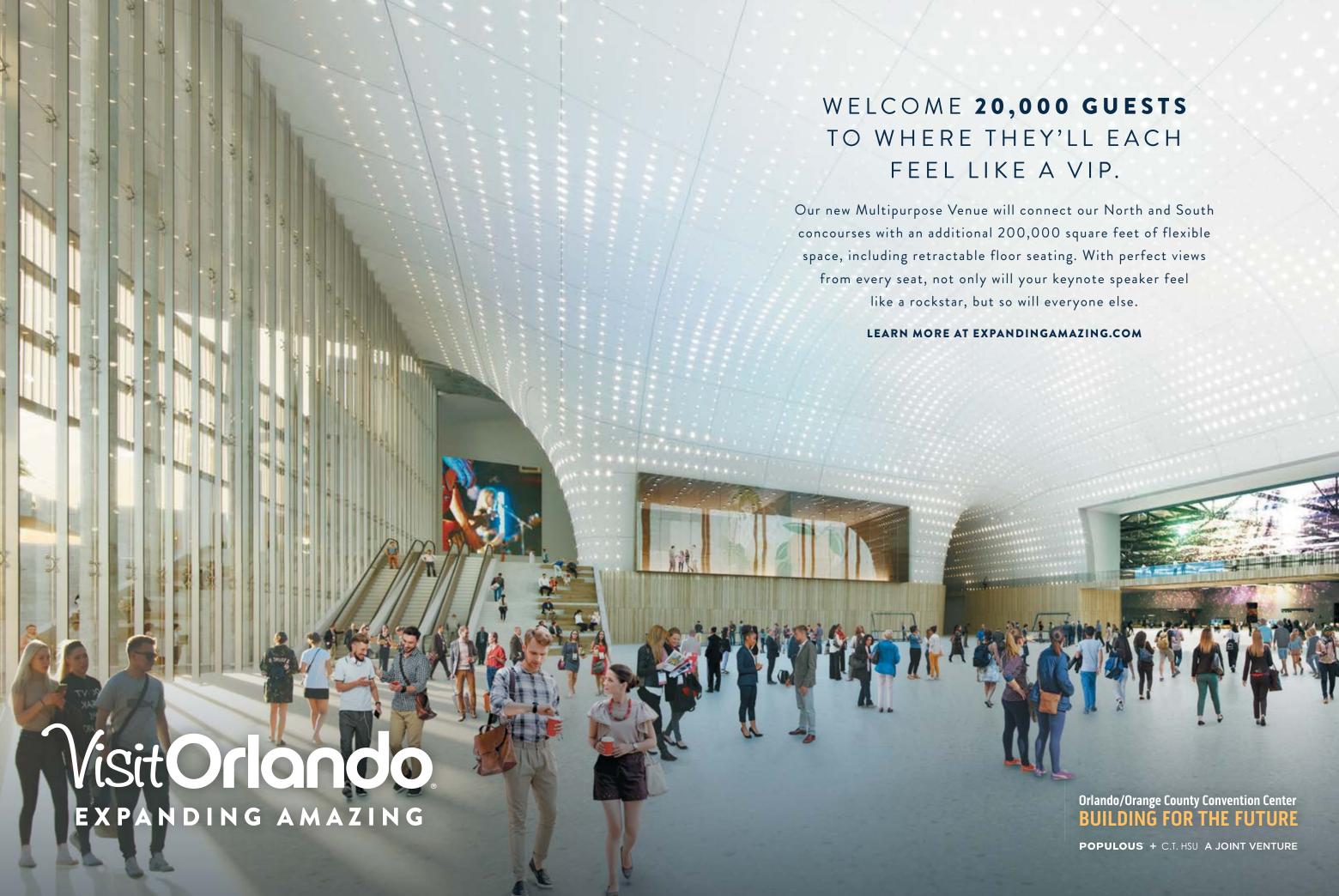
all attendees were treated to an offsite event at Epcot. Orlando is one of few cities in the United States where you can give your attendees an epic dining experience in the world's most famous theme park, instead of a regular dinner out with their colleagues.

Last year, the Creative Group planned a 650-person national sales meeting for a medical device company in the area and the program received some of the highest attendee satisfaction scores in event history - significantly higher on location and hotel satisfaction over the previous year's meeting in San Antonio.



offsite venues planners can use groups of attendees.

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"Orlando was a great location for the moderate to warm weather in winter months and the vast array of entertainment options," Brady says. "By staying at a Loews Universal property, they were able to easily take advantage of Universal Studios and City Walk during their free afternoon and evening."

In Orlando, Nelson has planned American Express' INTER[action], a global employee meeting and supplier showcase with more than 800 attendees.

"This event went incredibly well,

and the most advantageous part about hosting the event in Orlando was the knowledgeable local meetings professional that helped ensure we both wowed our attendees and had an effective supplier showcase," she says. "Since Orlando is known as North America's No. 1 meeting destination, the service

levels need to be world class resulting in world-class events."

Roberts recently arranged a meeting of 500 sales representatives at one of Universal Orlando's resort properties, and it offered flexible meeting space with the opportunity to host private events at Universal's theme park.

Ostertag was fortunate to help plan an annual sales kickoff meeting for three consecutive years in Orlando, explaining the group had more than 3,000 people and was made up of 10 different business units.

"Access Destination Services was tasked with producing inspiring offsite events for each business unit that were

unique from year to year," he says. "In most destinations, this would prove to be a huge challenge, but Orlando simply has so many venue options of varying scale, type and style that it made it easy for each to create the unique experiences the client was looking for year after year."

Last fall, Long hosted a conference for just about 2,000 senior executives at the Hilton Orlando.

"I could not have chosen a better venue," she says. "Across 2 1/2 days, our attendees absorbed phenomenal

I would strongly encourage meeting attendees to explore some of the local neighborhoods and experience Orlando like a local.

**JOE OSTERTAG** Director of National Accounts Access Destination Services



content in an even better environment. We hosted private lunches, receptions, etc. And the chefs at the property transformed the standard conference food experience into a culinary journey for our attendees."

Cleary recently returned home from Orlando after wrapping up an internal sales kickoff conference for a software company for approximately 1,100 attendees at Rosen Shingle Creek resort.

"The program was a huge success. The flow of the hotel worked great for what we were trying to accomplish," she says. "We got great feedback on the property, level of service, and food and beverage product. All departments

Rosen Shingle Creek was the right venue for an internal sales kickoff conference for a software company with approximately 1,100 attendees.

at the hotel were helpful, easy to work with and responsive to our requests. From our main contacts at CSM and catering, to setups, A/V and banquet departments, all were well-versed and professional."

#### **NOTABLE RESORTS**

For those aiming for a big corporate feel for an event, Orlando is a great choice, as it is home to a number of excellent venues and facilities. There's the Orange County Convention Center, which is the country's second-largest convention center at 2.1 million sf of exhibition space and 480,000 sf of flexible meeting space. It also boasts 49 meeting rooms, a large theater and a lecture hall and is in a prime location, being about a 25-minute drive from Orlando International Airport, making it highly accessible to those traveling from farther afield.

> A number of the area's villa resorts can also be used as meetings and events venue spaces, and many of

the top resorts have large meeting rooms available. For instance, the Walt Disney World Swan and

Dolphin Resort has 333,000 sf of meeting space; Omni Orlando Resort at ChampionsGate has 248,000 sf of flexible meet-

ing and event space; Rosen Shingle Creek offers 410,000 sf of indoor and 186,000 sf of outdoor space; and the Loews hotels at Universal Orlando feature 132,000 sf of event space.

Brady calls the Loews hotels at Universal a great option for groups due to great on-property outlets, easy and complimentary access via shuttle, or bus, to the Universal parks and Universal City Walk, and an experienced conventions services and banquet staff.

"The executive chef at Loews Sapphire Falls, for example, is willing and open to menu customization and creating new experiences for attendees,"



Walt Disney World Swan and Dolphin Resort, right, is popular with many planners. Universal Orlando Resort, below, offers myriad activities for attendees.

she says. "The meeting space is expansive, yet consolidated or stacked so that attendees can easily move from one meeting to another with ease. Loews also partners with approved local vendors to offer a vast array of branding opportunities to create an immersive experience for groups within the meeting space."

Bayer's favorite place to hold a meeting is at Disney's Swan and Dolphin, which she has worked with several times throughout her 13 years at a DMC.

"It truly offers amazing amenities for attendees, ample space for general sessions and breakouts, as well as unique reception options, including a private beach," she says. "With its close proximity to Disney's Boardwalk Inn and Epcot, it also gives us great dine-around and offsite venue options for our clients."

There are hordes of hotels, ranging in size and price, with amazing onsite



and impression of having exclusive private use of select major theme park rides, characters and attractions for the enjoyment of your meeting attendees."

In addition, a group can go to Disnev Springs, a premier shopping and entertainment destination boasting six restaurants that feature James Beard award-winning chefs. "Groups can buy out one of these restaurants for the evening or buyout multiple to create their own block party," Ostertag says.

Obviously, one of the main attractions for those coming into Orlando is the beautiful weather. Nelson has seen firsthand that meeting attendees will take personal time or even wake

up early before their meeting activities begin to enjoy the weather and use hotel amenities, such as pools and outdoor spaces. Many others explore the theme parks during their off hours.

Simply put, Ostertag notes, there is something for everyone to do and enjoy in Orlando.

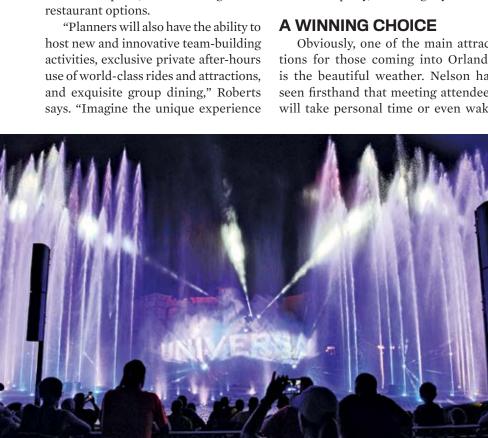
"I would strongly encourage meeting attendees to explore some of the local neighborhoods and experience Orlando like a local," he says. "One example is Winter Park, a picturesque town with brick- and oak-lined streets. It also has a wonderful chain of lakes where you can enjoy a relaxing narrative boat tour. After you get off the water, stroll down Park Avenue and enjoy the off-the-beaten path boutique shopping, local cafés and restaurants."

Long notes planners need to think outside the box when they plan in Orlando.

"There is more than meets the eye when it comes to Orlando, so take the time to understand how you can take advantage of all the area has to offer," she says.

Overall, Cleary says planning meetings in Orlando is quite pleasant.

"There are great, experienced partners to work with throughout Orlando, and you almost always find yourself working with a seasoned team of professionals who work in collaboration with us as meeting planners to achieve the same goal: To put forth the best product and service for our clients, and attendees, that we can," she says. "Working in Orlando makes our jobs easier and more efficient." C&IT





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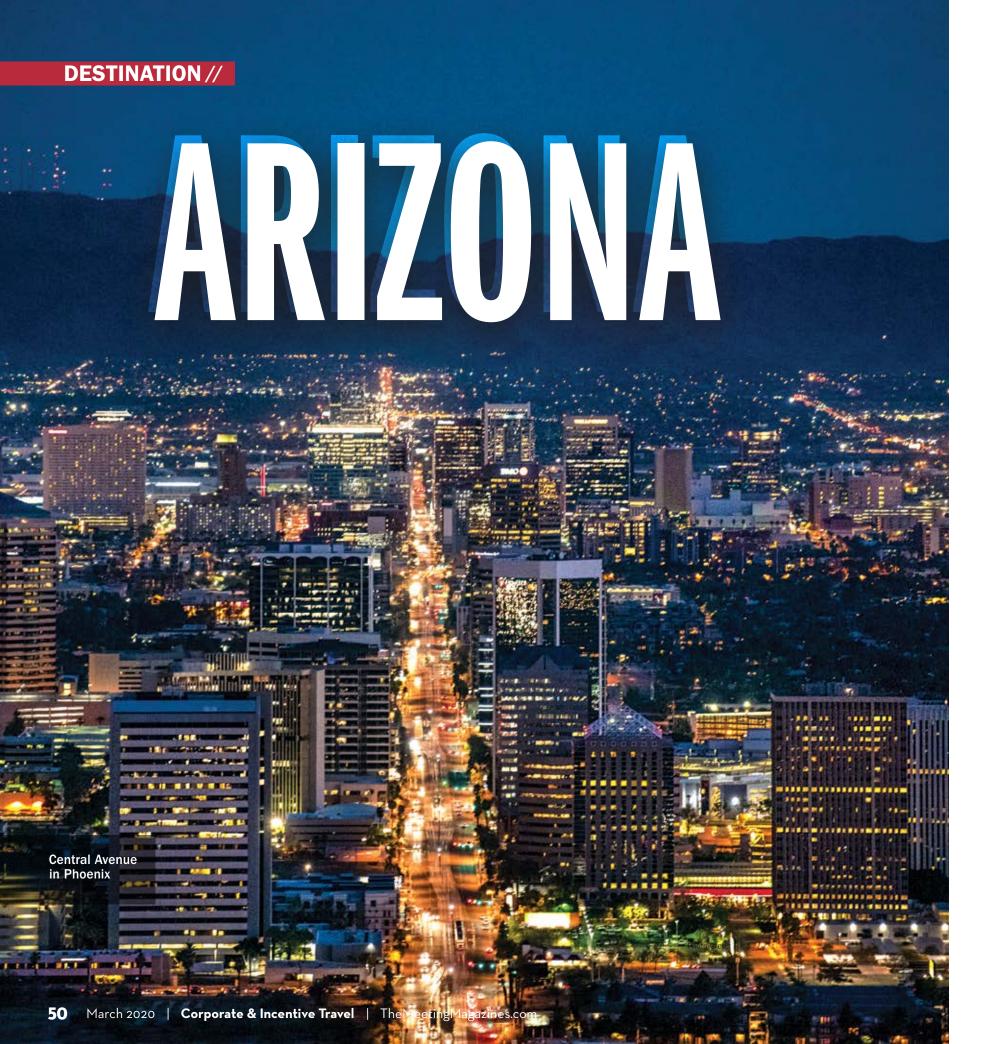
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# A Southwestern Destination Offering Amazing Outdoor Activities for Attendees

BY CHRISTINE LOOMIS

hat makes Arizona an ideal place for a meeting? Planners who have booked events there will tell vou there are many reasons, including near idyllic weather, a range of lodging possibilities from rustic western ranches to luxury high-rise resorts, a mix of adventure and culture adding color to any event, and towns and cities throughout the state each offering something unique.

#### **PHOENIX**

Downtown Phoenix is a thriving, revitalized urban center and the location of multiple group-friendly hotels. Amanda Solon, senior manager of events for Netsmart, brought her attendees for a meeting there headquartered at the Sheraton Phoenix Downtown and Renaissance Phoenix Downtown Hotel. Both are a short distance from the Phoenix Convention Center, where conference sessions took place.

"Phoenix was a great fit in terms of airlift and ease of access from the airport to downtown," Solon says. "And the hotels downtown, from a quality and accessibility standpoint, were very easy to navigate. This was our first program going from a hotel to a convention center with attendees split between two hotels, and it was very simple for the attendees and for myself as the planner. I also really appreciated the walkability and safety in downtown Phoenix."

The CVB was an important partner. "The folks at Visit Phoenix took great care of me and my group," Solon says. "They offered many services that made my program even more memorable for the attendees such

as discounts at local venues, information on when and where to go and how to take advantage of the city."

The two downtown hotels worked well for the group, but in different ways, Solon explains. "The Renaissance Phoenix Downtown Hotel is unique and has a super-friendly staff that I'll remember forever. The Sheraton Phoenix Downtown was just the right size and price for many attendees. Both hotels are in great locations and an easy walk to the convention center."

As for the convention center, Solon adds, "The stacked space there is very easy to navigate."

While all three venues worked for the program, Solon thinks that bringing all three together is important to facilitate the best coordination throughout the event. "I think one thing planners should know is to bring all the groups together — the hotels and the convention center — at some point and make sure everyone is on the same page and collaborating," she says.

Solon's group made use of multiple offsite venues as well. "We hosted our large offsite event at Corona Ranch outside of the city by a few miles," she says. "It was an amazing event and I would highly recommend this unique venue to any group coming to Phoenix. We also hosted multiple dinners at various restaurants throughout the city, with groups ranging from 10 to 50 people. All them had great service and food quality."

Although there were a few challenges, Solon thinks that at least some of them resulted from the fact that she was a firsttimer planning an event at a convention center. For others in the same situation, she says, "Talk with a planner who has done this or call me and I can help make sure the right questions are being asked. There were small issues I ran into that could have been avoided if I knew what I was looking for versus facing the issues at times when I didn't really have time to face an issue."

One standout of the event for Solon was the experience at the Renaissance. "My advice would be to stay at the Renaissance Phoenix Downtown Hotel. I received some of the best service I have ever had. I think it comes from the top down there — happy people making other people happy," she says.

And then there's Phoenix itself, which Solon thinks is underrated. "From my perspective, the entire city was very welcoming and valued my group. The focus on human directional signage and safety was unmatched. My group really appreciated the hospitality," Solon says.

The Sheraton Phoenix Downtown is just wrapping up a comprehensive renovation. Rooms have been refreshed and feature such forward-thinking amenities as height-adjustable tables that transform into standing desks. The final phase of the renovation, slated for a spring/summer completion, will turn the lobby area into a welcoming space for community networking and co-working. Among

the features are community tables and charging tabletops, as well as multipurpose studios. On completion, the redesign will have revamped rooms, F&B outlets and lobby space.

#### **SCOTTSDALE**

Scottsdale has its own persona that manages to meld uber upscale properties, spas and shopping with its historic western roots in Old Town Scottsdale.

Laura Bartley, leader, client experience, with DIRTT Environmental Solutions, a manufacturer of customized

I think it comes from the top down there — happy people making other people happy.

AMANDA SOLON Senior Manager of Events Netsmart



interiors, chose the Fairmont Scotts-dale Princess for the company's partner event last fall. Before last year, Bartley says, "We hosted our event at a wonderful property, but we had outgrown the space, which meant we had to split our attendees between three different locations and shuttle them to the conference location each day." She called that scenario "a logistical nightmare."



The Fairmont Scottsdale Princess was the solution. "We wanted all of our attendees under one roof. This property allowed for that. We also wanted our conference rooms grouped together instead of sprawling across the property, and we were able to accomplish this at the Fairmont," Bartley says.

She also notes the ease of accessibility. "It was easy to get to the property whether we were taking a chartered bus, which we could book directly through the Fairmont, Uber, a taxi or were driving ourselves," she

says, adding, "We had everything we needed under one roof, including enough hotel rooms, tons of meeting space, fabulous reception venues, and world-class food and beverage. And, I cannot say enough about the staff at this property."

There was a great deal more that made the Fairmont a good fit. "The rooms were clean, modern

and beautiful. The meeting spaces were spacious and had great access to the outdoors, which is always a plus when attendees are in meetings all day. The food and beverage during the day and at the receptions was exceptional, and the onsite entertainment and events team were with us every step of the way," she says.

Bartley calls the resort PSAV team "absolute rock stars who brought our vision to life," adding, "The onsite graphics team and print shop made our lives significantly easier, and the sales team, event coordinators and concierge staff were like family. We truly didn't know how we were going to function without them once our program was over."

The pricing was just right as well. "The team was flexible with pricing to ensure we were staying on budget while still delivering an excellent experience to our attendees. Everything from room pricing to menu selection, to print needs to entertainment options were very competitively priced," she says.

The Sheraton Phoenix Downtown is undergoing a complete refresh, which includes revamped rooms, F&B outlets and lobby space.

The Fairmont Scottsdale Princess' Copper Canyon hosted DIRTT Environmental Solution's Partner Camp 2019.

From start to finish, all functions were set on the Fairmont property. "Our welcome reception was a beach party at the Sunset Beach pool, which has its sand flown in from California. It offers a relaxed, tropical atmosphere and was the perfect way to welcome our attendees. Our secondnight reception was a dance party at The Plaza Bar. We hired DJ Mars through the Fairmont and he was fantastic. We ended up extending his play time by an hour because no one wanted to leave," Bartley says.

The group's final reception was staged at one of the property's most engaging venues. "Our wrap-up reception was a western-themed event at the Fairmont's western village, Copper Canyon. This space is something to be seen. We hired the Mogollon Band to



Courtesy of DIRTT Environmental Solutions

play country and rock music for us and we had an absolute blast," she says.

Bartley thinks this property has so much potential. "If you can dream it, odds are the Fairmont can bring your dream to reality," she says. "We were able to bring the themes of our events to life thanks to the wonderful kitchen and bar staff. Each theme was really obvious and beautiful each night. And

the PSAV team was such a pleasure to work with. They ensured we had music bumping at every turn during our receptions."

Bartley thinks much of the success of her programs has come down to the staff. She thinks others will experience the same level of service. "You're in good hands. The staff will treat you and your attendees with white gloves



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Sanctuary Camelback Mountain Resort & Spa offers 9,000 sf of indoor and outdoor meeting space and is ideal for small groups, business professionals and associations who seek a well-orchestrated meeting.

from the minute you begin your planning journey with them and even after you've returned home. Onsite, you'll have a dedicated concierge team at your service. All you need to do is send a text to the group and whatever you need is handled for you. Our devoted concierge team was spectacular. No request went unanswered and was taken care of within seconds. The banquet teams were super friendly, helpful and fun," she says.

Bartley also liked that she and her

team were able to honor an exceptional member of the resort staff thanks to a program designed for exactly that. "Fairmont also has an MVP program where the planner gets to identify a member of the service team that was outstanding during the event. At the end, you get to recognize them and present them with an MVP button. It was a wonderful experience," she says.

Even in a scenario where almost everything is fabulous, there can be challenges. In this case, it's important to note that some partnerships simply work better than others. "The only challenge we experienced was that our original Fairmont contact was not a good fit for our team. We ended up getting paired with Stephanie and immediately our perspective changed. Stephanie turned us from being skeptics of the property to fanatics," she notes.

Bartley believes groups will have a positive experience at the Fairmont. "You're going to love it. It was truly a seamless and pleasant experience from beginning to end. Put your trust in the team at Fairmont and you won't be disappointed. Our attendees said that our program at the Fairmont was by far the best one yet."

She strongly advises going on a site visit and touring the entire space. "Taste the food at the different restaurants as well as what offerings are

We truly didn't know how we were going to function without them once our program was over.

Laura Bartley
Leader, Client Experience
DIRTT Environmental Solutions



available from the banquet menus. To see it is to believe just how amazing this property is," she says. "But be honest about your expectations and what you're trying to achieve. This team is here to help you and to make your vision become a reality. They'll strategize with you to ensure you're delivering the proper message while sticking to your budget. Enjoy it and put your trust in this amazing team. They won't let you down," she says.

Last year, Fairmont Scottsdale Prin-

cess completed a room and pool renovation. Technology was bumped up in all rooms, including the addition of an Echo Dot with an "Ask the Princess" menu and a resort text service making it easier for attendees to connect with resort staff for requests and questions. The recent upgrades were a continuation of improvements and upgrades made over the past several years.

Another Scottsdale property with something new is the mid-century modern, with a touch of contemporary pizzazz, Hotel Valley Ho, which relaunched its completely revamped signature restaurant, ZuZu, last fall. Highlights include The Kitchen Table, an action station where the chef cooks tableside each evening. Planners can also take advantage of The Rosie Room, a chic new private dining space.

The Phoenician, a Luxury Collection Resort, in Scottsdale, another favorite of groups, wrapped up a three-year resort-wide renovation last spring and the opening of its new tavern. And, the city-owned Talking Stick Resort Arena is embarking on a \$230 million renovation over the next two years. Stay tuned.

Also of interest to planners is The Scottsdale Resort at McCormick

Ranch, which just completed renovation of its meeting and banquet spaces, and added a third break station; the Hyatt Regency Scottsdale Resort & Spa at Gainey Ranch completed renovation of its suites; and the Westin Kierland Resort & Spa revealed its newly designed rooms. Perhaps, the biggest news is that Caesars Entertainment announced plans for the

Caesars Republic Scottsdale, scheduled to open in 2021, which will be the company's first non-gaming hotel in the United States.

Near Scottsdale, Sanctuary Camelback Mountain Resort & Spa features inspiring Paradise Valley views and the surrounding mountains. The resort offers 9,000 sf of indoor and outdoor meeting space, and is ideal for small groups, business professionals and associations who seek a productive, focused and well-orchestrated meeting.

L'Auberge de Sedona was the venue of choice for Ensign Services Inc. Below: The group enjoys a nature hike, one of several adventure- or nature-oriented activities offered.

For team-building exercises, attendees can participate in an "Iron Chef America" inspired food battle, and enjoy hiking and other activities. Attendees can also enjoy Sanctuary's private upper lawn, which can accommodate up to 80 attendees for a seated event, or 120 for a standing reception or buffet, and overlooks Mummy Mountain and the valley. A larger, lower lawn overlooks the McDowell Mountain Range and can handle 100 attendees for catering and 200 for receptions and buffets.

#### **SEDONA**

Sedona is best known for its rumored mysterious vortexes, places of spirituality and healing resulting from unseen energy. Whether you believe that or not, it's inarguable that Sedona is a place of extraordinary natural beauty and a fine place to meet.

One of the town's most engaging hotels for groups is L'Auberge de Sedona, set along Oak Creek. That's where Kelly Wallerstedt, therapy resource assistant with Ensign Services Inc., brought a leadership group last fall. "Our group is made up of therapists in skilled nursing facilities," Wallerstedt says. "They're selected by performance and a lengthy application. L'Auberge is the perfect destination for them to get completely away from everything and recharge. This is

our fourth year coming to Sedona, and we have several people who continue to apply just because of the location."

One of Sedona's top attributes is its wealth of activities that take visitors deep into the region's compelling landscape. This group took advantage of several adventure- and nature-oriented options. "We sent a group on a Pink Jeep Tour with a cookout. We also had a group go on a horseback ride with a cookout and music. That one was with M Diamond Ranch. It was our first time using them, but we'll definitely go back. We also had a few different groups go out hiking with Trail Lovers Excursions. The groups were based on skill level, and everyone enjoyed it very much. All the activities provided a different look at what Sedona has to offer and views of the beautiful red rocks," Wallerstedt says.

This was the third year the group was based at L'Auberge. "We love the location and the staff, and it's perfect for what we want to accomplish during this type of meeting," she says. "L'Auberge is a great place for getting away from the hustle and bustle of everyday life. Set by the creek in Oak Creek Canyon, it lets you really take in the location and focus on the meeting. I think our best meeting outcomes are in Sedona. The scenery is inspiring."

All of the meeting functions were held within the hotel's meeting space, with A/V provided by PSAV, which Wallerstedt notes "met all of our needs." Catering was also excellent and, thanks to Sedona's idyllic weather, the group was able to use outdoor space. "Breakfast and lunch were provided outside every day, and dinner was down by the creek. You definitely want to have the F&B part of the meetings outside," she says.

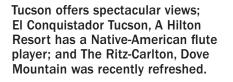
The resort's staff also earned Wallerstedt's praise. "I worked with Julianne Ryan. She was very attentive to the needs of our group and made sure everything happened as planned. We give our attendees a welcome gift when they arrive and Julianne and her staff made sure each package was delivered to the specific individual," she adds.

If booking L'Auberge is a consideration, Wallerstedt advises starting the planning process early since the location is in demand. Not only is L'Auberge an excellent choice for businesses wanting to recharge or motivate their groups,



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but also for Arizona locals wanting to get away from the heat of the valley. "The weather is always beautiful and so many offsite activities help bring your group together," she says. "Offer yoga in the morning, an afternoon hike and some downtime for attendees to explore Sedona. Just sitting down by the creek with a glass of wine was enough to keep us coming back."

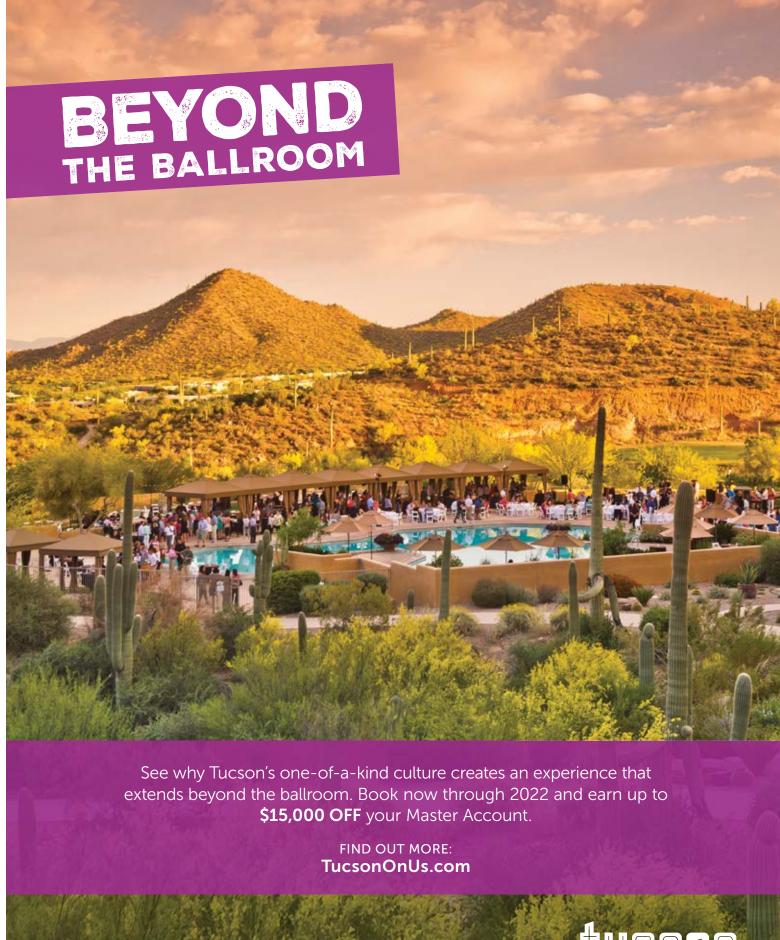
#### **TUCSON**

Tucson is another city with plenty to entice meeting planners and groups. Like Sedona, it has a wealth of outdoor activities, as well as the stellar Arizona-Sonora Desert Museum, which offers group programs. Also of interest is the multimillion-dollar renovation of the Tucson Convention Center, including a \$9.2 million expansion of meeting rooms, slated to be completed next year.

In lodging news, DoubleTree by Hilton broke ground last spring adjacent to the convention center. The sixstory hotel will feature a second-story pool, 4,000 sf of event space, a restaurant and two bars. It's expected to open later this year. The DoubleTree by Hilton Hotel Tucson - Reid Park in midtown is undergoing renovation and will also reopen this year. And, at Tanque Verde Ranch, a popular ranch option for groups, a new 20,000-sf event barn opened last fall.

The Ritz-Carlton, Dove Mountain, 30 minutes north of Tucson, wrapped up a room renovation. A favorite of incentive groups, it's one of only eight properties in the world to make it onto Forbes Travel Guide's verified lists of the World's Most Luxurious Hotels and World's Most Luxurious Spas. This year, it's offering planners an incentive package for meetings and events booked in May, June, July, August, September and December that includes a variety of upgrades, concessions and perks. Ranger Ainsley, the resort's new yellow lab "guest ambassador," is a perk everyone can enjoy.





# **DESTINATION** //

# Pacific Northwest

# Everything From Mountain Views to Idyllic Settings Will Inspire Attendees

BY CHRISTINE LOOMIS

he Pacific Northwest is a stellar place to meet in large part because it's a wonderful place to live. Portland and Seattle ranked No. 8 and No. 9 on the U.S. News & World Report's 2019 Best Places to Live in the U.S. list. Boise topped Liveability.com's 2019 Top 100 Places to Live list and snagged the No. 2 spot on WalletHub's Best Capital Cities to Live in — the only Northwest city in the top 10 on either list.

Many positive lifestyle factors are also often prime meeting factors, including plenty of infrastructure, restaurants, cultural institutions, walkability, easily accessible outdoor activities and low crime rates. Boise's affordability also impacts its meeting costs, while Portland and Seattle offer excellent airlift and a wide range of lodging and meeting options. And these aren't the only cities planners should consider. Bottom line: Why wouldn't you meet in the Pacific Northwest?

#### WASHINGTON

Planners and attendees looking to be in the middle of the action in Seattle need look no further than the Hyatt Regency Seattle, located in the heart of downtown just steps away from the Washington State Convention Center

(WSCC) and blocks from the iconic Space Needle. The hotel, the first and only LEED Gold-Certified hotel in Seattle, offers 103,000 sf of function space, including two 19,000-sf ballrooms, two junior ballrooms at 7,200 sf and 3,400 sf, respectively, and 35,000 sf of naturally lit, pre-function space.

In addition, Hyatt Regency Seattle has 46 meeting rooms, all with large windows, ranging from 422 to 1,825 sf, a high-end, permanent boardroom with a private balcony that can accommodate 22 people, and onsite A/V specialists.

Attendees looking for a bite? The hotel has several award-winning restaurants and bars, including Andare Kitchen & Bar, a modern, casual setting offering wood-fired pizzas, homemade pasta and salads or signature desserts for lunch and dinner; Daniel's Broiler and Rickhouse Whiskey Bar, an upscale steakhouse featuring USDA prime steaks and seafood and a large bar area with piano bar, extensive wine list and whiskey collection that offers breakfast, lunch and dinner; and the 24-hour Market, offering espresso, pastries, freshly prepared sandwiches and salads, hot entrees and more.

By the end of this year, downtown Seattle's guest room count is expected to reach 15,157, more than half of those within 5 1/2 blocks of the WSCC. The Space Needle recently reopened while undergoing the final touches on it's \$100 million renovation, and the city's waterfront revitalization project is ongoing with completion expected in 2024.

One person who knows a lot about why Seattle is an excellent destination for corporate meetings and incentives is Dianna Hermesmeyer, CMP, general manager of Hosts Seattle, who says, "First, Seattle is easy to get to with over 90 direct domestic flights, 25 nonstop international flights and an airport that's only 20 to 25 minutes from the downtown hotel corridor. The city offers a wonderful blend of art, technology, innovation and nature that makes it attractive to groups from all backgrounds and fields."

The city is also in a period of growth, so groups that haven't been there in a few years have something new to experience. "Seattle has seen a 20% increase in hotel rooms in recent vears and offers a mix of luxury, boutique and convention hotels with more properties on the way," she adds.

That growth, Hermesmeyer says, is energizing suppliers and partners in the meetings and events industry. And there's another element of particular interest to planners and their groups. "Part of the excitement we're **Hyatt Regency Seattle** offers 103,000 sf of function space, including two 19,000-sf ballrooms.

seeing here," she notes, "is due to the fact that Seattle is a 'bucket list' destination for many people, and that's increasing attendance for many of our clients' programs."

Hermesmeyer points to a slew of Seattle's venues and activities as good places for planners to consider booking. "Seattle has so many unique venues and experiences worth mentioning, it's hard to know where to start," she says. "The Museum of Pop Culture (MoPOP) is truly a one-of-a-kind venue for tours and private events. MoPOP's ever-changing exhibits celebrate the pop culture phenomena from science fiction, video games and fashion to Prince, Nir-

vana and Jimi Hendrix — and that's just the start. Neighboring Chihuly Garden and Glass also stands out as a showstopper, Hermesmever notes. "It features the art of area native and renowned glassblower, Dale Chihuly. Groups can delve deeper into the glassblowing culture of Seattle with demonstrations at the Seattle Glassblowing Studio to see

the process in action. Or maybe they want to learn a different type of skill, such as being a blacksmith for a day. They can do that at Lawless Forge."

Pike Place Market isn't new: it's one of Seattle's most famous attractions. But it offers plenty beyond a casual walk-through. "For those interested in a more epicurean experience," Hermesmeyer says, "A Pike Place

Market tasting tour is the best way to discover the history and tastes of the market. Other food- and drink-related options include a trip to neighboring Woodinville Wine Country or any of the new urban winery or distillery experi-



ences in the city, which showcase hundreds of local wines and spirits."

There are, in fact, a whole host of attractions in the culinary genre, given that Seattle has more than 17 James Beard award-winning restaurants, in addition to its notable craft brewery, distillery and winery scene.

There's also no lack of culture, art

Seattle is an amazingly walkable city with an abundance of shops, restaurants, sights and activities.

**DIANNA HERMESMEYER, CMP** 



or history to discover, as Hermesmeyer points out. Attendees can experience something of the Pacific Northwest Native American culture at Tillicum Village via a boat excursion from the city. Ballard Locks provides a glimpse

into Seattle's shipping industry, while the nearby National Nordic Museum interprets the history of Nordic people who migrated to the American Northwest. Then, there is the Underground Tour, which focuses on the hidden places beneath the city that resulted when Seattle rebuilt on top of itself following the Great Fire of 1889.

There's also an abundance of nature within and close to the city for outdoor adventures, not the least of which is Mount Rainier, just 59 miles away. "We could go on forever," Hermesmeyer says. "Seattle is an amazingly walkable city with an abundance of shops, restaurants, sights and activities all within walking distance of downtown hotels."

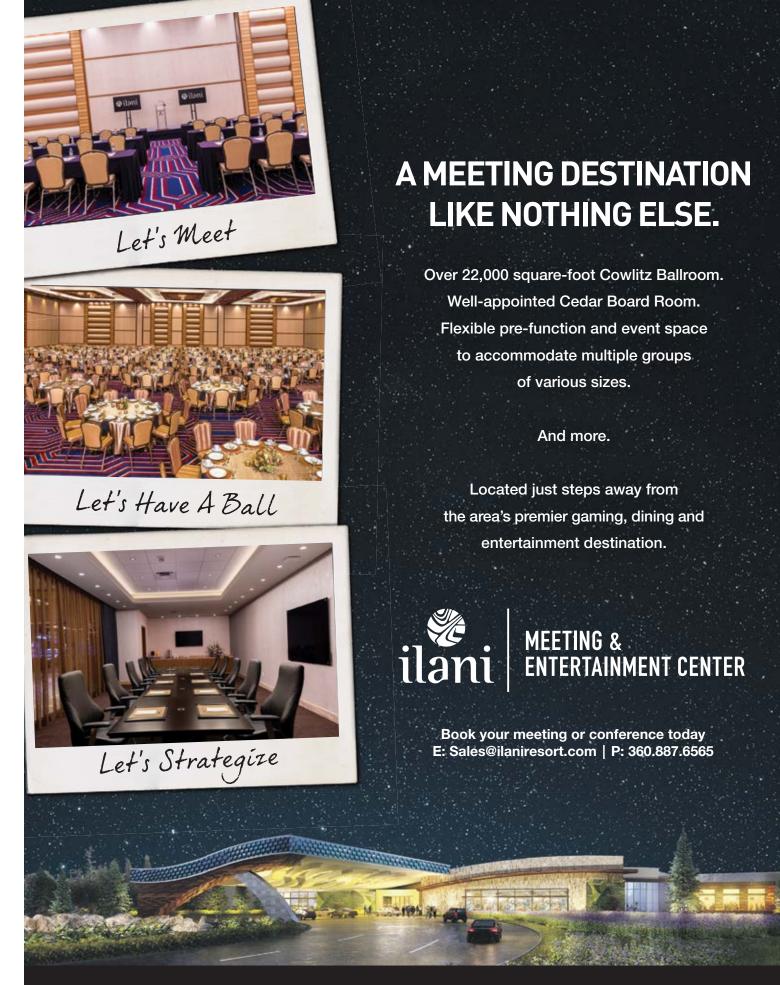
And there's one final thing Hermesmeyer wants to say: "We want to let planners in on a little secret: Seattle is not as rainy as you think. In fact, more sunglasses are sold per capita in Seattle than any other city in the United States."

Suncadia Resort, in Elum, Washington, is close enough to Seattle about an hour and a half away - that

attendees can enjoy the city before or after a meeting, yet far enough away and with enough going for it to be a compelling destination unto itself. That's where Yolanda Murray, executive assistant, sales with SanMar Corporation, is bringing the company's family retreat this summer. They'll be based at The Lodge there. The group has

met at Suncadia multiple times.

"This location works well because it is a destination location with a lot of activities and the staff is extremely helpful in executing their program. The planning process is seamless with



# **GREEN** FOR GOOD

he Hyatt Regency Seattle, through Hyatt's Thrive program, has undertaken major initiatives toward sustainability. The hotel, which received Gold certification under the LEED for New Construction 2009 rating system in June 2019, has:

- Permanently protected 5,285 acres of forest and 5 acres of local farmland as part of King County's transfer of development rights (TDR) program.
- Supported regional development goals by increasing density in existing urbanized areas while conserving forests in perpetuity and compensating landowners for protecting forests.



#### **Hyatt Regency Seattle**

To help reduce carbon emissions, the hotel is located within a few blocks of a light-rail station with direct service to the airport, a streetcar stop, two bus rapid-transit stops and dozens of bus lines with all-day service. There is also secure bike storage for 136 bikes, and shower facilities for hotel and retail staff, and the hotel provides Level 2 chargers for electric vehicles, as well as preferred parking for fuelefficient vehicles.

To see more about Hyatt's corporate responsibility strategy and platform, visit hyattregencyseattle. com or about.hyatt.com.

all the moving parts," Murray says. "We kept everything on Suncadia property as it provided all needed venue space and catering options."

The abundance of activities is a big draw for meetings, according to Murray. "There are so many activities for attendees to choose. If you want your own adventure, there's indoor and outdoor swimming, hot tubs and water slides. In addition to a lake in the heart of the resort, there are 47 miles of trails, as well as rental bikes, scooters, paddleboats, canoes and kayaks," Murray says. "The recreation team has a laundry list of other activities, including horseback riding, river rafting and ATV tours."

She adds, "There's a great spa with 14 treatment rooms along with soaking tubs for the outdoor experience." Additionally, Murray notes, there are two restaurants within the resort core, and attendees also make use of the food

> truck located at the Swim and Fitness Center for quick food and drink items.

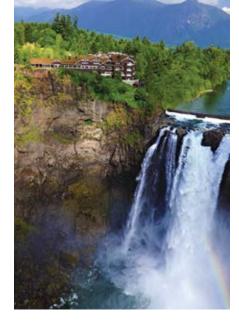
The Suncadia staff. Murray says, makes planning easy. "They're attentive to our needs and very friendly with our guests. The directors from each department are available to discuss our needs and work to make our program a success. Our planner at the resort, Debbie Losse, is one of the reasons

we've come back over the years. She makes us feel special and is willing to do anything to ensure that our guests are taken care of."

But she's not the only one. "We've always had exceptional service from Garrett O'Brien with PSAV, the resort's onsite A/V vendor," Murray says. "We use a phone app for updating guests on schedule changes and other notifications and haven't had any Wi-Fi concerns with this system."

An additional plus is the broad range of accommodations. "Suncadia has quite a mixture of sleeping accommodations, from The Lodge and The Inn to townhomes and homes featuring two to six bedrooms. "If you have specific needs," Murray suggests, "book early."

Another choice for groups that want to be close to, but not in, Seattle is Sal-



Salish Lodge & Spa offers breathtaking views of the Snoqualmie Falls and the river.

ish Lodge & Spa, about 30 minutes away. Perched at the top of magnificent Snoqualmie Falls, which plummets 268 feet into the river below, the lodge is an inarguably inspiring setting for corporate and incentive groups.

"Salish Lodge is one of the most beautiful hotels I've ever been to," says Steven Van Cohen, CEO of Meyvn Global, which specializes in corporate training. "It's perfect for our event because it's truly an escape for the team. It's far enough from Seattle where you're out of the city, but close enough to make it really easy in terms of travel. We want to be in a place where people can walk around and be one with their thoughts. It allows the team to focus on the work at hand and not feel the distractions of day-to-day work. The meeting spaces are so comfortable, the surrounding nature makes you feel alive and the energy is incredible. We always have phenomenal sessions when staying there. We've been coming to Salish every few months for two years because we're so productive when we're there."

He adds, "The food is five-star, the staff is incredible and the experience is always out of this world. Snoqualmie is a perfect little town because it's far enough from Seattle where you feel like you're at a retreat, but you're also close to the convenience of bars, restaurants and stores."

**Ilani's Meeting & Entertainment** Center offers 30,000 sf of meeting space. Below, its 100,000-sf casino has slots, table games and more.

The group has used the lodge's catering, ballroom and meeting rooms, "and just about everything else the lodge offers as an amenity," Van Cohen says. "Everything is world class. Linda, the catering guru who serves us, is amazing. She takes such good care of our team and makes the stay seamless. Monica and Faith always make sure all logistics are handled and are pros at making each experience perfect."

In considering what planners who haven't been to Salish Lodge should know, Van Cohen says, "Their team will be thrilled to have their event at Salish. The area is gorgeous. The smell of the fireplaces is calming and the overall commitment to excellence from the staff is welcoming. All of the available meeting rooms are great and you'll not go wrong with any food options, plus pricing is very reasonable. I can't speak highly enough about how wonderful this place is. Salish Lodge is the best place around Seattle, hands down, for a beautiful event that people will remember forever. The decision is easy - Just choose Salish."

Groups choosing Salish Lodge & Spa now have a new option for their VIPs - Club 268, its name a nod to the waterfall just outside. The upgraded experience includes access to the concierge-style club, which serves food and drinks during the day and evening, and accommodations in recently renovated guest rooms on the spa level. Ask about options for adding a wellness-focus to your meeting, an element slated to begin this year.

Tacoma is another great meeting destination in Washington. Only about 30 minutes from Sea-Tac Airport, two new hotels are opening in the city this vear. Scheduled to open this summer is Silver Cloud Hotel Point Ruston Waterfront, with more than 15,000 sf of function space including a 5,400-sf ballroom, and both covered and uncovered outdoor spaces.

Also opening is the Courtvard Tacoma Downtown, which will connect to the Greater Tacoma Convention Center via skybridge. The largest meeting space is a 10,500-sf ballroom, about half of the total space, and there's also a rooftop events center with approximately 6,500 sf of outdoor space.

Just north of the Oregon border sits Ilani in Ridgefield, Washington. The resort's new Meeting & Entertainment Center offers 30,000 sf of flexible meeting and event space. The 22,400-sf Cowlitz Ballroom can host a crowd of up to 2,500 for concerts, comedy shows or other entertainment. For smaller parties, there is the 650-sf Cedar Board Room.

When it comes to gaming, Ilani's 100,000-sf casino floor offers slots, high-stakes table games and more.

There are also 11 dining options, which include fine dining at Michael Jordan's Steak House for lunch and dinner; Rose & Thorn, offering modern interpretations of classic Mediterranean and Italian offerings; Longhouse, offering ocean-fresh, handcrafted and made-to-order sushi rolls, and traditional rice and noodle dishes; Chef Jet, offering food based on modern Asian cuisine; and Line & Lure Seafood Kitchen and Tap, offering locally sourced and seasonal seafood.



There's no indication that Portland is slowing down in terms of its popularity with planners and groups, nor is the city slowing down in terms of growth. Last year, the new Hyatt Regency Portland at the Oregon Convention Center opened, providing planners with more than 38,000 sf of its own flexible space. This year, another Hyatt property also opened, the Hyatt Centric Downtown Portland, with four meeting spaces and an onsite Spanish restaurant, Masia, with a full bar.

Groups looking to meet in Portland should consider summer or fall when the city's My People's Market runs, a gathering of entrepreneurs, makers, artists and culinary artists celebrating



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more than 100 local multicultural businesses. But the city has plenty to see year-round, including its legendary independent bookstore, Powell's City of Books.

#### **IDAHO**

Boise is one of those under-the-radar cities that deserves more recognition among planners. Scott Winegar, president of TMN Events Inc. in Boise, says the city has way more to offer than many groups realize. "Boise has a very walkable downtown. Everything — hotels, dining, entertainment, brew pubs - is right there. Our downtown is vibrant and many groups never even leave the downtown area during a multiday meeting. Not only is that convenient, it's a cost-saver on transportation. Our airport is a surprise for many groups. It's won awards for having so many flights on time and it's only about 3 miles away, 10 minutes or less, which also helps reduce a meeting's transportation costs."

Winegar notes that the weather is meeting-friendly, too. "Any month of the year, you can have sunny days and 40 degrees. And nine months out of the year there's plenty of recreation going on around town, especially May to October."

Whether groups want to add activity or culture to an event, Boise delivers. "We have multiple museums downtown: the Boise Art Museum, the Idaho Historical Museum and the Black History Museum, and the zoo is close by as well. As for activity, our 25-mile Boise River Greenbelt is popular for cycling and walking before

or after meetings." According to Winegar the sweet spot for group size is probably about 300 or 400, at least if they all want to be under one roof. Larger groups have to book multiple hotels downtown, but even that is easy as several hotels

are a short walk from the

Boise Centre and each other. "The Boise Centre is pretty fantastic and easy to navigate," Winegar says. "A renovation was completed two or three years ago, so if groups haven't been here in a while, there's a big difference. The East Building expansion added





The Oregon Convention Center, top, offers 255,000 sf of contiguous exhibit space. Above, a rider enjoys the zip line at Twin Falls in South Central Idaho.

36,000 sf, bringing the total today to 86,000 sf, which easily accommodates groups of 1,500 plus."

One venue that planners won't see anywhere else is JUMP, a community facility on multiple acres that Winegar highly recommends to planners and groups. "It has some really

Nine months out of the year there's plenty of recreation going on around town, especially May to October.

SCOTT WINEGAR

President



unique indoor and outdoor meeting space," he says.

JUMP stands for Jack's Urban Meeting Place, named for a local entrepreneur and pioneering spirit. "Consider doing a portion of your meeting, or at least an evening function, at JUMP," Winegar advises. "It's really an unusual facility."

Boise State University also has a great venue. "Of course, people always want to see the famous blue field, so we often take groups there and then to Stueckle Sky Center on campus; it's a really good venue for corporate events

> with amazing views and amenities," he adds.

> "While Boise has a lot to offer groups, it's also affordable," he says, "The room rates are good compared to similar cities; you get a good quality product at a moderate price."

All of that means one thing - plan ahead. "Plan

early, as we've become busy and it's hard to get space at the convention center and hotels. Plan at least a year out if you can. It will be well worth it," he says.

So, go ahead. Choose your favorite Pacific Northwest city or resort to meet in. You really can't go wrong.



#### ON THE MOVE //



**VEZZOSO-SCHAEFER** 



MOJICA



MOONEY



**PUNTEL** 



**BARAN** 

French Lick Resort has welcomed two new members to its sales team — Ashley Vezzoso-Schaefer and Brittany Kummer. Vezzoso-Schaefer will focus on southern Indiana, southern Illinois, western Kentucky and Tennessee. Kummer's main focus will be on Missouri, along with central and northern Illinois.

Maggie Mojica has been appointed director of Sales and Marketing for Gurney's Resorts' properties in Montauk, New York, including Gurney's Montauk Resort & Seawater Spa and Gurney's Star Island Resort & Marina. She comes to Gurney's Resorts from St. Regis New York where she served as the director of Sales.

The Walt Disney World Swan and Dolphin Resort has announced Jim Curtis as director of Sales & Marketing for the entire complex. Curtis has more than 30 years of sales experience in the hospitality industry. Most recently, he was area director of Sales for Omni Hotels & Resorts.

Sheraton New York Times Square has announced that Jim Mooney will be the new director of hotel sales. Mooney brings to the hotel more than 24 years of hospitality experience, including 21 years in the New York market. He was most recently vice president of Sales for Interstate Hotels & Resorts, a global hotel management company with a portfolio of 500 properties.

Mike Hubnik joins Omni Viking Lakes Hotel as their new director of Sales & Marketing. He has more than 10 years of experience in the hotel industry from companies including Hyatt, W Hotel, Marriott International Inc., Sheraton and Le Méridien.

The Waldorf Astoria Los Cabos Pedregal has selected Tom Puntel as their new director of Sales & Marketing. Puntel brings more than 25 years of experience in hospitality to his new role, having held positions as regional director of Revenue Management and director of Sales, Marketing and Events at Hyatt Hotels, and most recently as vice president of Sales and Marketing at East West Hospitality.

The Cayman Islands Department of Tourism (CIDOT) announced Kari Dehn will join the U.S. National Sales team for the CIDOT and lead efforts in the New York office to execute group sales for Meetings, Incentive, Conferences and Exhibitions (M.I.C.E.) travel and leisure groups visiting the Cayman Islands. As a Certified Incentive Specialist (CIS), she has more than 25 years of experience in the travel industry.

Team San Jose recently welcomed Charles Baran as director of Event Operations. Baran joins the organization with 15 years of hospitality and marketing experience. He was most recently the director of Sales & Marketing for Hotel Sorrento in Seattle, but he has worked with other brands as well.

The AAA Four Diamond InterContinental Houston – Medical Center has appointed **Doug Kelly** as their director of Sales & Marketing. Before this position, Kelly was an area director of Sales and Marketing supporting the Hotel Indigo Naperville Riverwalk and Holiday Inn & Suites Chicago O'Hare-Rosemont.





CURTIS



HUBNIK



DEHN



**KELLY** 





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