

INSURANCE & FINANCIAL MEETINGS MANAGEMENT

THE EXECUTIVE SOURCE FOR PLANNING MEETINGS & INCENTIVES



The Florida Factor

'It Adds a Layer of Incentive Without
Having to Be an Incentive' Page 26

TD Ameritrade Event Group Director
Katrina L. Kent, CMP, CMM, is flanked by
former presidents Bill Clinton and George W. Bush,
keynote speakers at TD Ameritrade's annual
Institutional National Conference, held at
Orlando's Rosen Shingle Creek (background).

William Kidston/Rosen Hotels & Resorts



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JANUARY/FEBRUARY 2011

Vol. 18 No. 1

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Photo courtesy of Las Vegas Sands Corp.

Las Vegas' Sands Expo and Convention Center combined with The Venetian/Palazzo Congress Center offer more than 2.25 gross million sf of event space.

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Photo courtesy of Long Beach CVB

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Long Beach is known as "one giant playground" located in the heart of Southern California.

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By George Seli

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Publisher's Message

An Experience That Can't Be Duplicated

As most savvy planners know after years of trial and error, there's no "easy button" for delivering a memorable event or incentive program — especially one that can't be duplicated. Just ask Katrina L. Kent, CMP, CMM, the director of The Event Group for TD Ameritrade, who staged the company's annual Institutional National Conference at Rosen Shingle Creek last year. Kent, who graces our cover this month with former presidents Bill Clinton and George W. Bush, staged the ultimate experience that can hardly be duplicated: She



arranged for not one but two former presidents as keynote speakers at the conference. Kent discovered Rosen Shingle Creek, one of the premier convention properties in Orlando, as "the perfect venue." Kent said, "Shingle Creek is also very large without feeling like a convention center, which is ideal for a large program where you still want to maintain a sense of intimacy. And we typically have very high-profile keynote speakers at this conference, and we were really comfortable with having them at the venue."

Stephen W. Clark, CMP, founder of Stephen Clark & Associates LLC, often recommends meeting in the Sunshine State because, "Florida is always a good draw because even when you're doing sales, educational or training meetings, it adds a layer of incentive without having to be an incentive." Consistently at the top of its game, Florida — from east to west and north to south — is an exceptional destination that always delivers unforgettable, face-to-face events.

Meeting face-to-face also is an experience that can't be replicated, much like reading this magazine *in print* provides an experience that can't be duplicated, according to Gordon Hochhalter, a managing partner of Chicago-based Mobium, who opined in a recent issue of *BtoB* magazine that print is powerful because "it provides immediate scale and reach...it creates an environment of contemplation and learning instead of simply sound-bite gathering." He maintains that nine out of 10 adult Americans spend an average of 43 minutes reading a magazine simply because they enjoy the pure act of the reading experience. For one thing, "It invites you to linger if you want. You can enjoy a visual pun or savor for a moment a true insight." For Hochhalter's complete revelations go to *btobonline.com*. To be drawn into "an activity at once mentally strenuous and physically still," please keep turning these pages.

Harvey Grotsky

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Business Events Australia

Meeting Value Line



Ocean Reef Club, Key Largo, FL. The Choice Is Yours Package allows planners to choose three of the following options for qualified meeting groups with a minimum of 10 rooms for at least two consecutive nights on select dates Sunday–Thursday: daily Continental breakfast; morning and afternoon breaks; one one-hour welcome cocktail reception; one basic audio-visual package; daily club fee of \$20 per night discounted to \$10 per night; and 30 percent off road-cart rental. 800-843-2730 or e-mail orcsales@oceanreef.com.

■ Hyatt Regency Tamaya Resort & Spa, The Pueblo of Santa Anna, NM.

The Discover Meeting Experience package, valid for all new meetings booked between now and August 31, 2011 and held before January 16, 2012, includes: round-trip airfare for meeting planner or person of organization's choosing for bookings of 150 or more; complimentary welcome reception with a culture activity; complimentary general welcome session and cultural blessing; one suite upgrade for every 50 rooms reserved at the set group rate; complimentary Internet services; one cultural VIP amenity per every 10 rooms booked for the meeting; 100,000 Hyatt gold passport points. 800-554-9288, tamaya.hyatt.com

■ **La Costa, Carlsbad, CA.** The New Year, New La Costa meeting package, valid for signed contracts received by March 31, 2011, includes: choice of either a discounted CMP to include standard AV, breakfast/breaks/

lunches starting at \$115/person, OR 3 percent rebated on guest room revenue to the master account. The package also includes a discounted resort charge to \$11; two upgrades at the group rate to La Costa Suites for every 25 rooms booked; 1/50 upgrade to a Junior Villa Suite; 1/50 complimentary one-night return stay; 1/100 complimentary massage; complimentary in-room high-speed Internet access; complimentary access to fitness center. 800-544-7483, ccooper@lacosta.com

■ The Homestead, Hot Springs, VA.

The Meet and Give Back in 2011 program provides corporate groups the opportunity to donate five percent of guest room revenue from meetings to a 501(c) (3) designated charity of their choice. The program is valid for meetings booked by June 30, 2011 with a 75-room per night minimum. The donation will be paid on room revenue up to \$5,000 per group. 888-796-5838, thehomestead.com

Industry News

NBTA Says Business Travel Spending and Group Trip Volume To Grow

ALEXANDRIA, VA — Annual U.S. business travel spending should climb about 5 percent in 2011 and 6.4 percent in 2012, to \$254.5 billion, according to a recent NBTA Foundation report. “Spending continues to recover at a faster rate than overall volume as premium travel restrictions are removed and the price per business trip rises,” reported the NBTA.

Group trip volume and group spending are projected to grow this year after being “under siege for nearly three years.” Group trip volume dropped 17.5 percent between 2007 and 2010. In 2010, group trips declined 0.8 percent year over year, following a 2009 annual loss of 11 percent. The NBTA forecasts group volume to grow 3.2 percent in 2011 and 2.6 in 2012. Group spending, which increased 5 percent in 2010, is forecasted to rise another 5.5 percent this year. nbta.org

Downtown Chicago Hotels Team Up

CHICAGO, IL — Swissôtel Chicago recently announced a new partnership with its neighbor The Fairmont Chicago to increase business by offering more rooms and larger meeting space. Connected by an underground, heated walkway, the two Chicago hotels boast a combined total of 1,348 guest rooms and more than 125,000 sf of function space.

Meeting planners will get just one bill but attendees can use the services and restaurants at either property. fairmont.com/chicago, swissotelchicago.com

Events Calendar

JUNE 15–17, 2011 FINANCIAL & INSURANCE CONFERENCE PLANNERS EDUCATION FORUM

Grand Del Mar
San Diego, CA
Contact: 312-245-1023
www.ficpnet.com

JUNE 21–23, 2011 THE AMERICAS MEETINGS & EVENTS EXHIBITION (AIBTM)

Baltimore Convention Center
Baltimore, MD
Contact: 800-417-8646
www.aibtm.com

JULY 23–26, 2011 MPI WORLD EDUCATION CONGRESS

Orange County Convention Center
Orlando, FL
Contact: 972-702-3053
www.mpiweb.org

OCTOBER 4–6, 2011 THE MOTIVATION SHOW

McCormick West
Chicago, IL
Contact: 866-740-6684
www.motivationshow.com

OCTOBER 11–13, 2011 IMEX AMERICA

Sands Expo at
The Venetian/Palazzo
Las Vegas, NV
Contact: +44 1273 227311
www.imexamerica.com

NOVEMBER 13–16, 2011 FINANCIAL & INSURANCE CONFERENCE PLANNERS ANNUAL CONFERENCE

Grand Hyatt San Antonio
San Antonio, TX
Contact: 312-245-1023
www.ficpnet.com

NOVEMBER 11–14, 2012 FINANCIAL & INSURANCE CONFERENCE PLANNERS ANNUAL CONFERENCE

JW Marriott Los Angeles
Los Angeles, CA
Contact: 312-245-1023
www.ficpnet.com

U.S. Travel Enters Cooperative Partnership to Promote IMEX America 2011

WASHINGTON, DC — The U.S. Travel Association (U.S. Travel), a leading advocacy voice for the industry, will present at IMEX America, scheduled for October 11–13, 2011, at the Sands Expo and Convention Center, Venetian/Palazzo in Las Vegas. In addition, U.S. Travel will help promote attendance at the inaugural



DOW

IMEX America, the United States' new worldwide exhibition for the incentive travel, meetings and events business.

Roger Dow, U.S. Travel's president and CEO, said the timing of IMEX America is a natural complement to U.S. Travel's International Pow Wow, which will be held in May in San Francisco. “With U.S. Travel's interest in promoting meetings, events and incentive travel in our country year-round, IMEX America provides an ideal opportunity for us to raise visibility for this market during the second half of the year,” Dow said. “While

International Pow Wow will continue to be the premier showcase for international leisure operators and meeting planners interested in U.S. business during the first half of the year, IMEX America's focus on incentive travel, meetings and events worldwide provides professionals in those segments another opportunity to develop contacts, network and gain valuable knowledge about this market.” imex-america.com, ustravel.org



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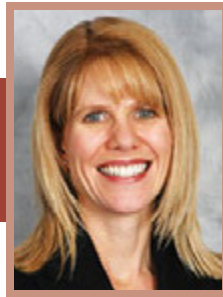
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Site Selection

By Michelle DeClerck, CMP

The A-I Solution



The appeal of all-inclusive (A-I) properties is huge for financial companies who need to stay within budget parameters and lower costs, while rewarding their superstars. When producers can qualify for a trip that is fully loaded, it's more likely they'll work harder to qualify for an appealing A-I destination over the competitor's offerings — especially in this economic climate.

Organizations that continue to offer incentives in tough times understand the power of a business strategy that elevates sales, improves relationships, aligns visions and sharpens producer sales skills. These companies are often able to attract top performers from budget-cutting competitors.

Now, more than ever, companies are sold on A-I from a cost perspective (25–35 percent savings for a typical event); while attendees love not having to personally pay for anything during their stay if they adhere to the main package.

Mexico, for example, is one of the top A-I spots with enhanced offerings, a favorable currency exchange rate, and tax-free status on qualified meetings.

Michael Key, assistant V.P. sales support, Monumental Life, is a fan of the A-I concept after hosting 1,250 attendees at the Moon Palace Golf & Spa Resort in Cancun. According to Key, "Our attendees were so pleased with the all-inclusive experience that many of them told us we should make that hotel our permanent conference site."

Key is not alone in increased interest of the A-I, as evidenced by the even greater market share and recent saturation of A-I properties in international destinations. And perhaps the greatest benefit for Key: "You should have little problem staying within budget."

An A-I property is classified based on a package of offerings at a set rate per night, per person, usually with discounted children's pricing. Typical inclusions:

- Room/tax
- Food/beverages (including alcohol, plus 24-hour room service, bottled waters, stocked mini-bar)
- Non-motorized water sports
- Onsite entertainment
- Hotel staff gratuities

Some properties include airport transfers, premium alcohol upgrade, group meals, meeting space, private event table décor, mountain bikes, offsite tours, tennis or fitness classes, or even a fitness trainer. Supplement or setup fees may be charged to upgrade group dining events or add enhanced theme décor.

Emerging A-I trends include:

- A new favorite: free wireless Internet and phone calls back to the U.S.
- Generous attrition
- Vast improvement in additional service offerings
- Upscale gourmet dining options
- Full-size bottles of guests' chosen beverages waiting in their rooms
- Luxurious spa facilities
- Traditional hotels creating custom A-I packages, called All-Inclusive Optional, to gain new business opportunities (your hotel contract specialist should be cautious in how they book this as some hotels are not prepared to handle the complexities of an all-inclusive arrangement).

The era of the A-I serving inexpensive, poorly prepared food served from oversized buffet chafing dishes has passed. Properties infamous for

watered-down drinks and unimaginative, tasteless food are becoming extinct.

"We educate our clients about the luxurious stature that many of these resorts have attained over the past five years and the superior level at which they are performing," commented Brenda Horst, senior meeting planner for Des Moines, IA-based Conference Event Management. "Many resorts provide gourmet à la carte dining experiences that rival some of the finer meal selections available at the popular upscale restaurants in major cities."

Pepe Villela, president of Texas-based International Group Sales, previously spent considerable time informing his clients on the benefits of the A-I concept, as they had mistaken perceptions about the quality of food and beverage. "Once we brought clients in to experience our products, our sales skyrocketed. They realized they couldn't duplicate the experience or the savings if they were at a traditional property."

Gay Grizzell, corporate meeting planner for Fort Dearborn Life, has used these resorts on many occasions. "Now I always consider all-inclusive properties, as I know how well received they are by the qualifiers, and how great my events are with all of the additional enhancements," Grizzell said.

It's difficult to inform a client that their selection may be sub-par, but all A-I locations are not the same. What looks good on a website can quickly become a disaster in person! It's imperative to contract a property that understands group dynamics, and your meeting partner can help guide you.

Our clients count on us to deliver the best property at the best prices, and that's why we often consider an A-I. If a land-based A-I isn't right

for our clients, we also provide consultations on cruises that offer many of the same features as the A-I properties. Last-minute changes that typically cause a planner to go over budget can be avoided within the all-inclusive plan — potentially shaving off thousands of dollars and keeping budgets intact.

Popular A-I financial group destinations include Cancun, Los Cabos, Puerto Vallarta/ Riviera

Now, more than ever, companies are sold on A-I from a cost perspective.

Nayarit, and Riviera Maya in Mexico; as well as Punta Cana and La Romana in Dominican Republic and of course, Caribbean and Alaska cruises.

Bottom line: We're booking more all-inclusive business each year as nearly everyone loves the experience, and it's hard to beat the value! **I&FMM**

Michelle DeClerck, CMP, founded *Conference Event Management and Financial Speakers Bureau*, a woman-owned business enterprise and leading provider to financial and insurance organizations of unique, world-class event, conference, incentive travel and meeting experiences and reward strategies, individual Travel MyWay travel bookings and financial speaker bookings. She can be reached at Michelle@myCEM.com.



The Venetian Resort Hotel Casino will be the headquarters hotel for the first IMEX America convention and trade show in October 2011.

Photo courtesy of Las Vegas Sands Corp.

Gaming Resorts

Great Places for Face-to-Face

The wildly popular game show “Let’s Make a Deal” offered contestants a choice of winning all the merchandise and related exotic travel destinations positioned behind one of three doors. Using a similar concept, which door would you choose to stage your business meeting — a serious, ambitious event that includes updates on new policies and procedures, advances in online initiatives, software products and services, and successful cross-selling techniques?

By Stella Johnson

Behind door No. 1 awaits a private, secluded conference center equipped with the most recent audio-visual technology. Open door No. 2 to find a conveniently located, recently refreshed downtown hotel boasting a new celebrity chef restaurant. Hiding behind door No. 3 is a tropical resort that promises every imaginable amenity, built-in entertainment and top headliners.

Making the right choice of destination and venue is always risky, to say the least. You must select the best environment to engage your attendees, provide lasting memories and satisfy your company’s objectives and return on investment.

While all three choices could work for any given meeting group, depending on its size and requirements, the answer in this scenario is none of the above. Instead, the planner selected an exciting and glamorous casino hotel-resort because gaming resorts offer the sum total of every amenity and service found behind all the doors. Gaming resorts have all the necessary ingredients for a successful, serious business meeting or event. In addition, the values nowadays can’t be beat.

Las Vegas

In this case, planner Mark Leonardi, CMP, founder and director of Napa, CA-based MLA Events, selected The Venetian Resort Hotel Casino, located on The Strip in Las Vegas. The group — one of the top-five financial institutions in the country — hosted a group of more than 1,800 attendees, which included members of mid-level and top management, sales reps, brokers and administrators.

The multiday meeting’s goal was to review business accomplishments and create an environment to foster new ideas.

Leonardi explained, “The event included several training sessions and networking receptions whereby attendees sampled food selections from area restaurants while playing various games especially designed to

acquaint people who worked within the company.

“Overall, networking receptions and meals were very important for them since this event was extremely business-focused, with very little time for any socializing — although pockets of people went off on their

Las Vegas, 2,814 rooms, 175,000 sf of meeting space; Caesars Palace, 3,348 rooms/300,000 sf; Flamingo Las Vegas, 3,460 rooms/73,000 sf; Rio All-Suite Hotel & Casino, 2,522 suites/163,000 sf; Harrah’s Las Vegas, 2,526 rooms/25,000 sf; Imperial Palace Las Vegas, 2,640 rooms/40,000 sf;

Mirage, Monte Carlo, New York-New York, and others.

Aria is a spectacular 61-story, 4,004 room gaming hotel that serves as a centerpiece to the new CityCenter urban oasis. For meetings, it features 300,000 sf of meeting space that is very versatile for groups, as well as a 150,000-sf casino, 16 restaurants, a two-level spa with 62 treatment rooms, 10 bars and lounges, three primary pools and a plethora of entertainment options, such as Cirque du Soleil’s production of “Viva Elvis.”

Aria’s sister property Vdara is a more intimate venue with 1,495 suites. It is a non-gaming, non-smoking hotel with 10,000 sf of meeting space. Crystals is CityCenter’s 500,000-sf entertainment, restaurant and shopping complex.

Brett Dault also sings the praises of using gaming resorts for serious business meetings. Dault, a meeting manager who oversees small (20 attendees) to large (10,000) events for an Orlando-based meeting management company, said, “Gaming resorts traditionally attract a variety of consumers and clients, so it therefore follows that planners have little difficulty finding something tailored to all budgets — from economy to high end.”

“We book Foxwoods for the convenience, accommodations and entertainment that is 24/7 so we don’t have to worry about planning evening events for the attendees, which usually number 130 people.”

Amanda Kelley, Assistant to the CFO
Commonwealth Financial Group, Boston, MA



free time to any one of the many surrounding restaurants like B&Bs, Bouchon and Delmonicos. These same groups also enjoyed taking in any one of the many shows that the hotel had to offer, from Blue Man Group to ‘Jersey Boys’ and, of course, there was plenty of night life at places like Tao.”

Leonardi said The Venetian was selected because it was centrally located, easy to get to and had the right amount of space for their meeting needs. “Most importantly, price was the deciding factor,” he noted. “The Venetian was a good choice because it enabled the entire group, including the sales reps who flew in from all parts of the country, to come together for one quick meeting and then, just as quickly, return to their offices without much cost or effort.”

The Venetian/Palazzo will be the headquarters hotel and the Sands Expo and Convention Center (1.8 million sf of show floor and meeting and event space) will host the first IMEX America convention and trade show in October 2011.

For meeting planners who are considering staging a meeting in Las Vegas, other excellent choices include Las Vegas Meetings by Caesars Entertainment (LVMCE) — a portfolio of eight properties: Bally’s

Paris Las Vegas, 2,916 rooms/140,000 sf; and Planet Hollywood Resort & Casino, one of its newest additions, 3,696 rooms/88,000 sf.

Michael Massari, LVMCE vice president of sales and operations, said, “We have worked very hard to put some real unique things in place for our customers. Our 8-stop strategy, which allows them to mix and match facilities and venues across our properties with one contract, contact and minimum; our Meeting Diamond program, which gives planners priority services and VIP benefits; our alternative venue program, which allows planners to use restaurants, nightclubs and lounges for their events and have a portion of their spending apply to their food and beverage minimum — these are things our customers have come to expect from us, and they will continue to be at the core of our business.”

Similarly, MGM Resorts International is also an impressive collection of award-winning properties, which include Aria Resort & Casino, Mandarin Oriental, Vdara Hotel & Spa, Bellagio, MGM Grand, Mandalay Bay,



Photo courtesy of Planet Hollywood Resort & Casino

The 3,696-room Planet Hollywood Resort & Casino is the most recent addition among the eight properties of Las Vegas Meetings by Caesars Entertainment.

In addition, Dault appreciated the extraordinary value available in Las Vegas. He said, “Often, planners are able to receive or negotiate amazing rates for rooms, food and beverage,

and other concerns when booking Las Vegas. And, many times, such rates are considerably cheaper than non-gaming destinations, no matter what the economic climate. Other perks include self-contained environments and quick airport transfers where everything is at hand. The extra bonus is that additional pre- and post-trips are ordinarily high for attendees seeking to extend a corporate event into a vacation.”

Last year, Dault coordinated a program for a Northeast client that staged a meeting for more than 1,000 attendees from all over the U.S. At first, Las Vegas was not at the top of the client’s list but the deals convinced them otherwise. Dault said, “The rates and negotiation power were incredible in that we were able to offer our client a top-tier, mega-size property with ample meeting space and outstanding amenities. The space that was made available to us was extraordinary and provided plenty of room for the many breakout sessions. It also allowed the internal regions to convene independently while still coming together for receptions, meals and evening functions.

“There also were plenty of venues in the neighboring properties allowing for easy access and no need for group transfers. All in all, we were

able to keep our group’s attention, keep them onsite and provide a memorable program, which was the business objective. And, we also enjoyed a hip event at a popular nightclub, which was reserved privately for the evening. It provided customized entertainment that incorporated the meeting theme, which was a huge hit with the attendees.”

Atlantic City

Known as the entertainment capital of the Northeast, Atlantic City is a popular destination for many New England-based insurance companies, as well as New York City-based financial firms that are located within easy driving distance to the oceanside resort city.

As a matter of fact, Atlantic City is located within driving distance to an estimated one-third of the total U.S. population. Even so, the Atlantic City International Airport continually adds nonstop routes to boost traffic to the area. Nearly a dozen casino hotels, several non-gaming properties and award-winning championship golf courses make the oceanside resort a leading contender for group business. In addition, there is a growing culinary scene, exciting entertainment and amazing offsite venues such as One Atlantic, a venue that stretches

out over the ocean and offers astounding views for a memorable corporate event.

Interest in Atlantic City spiked when HBO’s highly acclaimed “Boardwalk Empire,” a series set in Atlantic City during the prohibition era, began its run on cable. In fact, Resorts Atlantic City, the nation’s first casino to open (1978) outside of Nevada, adopted a Roaring Twenties theme, which will show up in new décor, the attire of dealers, waiters and bellhops, even in its cocktails and entertainment. The switch will be easy because its main hotel was erected in the 1920s.

Other Atlantic City news includes two landmark bills designed to reinvent and reshape the future of the destination: S-11, the restructuring of the tourist district and urban marketing efforts; and S-12, the shift of casino regulatory powers to the Division of Gaming Enforcement. In early January, a bill passed allowing Atlantic City casinos to be built with only 200 rooms, as long as the new casinos are new construction and commit to grow to 500 rooms.

One of the most popular hotels in Atlantic City is the Borgata Hotel Casino & Spa which opened in 2003, infusing new life and spirit to the East Coast. The 2,000-room Borgata is adjacent to its sister property The Water Club, which opened in 2008 with 800 rooms.

The trendy Borgata, reminiscent of art deco-style boutique hotels located in Miami and New York City, has 70,000 sf of meeting space, a 2,400-seat event center and a 1,000-seat performance theater — the Music Box. Other features include nearly one dozen retail shops, six destination restaurants such as Bobby Flay Steak and Wolfgang Puck American Grille, another six casual eateries, plenty of nightclub life, a dance club with famous DJs, a 54,000-sf spa and a 161,000-sf casino floor.

Over at The Water Club, guests enjoy rejuvenating treatments at a two-story, European-style spa, cuisine prepared by a celebrity chef, shopping at designer shops and other amenities.



Photo courtesy of Foxwoods Resort Casino

Foxwoods Resort Casino and MGM Grand at Foxwoods in Connecticut, feature 2,200 guest rooms, roughly 150,000 sf of meeting space and two golf courses.

For smaller corporate functions, there is a total of 18,000 sf of meeting space.

According to Liza Costandino, a spokesperson for The Borgata Hotel, Casino & Spa, a financial services company booked the hotel during the shoulder months, rather than the prime summer season at the shore, thus taking advantage of a more attractive rate for their recent conference. Avoiding the busy weekend dates, they booked their event from Monday through Thursday.

“The company booked close to 500 sleeping rooms each night with 650 people, and more, at various times,” said Costandino. “The Borgata Event Center was ideal for this size group and was utilized in four sections: one area for booths and displays, another area for the general session, and the remaining two salon sections for meals. When needed, Borgata utilized hotel restaurants, including Bobby Flay Steak and Wolfgang Puck American Grille, for all meals throughout the day. Six breakout rooms were also offered and were located on the same convention second-floor location.”

According to Costandino, Borgata had several Fiore hotel suites available for conferences; the welcome receptions and evening events were well received by attendees; and the Borgata staff pitched in to enhance some of the themed events with lighting and technical expertise.

Attendees also browsed The Shoppes at The Water Club and

danced in Borgata’s two nightclubs, MIXX and mur.mur. “With more than 24,000 vintages on property and a highly skilled team of sommeliers led by our wine director, Borgata was able to assist with wine tasting presentations and teachings for those interested,” Costandino noted.

Connecticut

Connecticut is well known for Mystic Seaport, a nautical, seaside resort area with a wide array of interesting things to explore, from ships to shops. Within the last two decades, however, the area has become even more attractive as a premier meeting destination because of its gaming resorts, which have become very popular with a variety of companies, including New England and New York City-based insurance and financial firms.

Mohegan Sun, for instance, located in Uncasville, sprawls over 240 acres and overlooks the Thames River. Owned by the Mohegan Tribe, Mohegan Sun offers a 1,200-room hotel; more than 100,000 sf of flexible meeting space, including one of the largest ballrooms in the Northeast; a 10,000-seat arena plus two small theaters (Cabaret and Wolf Den); and a 17,500-sf terrace perfect for an outdoor corporate reception. Also, Elemis Spa, dozens of popular retailers from Chicos to Coach, and exciting entertainment such as a Blues Brothers Revue and championship boxing. Most recently,

the resort welcomed Bobby Flay’s American Bar to its roster of 40 restaurants and eateries. The property is also known for its Signature Series of one-time special events.

Foxwoods Resort Casino and MGM Grand at Foxwoods is a larger complex with a total of 2,200 guest rooms housed within four hotels including the MGM Grand, Grand Pequot Tower, Great Cedar Hotel and Two Trees Inn; and a combined total of approximately 150,000 sf of multipurpose meeting space. The complex includes a variety of dining establishments that range from gourmet to casual, including Hard Rock Cafe; large and small entertainment venues (Fox Theater, MGM Grand Theater, Grand Pequot Ballroom, Premier Ballroom, Celebrity Ballroom, Comtrix); a retail concourse of shops; The Norwich Spa with poolside veranda; two championship golf courses; six casinos and plenty more to entice groups, large and small.

One financial group that has been meeting there regularly for the past two years is Boston-based Commonwealth Financial Group, a general agency of Massachusetts Mutual Life Insurance Company. Amanda Kelley, executive assistant to the CEO, coordinates a variety of kickoff meetings for the firm, as well as smaller, regional conferences within the main event for agents who arrive one day early.

As Kelley stated, “We book Foxwoods for the convenience, accommodations and entertainment that is 24/7 so we don’t have to worry about planning evening events for the attendees, which usually number 130 people. After a long day at meetings and seminars, the meeting-goers can enjoy the premises on their own time and expense.”

Generally, Commonwealth books two ballrooms, one for meeting activities and the other for lunch and dinner. “This way, we get down to business in one ballroom while the other is being set up for our lunch or dinner meal functions, which is usually a buffet with, in some cases, a cash bar. And,



Photo courtesy of Mohegan Sun

The 1,200-room Mohegan Sun in Uncasville, CT, features more than 100,000 sf of flexible meeting space, including one of the largest ballrooms in the Northeast.



Photo courtesy of Talking Stick Resort

Talking Stick Resort has more than 100,000 sf of meeting space, including the 25,000-sf Salt River Grand Ballroom.

as many of our people like to go back to their rooms to change or make calls after hours at a meeting, we provide a three-hour service window for the buffet so they aren't rushed."

Finally, Kelley gives a four-ace rating to Foxwood's onsite management. She said, "I'm the type of person who sends about 100 e-mails before the first day of the event so that everything will be perfect. They treat every communication promptly and professionally, no matter how minor. For instance, I usually like to have some candy at the meeting tables so attendees can re-energize during the sessions, when I realized at the last minute that candy was one detail I forgot to e-mail them about. So, I contacted them immediately and they had someone actually run out to the grocery store and buy the candy. It was right on the tables when we arrived."

New & Noteworthy

For planners interested in a West Coast gaming destination, the **Tulalip Resort Casino** is a premier



Photo courtesy of Tulalip Resort Casino

The Orca Ballroom at Tulalip Resort Casino in Washington State is divisible by three and can easily accommodate a 1,000-attendee sitdown dinner.

choice. Starting out as a bingo hall 27 years ago, Tulalip Resort Casino is now an 83-acre resort located in Quil Ceda Village on the Tulalip Indian Reservation, 30 minutes north of Seattle. Surrounded by some of the most beautiful Pacific-Northwest scenery in the region, including the Cascade Mountains and Puget Sound, Tulalip recently celebrated the opening of a 370-room hotel making it one of the largest meeting, gaming, entertainment and shopping complexes in the state. Here, each room is 500 sf in area, contains an LCD 42-inch flat-screen TV and features local Tulalip



Photo courtesy of Northern Quest Resort & Casino

The Northern Quest Resort & Casino in the Spokane, WA, area features the 16,000-sf Kalispel Conference Center and the AAA Four Diamond Masselow's Restaurant.

tribal art. Meeting space totals 30,000 sf, and special suites are adaptable for corporate functions, including Player's Suite, a 2,000-sf venue equipped with a professional-size pool table, dart board, arcade-style games and professional sports memorabilia. A 192,000-sf casino, six restaurants/lounges, a full-service spa, and a 450-seat cabaret, which offers live entertainment every night of the week, completes the resort's appeal for groups.

Also in Washington state, the **Northern Quest Resort & Casino** in the Spokane region, recently received a 2011 AAA Four Diamond award. The resort's Masselow's Restaurant, named after a tribal chief, also received a stand-alone AAA Four Diamond award. The 250-room luxury hotel has undergone four expansions since its 2000 opening and includes the

16,000-sf Kalispel Conference Center, a full-service Current Spa and Salon, 14 restaurants and lounges, as well as a 46,000-sf casino.

In Scottsdale, AZ, on the Salt River Pima-Maricopa Indian Community, meeting planners will find the new 497-unit **Talking Stick Resort**, which features a spa, eight world-class restaurants, 10 lounges, a 240,000-sf gaming floor, two pools and more than 100,000 sf of indoor and outdoor meeting space, including a 25,000-sf ballroom and 12 conference rooms.

The Seminole Hard Rock Hotel and Casino, located in Hollywood,

FL, near Fort Lauderdale, is a AAA Four-Diamond award-winning property with 500 guest rooms and 40,000 sf of meeting space that includes a 16,000-sf ballroom. Seminole contains a flexible 5,500-seat arena and a 7,000-sf poolside area for outdoor functions. The three-acre casino floor contains 130,000 sf of space and has 89 gaming tables offering a wide variety of challenges. Other popular activities include relaxing at the Contour Spa, dining at one of 18 restaurants including Hard Rock Cafe, shopping and clubbing at Seminole Paradise entertainment district and more. In addition, live performances, from Diana Ross to Joan Rivers, can be enjoyed at Hard Rock Live indoor arena, which can also be used for meetings.

In summary, don't hesitate to consider premier gaming properties for your next group meeting. After all, every element, every amenity, every service you need for a successful outcome is there just for the asking. **I&FMM**

haʔt ti adsʔčil (Welcome)

Two words will sum up your next meeting at Tulalip Resort: Truly successful. With 30,000 square feet, our meeting and event spaces are orchestrated to ensure productive, efficient and trouble-free sessions, whether for a committee of ten or a conference for one thousand. With outstanding catered meals, luxurious rooms, spa and gaming facilities, and nearby shopping, golf and entertainment, it's easy to see why Tulalip Resort is regarded as one of the most outstanding meeting venues in the Pacific Northwest.



TULALIP
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After battling through an economic downturn, convention and visitors bureaus (CVBs), otherwise known as destination marketing organizations (DMOs), see light at the end of the tunnel. DMO executives report an incremental increase in group meetings and events from businesses, including financial firms and insurance companies. The burgeoning demand is due to DMO/CVB marketing efforts, exceptional deals and value offered by hotels, the steadying U.S. economy, and diminution of the AIG effect perception problems, according to tourism officials.

Leonard Hoops, executive vice president and chief customer officer of the newly named San Francisco Travel Association (formerly the San Francisco Convention & Visitors Bureau), said, "In general, I've seen some uptick in the financial and insurance side. Some firms in the financial and banking industries have been sensitive to public perception, but I think they now have more comfort in rewarding their employees today than they did a year ago."

Denver also cited an uptick in corporate meetings, including insurance and financial groups, mostly ranging in size from several hundred to more than 2,000 attendees. Rachel Benedick, vice president of sales and services of Visit Denver, the Convention & Visitors Bureau, said, "We've had a great 2010. We've seen some return of the business traveler, which has made a big difference. Some groups have been over their projected attendance."

Overseas, DMOs are also looking to increase business from insurance and financial firms. Caroline Pidroni, U.S.-based director of sales and marketing for the Switzerland Convention & Incentive Bureau (SCIB), attended the 2010 Financial & Insurance Conference Planners (FICP) annual conference, which attracted 625 meeting planners and other hospitality professionals to sessions held at the Fontainebleau Miami Beach, the conference's headquarters hotel, as well

as the Westin Diplomat Resort and the Eden Roc Renaissance Miami Beach. "We go to FICP every year because it's so focused on (the financial) sector.

We attend networking sessions and workshops to interact with buyers and meeting planners," said Pidroni.

DMOs have noticed a rise in business from corporations during what has been a buyer's market favoring meeting planners over the last few years. But the market is beginning to tip ever so slightly toward the sellers — the DMOs, said Michael Gehrisch, president and CEO of the Washington, DC-based Destination Marketing Association International (DMAI). "I

see it changing from a demand standpoint. A lot of folks are looking for free convention center space. I always say there has been some irrational discounting going on. You have these new convention centers being built and expanded, and there's an expectation that these buildings will be financially self-sufficient. During the recession people were willing to make concessions to get the business, but I see that beginning to change, looking out through 2012 and 2013."

New Campaigns To Attract Business

But it's not a seller's market yet, and some DMOs are introducing new

advertising campaigns and other efforts to attract business. In a unique venture, three CVBs, Visit Baltimore, the Fort Worth Convention & Visitors Bureau and Visit Salt Lake, operate a sales partnership in which each destination works to book the other.

The Baltimore and Fort Worth CVBs formed the original partnership and Salt Lake City joined in 2010. Each destination co-sells the others and offers discounts to groups that sign multiyear deals to hold meetings at each destination. Such an effort helps DMOs stretch their marketing efforts and budgets, Gehrisch noted.

In California, the Long Beach Convention & Visitors Bureau will

premiere a new advertising campaign in meeting industry publications. Steve Goodling, president and CEO of the Long Beach CVB, said, "The new campaign is entitled 'unconventional' and will show our destination on the Pacific and vignettes of different events we've hosted that are distinct. The target audience is meeting planners."

The Long Beach CVB is also in the process of launching a new website accessible by all smart phones and PDA devices. That's important because meeting planners on the go increasingly use these devices to access CVB websites. "There is more responsibility on CVBs to provide content

to help companies and associations market destinations to their groups. A lot of sites aren't PDA-enabled. It's difficult to navigate and read everything. We will be launching the new site this summer and adding more content such as videos and other applications," said Goodling.

In July, the San Francisco Travel Association launched a print advertising campaign that appeared in meeting industry magazines. The ads were designed to drive meeting planners to their new website, which shows a variety of special offers from San Francisco hotels. Hoops said they launched the website because, "We saw that hotels have a lot of individual deals on food and beverage or additional free rooms based on amount of peak rooms you book. A lot of these offers are applicable to groups that book within a short window, so we put them all on one site."

Personal and Destination Branding Come of Age

Good DMO marketing consists of more than an advertising campaign that touts a city's name as a top destination brand. Effective DMO marketing also establishes salespeople themselves as individual brands, said Al Hutchinson, vice president of convention sales and marketing for the Virginia Beach Convention & Visitors Bureau: "I'm constantly talking to our sales folks about developing their personal brands. Virginia Beach is the ultimate brand, but it's important for them to develop their personal brand so that customers know they will respond in a timely fashion, be a consultant to customers and offer one-stop shopping. To me, having a personal brand is about as important as branding the destination."

Another important DMO marketing tool is earning a reputation for providing value and flexibility to groups. Goodling said, "Special programs aren't necessarily the long-term answer because they aren't individualized. Everyone we talk to wants to negotiate their own package. They

CVBs Celebrate The Return of Group Business

The Long Beach Convention & Visitors Bureau is preparing a new campaign touting the Pacific destination as "unconventional" and highlighting its distinct events such as this unique dining experience at Long Beach's Aquarium of the Pacific.

Photo courtesy of Aquarium of the Pacific

“I’ve seen some uptick in the financial and insurance side. Some firms...have been sensitive to public perception, but...now have more comfort in rewarding...employees today than...a year ago.”

Leonard Hoops, Executive V.P. and Chief Customer Officer
San Francisco Travel Association
San Francisco, CA

want to know that you are starting from an affordable base point, and Long Beach has always had an affordable base point.”

Visit Denver, according to Benedick, takes a similar approach by always fo-



Photo courtesy of San Francisco Travel Association

Fittingly, the new logo of the San Francisco Travel Association, formerly the San Francisco CVB, includes a photo of the iconic Golden Gate Bridge.

cusing on providing value to meeting planners. “Obviously, right now value is king. We maintain that focus in a down economy and a robust economy. We have always talked about the affordability of Denver as a destination and where that falls in the sales pitch,” said Benedick.

DMAI Resources

DMAI’s EmpowerMINT.com website helps market DMOs to meeting planners. Launched last year, the

website allows meeting planners to search for hotels and meeting venues that match certain specifications and submit RFPs. The website employs DMAI’s Meetings Information Network (MINT), a long-standing database of information about corporate and association meetings. EmpowerMINT strengthens the partnership between DMOs and meeting planners and saves time by using local destination experts as one-stop-shopping experts, explained Gehrisch. “We see EmpowerMINT as a product that brands DMOs to planners and makes life easier for them. They are working with leaner staffs and have to do more with less so this helps them,” he said.

DMOs are dedicated to partnering with both large and small groups, although there is a perception among some meeting planners that smaller groups don’t get as much attention. CVB executives acknowledge that the perception exists and insist that they do everything possible to counter it. “There are planners who feel that if their group isn’t big enough, especially in larger cities, that it won’t get the same support as bigger groups. For us, it doesn’t matter whether it’s 500 rooms or 20 rooms on peak, we’ll do the same thing for you,” said Hoops.

Goodling agreed: “We don’t differentiate between group sizes when it comes to assigning salespeople. Each salesperson is assigned to a territory, and all sales that originate from that territory, from small meetings to citywides.”

The same situation exists in Denver. “I can’t tell you how many times we talk to both our corporate and association clients, and they say, ‘We didn’t call you because we’re not



Photo courtesy of Visit Denver

Built by meeting planners for meeting planners, Denver’s Colorado Convention Center has more than 8,400 hotel rooms within walking distance.

going to use your convention center.’ What we do to combat that is work hard on education and awareness. We tell them that we have two salespeople dedicated to meetings ranging in size from 10 to 150,” said Benedick. Last year, Visit Denver published a printed piece on the 10 reasons to use the organization, which also let planners know that

“We see EmpowerMINT as a product that brands DMOs to planners and makes life easier for them. They are working with leaner staffs and have to do more with less so this helps them.”



Michael Gehrisch
President and CEO
Destination Marketing Association International
Washington, DC

they don’t have to use the Colorado Convention Center (CCC) in order to use the CVB’s services.

Sustainability Counts

DMOs and convention centers are also meeting the needs of the

growing number of groups that are requesting meeting facilities with environmentally sustainable practices. “We have gone from being green as a competitive advantage to it being an expectation. Now, it’s more of a disadvantage if you don’t have it as opposed to an advantage if you do have it,” said Hoops. “The Moscone Center, San Francisco’s primary convention facility, is pursuing LEED silver certification as part of the facility’s renovation and upgrade project. The center has one of the nation’s biggest city-owned rooftop solar power generators. The center also operates an energy-saving lighting system and has one of the highest recycling rates in the nation,” Hoops added.

In Virginia, the Virginia Beach Convention Center (VBCC) was the first convention center in the nation to obtain LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) Gold Certification for Existing Buildings awarded by the U.S. Green Building Council. The VBCC provides more than 500,000 sf of flexible meeting space that includes a 150,000-sf exhibit hall and a 31,000-sf ballroom. Hutchinson cited the importance of convention center sustainability as a selling point to meeting planners. “It was important for us to get the first

LEED Gold certification to make a statement to our customers. For them to select a city, they want to see some type of sustainability effort,” he said.

Visit Denver is among those that want its center’s green practices to be top of mind among meeting planners. “That’s a sector we focus on and feel we have a unique advantage based on how much our city and state embrace sustainability,” said Benedick. The CCC employs a sustainable programs manager who oversees a range of green programs, including a rooftop 300-kilowatt solar power generator and a lighting system that conserves energy. The CCC also recycles and uses biodegradable cleaning materials. The entire city is a leader in environmental sustainability. Under Denver’s Green Fleet program, one of the nation’s largest and oldest in the nation, alternative fuels power more than 43 percent of the city’s vehicles. Denver’s recycling program has increased tonnage 18 percent since 2005.

DMOs in foreign countries are also stepping up efforts to demonstrate their environmental sustainability practices. Last year, the SCIB won

the Green Exhibitor Award at IMEX Frankfurt, which attracted more than 3,500 exhibitors from more than 150 countries. The SCIB constructed its exhibit from Swiss wood, a renewable resource; required staff to travel

“We’ve had a great 2010. We’ve seen some return

of the business traveler, which has made a big difference. Some groups have been over their projected attendance.”



Rachel Benedick
V.P. of Sales and Services
Visit Denver
Denver, CO

to and from IMEX by train; and used as few truck runs as possible to transport exhibition materials. Switzerland, where renewable resources account for two-thirds of the nation’s energy, has long had a worldwide reputation for green meeting convention centers and hotels, said Pidroni.

New and Noteworthy Here and Abroad

San Francisco, CA. Moscone Center is undergoing a \$55 million renovation and upgrade that is scheduled for completion by the summer of 2012. The project includes upgraded lobbies and kitchen; new carpet, ceilings, paint and lighting; digital displays; restroom renovations; and improvements to escalators and elevators. Work on the project has been scheduled to have little, if any, effect on groups meeting during the renovation. Moscone Center provides more than 700,000 sf of exhibit space and 106 meeting rooms.

A view of the river Limmat and the Old Town, Zurich, Switzerland with Lake Zurich and the Swiss Alps in the background.



Photo by Christof Sonderegger courtesy of Switzerland Tourism



The expanded Pennsylvania Convention Center in downtown Philadelphia will feature more than 1 million sf of space and the largest ballroom on the East Coast when it is completed in March.

Photo courtesy of Philadelphia CVB

of meeting room and ballroom space, and the medical mart's 100,000 sf of showrooms. The project is scheduled for completion in 2013.

Tinley, Park, IL.

The \$19 million expansion of the Tinley Park Convention Center underway will nearly double the facility's size, adding 9,000 sf of meeting space and 24,000 sf of exhibit space. The expansion is scheduled to be completed by May 2011.

Philadelphia, PA. The Pennsylvania Convention Center is scheduled for completion by March 2011. The expanded center, the 14th largest in the nation, will increase exhibit space by 62 percent to 528,000 sf, and offer a 55,400-sf ballroom, the largest on the East Coast. Philadelphia officials expect the new center to boost the local economy by \$140 million and add 280,000 room nights each year.



Al Hutchinson

V.P. of Convention Sales and Marketing
Virginia Beach Convention & Visitors
Bureau, Virginia Beach, VA

and meet a certain benchmark in hotel rooms picked up, then the client can qualify for a 25 percent to 75 percent reduction in rent at the convention center. It's for groups of about 500 to 2,500," said Hutchinson.

Cleveland, OH. Cleveland plans to break ground on a \$425 million project to upgrade the Cleveland Convention Center and construct a medical mart nearby. The new facility, Cleveland Medical Mart & Convention Center, will include a 230,000-sf exhibition hall, 92,000 sf

Indianapolis, IN.

After completing its expansion in 2011, the Indiana Convention Center will be the nation's 16th largest such facility. The center is

A distinctively clad Beefeater, a distinguished member of the Yeomen Warders, guides attendees on a tour of the Tower of London.



"Everyone we talk to wants to negotiate their own package. They want to know that you are starting from an affordable base point, and Long Beach has always had an affordable base point."

Steve Goodling

President and CEO
Long Beach Convention & Visitors
Bureau, Long Beach, CA

now ranked 32nd. The expanded center will offer 566,600 sf of exhibit space. Nearby Lucas Oil Stadium, which connects to the center via an enclosed walkway, provides another 183,000 sf of exhibit space.

New York City. The Javits Center has completed an expansion that includes the addition of Javits Center North, which will connect to the main building via a corridor. The project adds 80,000 sf of exhibition space, registration and prefunction areas and an outdoor plaza. The main building will undergo renovations, to be completed over the next few years, which include a new roof, larger and reconfigured main entrances, skylights and modernized building systems.

London. The United Kingdom is a preferred destination for business



Photo courtesy of Visit London

travelers. England, specifically the London area, is the U.K.'s top destination for groups and business travelers. The ExCeL London International Convention Centre is the largest convention center in London, offering more than 968,000 sf of exhibition and meeting space. The space includes 45 meeting rooms that can accommodate 50 to 200 attendees. Five hotels located on the convention center site provide 1,500 rooms, and 7,500 additional rooms are available at hotels located within a 20-minute drive. Visit London recently reorganized the meeting planners section of the organization's website, which includes interactive venue research functions and a planner's tool kit.

Switzerland. Switzerland is currently undertaking at least 50 large construction, renovation and expansion projects involving convention centers, conference facilities, hotels and other venues. Over the next six years, the country will add



Photo courtesy of Irving CVB

The opening of the 275,000-sf Irving Convention Center at Las Colinas in January completes the first phase of the development of the Las Colinas Urban Center.

more than 3,000 hotel rooms aimed at business groups and conferences. Group business is picking up. "After a weak year in 2009, business and conference tourism in Switzerland is recovering, as demonstrated by the increase in the number of hotel overnights in the main Swiss cities in the first half of 2010," Barbra Albrecht, manager of the SCIB, said in a statement.

China. In recent years, China has invested vast amounts of money into building convention and conference

centers in several cities throughout the country. China offers several large facilities that offer complete convention services. These include the China National Convention Center in Beijing, the nation's largest and newest venue. The facility offers 258,334 sf of meeting space and 100 meeting rooms. Other top facilities include the Shanghai International Convention Center with 28 conference halls of different sizes and the largest ballroom without pillars in China. **IE&FMM**



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Alp "Aeugli", Lungern, Central Switzerland

Switzerland ranks top!

Environmental Performance Index, Yale & Columbia Universities

10 Budget Cuts That Won't Hurt Your Meetings

By Steve Winston

If you think you can't save any more — while still having great meetings — think again!

We've all learned how to be surgeons, of sorts, these past few years. We've all learned some hard lessons in how to cut the fat out of our meeting budgets, without (hopefully!) cutting the vital organs.

We've learned to carve out savings in areas we never even considered before. And we've learned a new way of thinking, as well, by identifying new areas in which we can cut our meeting budgets.

Some in our industry even have a case of "savings fatigue," saying that we've gone about as far as we can go.

But most experts say — emphatically — "Not so!" In fact, the experts with whom we spoke came up with tons of ways to save on your budget, and look very good while doing it — without compromising the quality of your meetings. And they identified 10 main areas in which you can do it.

1 Guest Rooms and Meeting Space

"Step one is probably to take a close look at the time of year your meeting will take place," said Jenny Besser, CMP, director of meetings for St. Louis-based MAC Meetings & Events. "And step two is to determine how much flexibility you have to change the time of the meeting, if necessary."

Besser explained that, whenever possible, it's best to hold your meeting in the off-season. Rates in Miami in the winter, for example, will be much higher than for the same facility in summer. Or, she said, you could consider a different type

of destination than you've used before; perhaps a second- or third-tier city, where the prices are more reasonable all year long.

"Not only do you need to be flexible with your target dates," said Besser, "but also with your target days. Hotels have certain days of the week when it's more difficult to fill rooms. And, obviously, you have a chance of getting a better rate on those days."

Gregory Carter is a well-known speaker and author on the topic of meeting — or beating — your meeting budget. And he should know: He has 25 years of experience as a convention services director at major hotels, such the Sheraton Nashville Downtown Hotel.

"The best savings are achieved by the planners most willing to be flexible," he said, "and by planners who understand that \$100 in some cities goes a lot farther than \$100 in other cities. And if you pick a city where it goes farther, it'll make your life easier, when it comes to finding areas in which you can save."

2 Hotel Add-On Fees and Surcharges

Karen Shackman, founder of a highly regarded DMC Shackman Associates New York, believes that this is a tough place to find savings, but that savvy planners should look for hotels that offer other free amenities, such as in-room Wi-Fi.

Koleen Roach, director of meetings and conference management at Securian Financial Group in St. Paul, MN, agreed. "I always start by trying to negotiate away these fees. But it's starting to get harder. The honeymoon of the last few years is over — and hotel rates are now starting to rise."

Paul Eder, vice president of meetings and incentive planning at Birmingham-based Protective Life, advised planners to always be aware of where the add-on charges are coming from.

"We always try to negotiate them down," he said, "or to take them out of the equation entirely. But it's not the easiest place to find savings."

3 Food & Beverage

"We definitely look for savings in this area," said Besser. "We like to work directly with sales and with the chef to develop our own menus. I'll always tell them exactly how much we have to spend — and always make it clear that we're not going over that figure. And then we ask what they can provide for that figure."

MAC also tries to use local produce whenever possible. And, when booking a few years out, the firm always negotiates for a cap on the percentage increase that the hotel might add on to today's rates.

Wichita Villacres, president/owner of PRA Destination Management Southeast Florida based in Fort Lauderdale, believes that these days, you have to look for savings in unlikely places.

"One example is water," said Villacres. "If you use the water fountains instead of bottled water, you'll save. And a bunch of 'little' savings really adds up."

Roach added that planners should never assume they have to operate within the guidelines of prepared menus, which can be more expensive. She recommended sharing with your catering manager your per-person cost for each meal, and then asking them to prepare special menus that fit your budget — or, negotiating a 5 percent to 10 percent discount

off your total food and beverage spend at the end of the program.

Eder added that pre-dinner hors d'oeuvres are another area that's ripe for the chopping block.

"If you have heavy hors d'oeuvres," Eder said, "many people don't even eat their dinner — and you've wasted a lot of money. Why not have lighter, dry snacks for hors d'oeuvres, things like pretzels, peanuts, crackers, etc.? Even if you have champagne with it, you've still saved money. And your attendees will still enjoy it. In fact, the first time we did that, we were prepared for some negativity on the part of some of the attendees. But not one person even noticed."

Shackman added that it's always good policy to see if you can piggyback with another company in the same hotel.

"We recently worked with a financial client who was meeting at an elite hotel, with 800 attendees," Shackman said. "By combining our luncheon order with the meeting down the hall, and ending up with a total of 1,500, both companies saved on per-head costs."

4 Audio-Visual and Presentation Technology

One way to save in this area is to use what's already in the hotel, said Michele Wilde, director of conference services at The Breakers, the prestigious landmark hotel in Palm Beach, FL.

"Hotels are more likely to negotiate if you use what they already have on hand," said Wilde, who presented at an education session on budgeting at FICP's 2010 Annual Conference last November. "Also, ask if there's any way you can piggyback on top of another meeting in the hotel. Maybe you can use the same audio-visual or technical equipment they'll be using; see if you can piggyback on events after or before yours."

Villacres said that in the past, companies often would use the hotel's audio-visual equipment, while their DMC would also bring in equipment.

"If that's not duplication of effort," she said, "I don't know what is! And there are other ways to save, as well. Use only one room — don't move your sessions around. Also, in the past, clients would automatically hire the first local audio-visual company that came along, or which was suggested by the hotel. Now they're wiser with their pennies. They're not just taking the hotel's suggestion, they're asking for bids."



Jenny Besser, CMP
Director of Meetings
MAC Meetings & Events
St. Louis, MO

"Not only do you need to be flexible with your target dates, but also with your target days."



Karen Shackman
Founder
Shackman Associates
New York, NY

"By combining our luncheon order with the meeting down the hall, and ending up with a total of 1,500, both companies saved on 'per-head' costs."



Koleen Roach
Director, Meetings and
Conference Management
Securian Financial Group
St. Paul, MN

"I always start by trying to negotiate away (hotel) fees. But it's starting to get harder...and hotel rates are now starting to rise."



Paul Eder
V.P. Meetings and
Incentive Planning
Protective Life
Birmingham, AL

“People who arrive within an hour or so of each other should be on the same shuttle, otherwise you can be paying for hundreds... of trips.”



Michele Wilde
Director of Conference
Services
The Breakers
Palm Beach, FL

“You’ll find the conference services directors will do their best to help you lower costs...this is 2011 and we want your business.”

5 Setup and Staging

“You can use different lighting packages,” said Eder, “rather than investing money into a hard set for one-time use.” In addition, Protective Life works with one production company, which can handle both audio-visual and staging.

Besser, on the other hand, saves money by looking for local DMCs to dress her stages up. That way, she doesn’t have to worry about the cost of transporting people and props over large distances (let alone possible damage to the props, and the subsequent frantic dash for replacement items).

Wilde sees a lot of companies pass through her hotel and, unfortunately, a lot of mistakes.

“Make sure you’re comparing apples to apples,” she said. “What are the extras? Are you going to have to pay for feeding the production company’s staff? Are you going to have to pay for security for the room? Make sure you’re comparing the entire packages offered by different companies — and make sure you understand them.”

6 Transportation

Carter believes that, on some occasions, it’s not inappropriate to ask attendees to pay for some of their transportation: for example, from the airport to the hotel. And he added that if it’s a citywide convention, planners shouldn’t just go with the first company they find. Instead, consider several contracts with several different companies, each of which may be able to transport attendees to and from certain areas more economically than other companies.

“We promote shuttle services to our clients,” said Villacres. “It’s less revenue for us. But it’s more beneficial for the client. On occasion, some of your arriving attendees at the airport may have to wait for other attendees.”

Eder seconds that notion. “People who arrive within an hour or so of each other should be on the same shuttle,” he said. “Otherwise you can be paying for hundreds — or even thousands — of trips back and forth to the airport. And take a long, hard look at the arrival and departure manifests. Make sure you have the right-sized vehicles.”

Eder added that places with multiple airports generally offer lower airfares, because there’s a lot more competition among airlines.

“For example, in South Florida,” he said, “there are three major airports, and dozens of airlines that fly there. The average fare to a place like this might be \$200 as opposed to \$600 in other larger destinations.”

7 Speakers and Entertainment

As any planner knows, you can spend \$1,000 on a speaker or an entertainer(s)...or you can spend \$50,000. It’s an area where you can achieve substantial savings — if you approach it wisely, and if you keep an open mind about who and what you need.

“Piggybacking” may be possible in this category, as well, according to Besser.

“If an entertainer or speaker is already going to be in town for another event, why not piggyback?” she asked. “It saves you the cost of transporting them, and the ancillary costs, such as food during the trip, etc.”

Wilde has another rule: “Be very specific with your hotel,” she said. “Don’t tell us you want something ‘over the top,’ or you want something ‘casual.’ Different terminology means different things to different people. Instead, tell us in financial terms how ‘over the top’ or how ‘casual’ you want to be. Speak in numbers, rather than broad generalities.”

Shackman noted that planners no longer have to go through speakers bureaus to find the right person to address their meeting, since many speakers now have their own websites, or pages on Twitter or Facebook.

And Villacres advised planners to think local. “As we’ve all learned over the past few years,” she said, “gone are the days when getting a famous speaker was the priority, and it didn’t matter how much you had to pay to get that speaker. We’re now using more locally based speakers and entertainment. Our clients are telling us they enjoy the presentations just as much. And they not only save on the speakers’ fees, but on the transportation and housing of outside speakers, as well.”

8 Finding an Affordable Meeting Site

Roach pointed out that sometimes planners often overlook what should be a very obvious resource — other planners.

“What better way to find out what’s affordable and what’s not?” she said. “Don’t be afraid to ask other planners about which sites worked well for them. And don’t be afraid to

tell others what worked for you. You’re getting advice from the source. And you don’t have to pay a third party to get it.”

There are other factors to consider, as well, when you’re looking for affordable meeting spots...factors that you might not automatically think about.

“Consider the number of hotels in a given area,” said Eder. “The more hotels, the more the pricing will be competitive. And always consider having your meetings in shoulder season, rather than peak season, if it’s a big tourist area. Your dollar will go a lot farther.”

Wilde — even though she works for a hotel — offers some more advice on keeping the rates lower.

“When you start talking to a hotel,” she said, “don’t think along the lines of ‘this is my budget; I have this many dollars to spend.’ Just because it’s in the budget...doesn’t mean you have to spend all of it!”

“And don’t make the mistake of thinking that solutions for past meeting problems will always work at your next meeting,” she added. “We need to know about previous problems, so we can have a broader perspective. Generally, you’ll find the conference services directors will do their best to help you lower costs, because this is 2011, and we want your business.”

9 Printing

Unanimously, our experts said that printing is not really much of a consideration anymore.

“If you really need printed material, have it done by a printer in the city where you’re meeting,” said Besser. “At least, that way, you don’t have to ship it, and risk the materials never making it to the meeting. But, these days, we’re all going digital, anyway. You can post information online, on your website, or the meeting website. You can e-mail it to all the attendees. Or you can just put all the information from the meeting on USB drives for everyone. Most people bring their laptops to meetings these days.”

10 Staffing

Often, it seems, planners have too many outside people helping out at the meeting — more than they need.

“But if you really do need extra staff,” Carter said, “consider the local CVB. Sometimes they’ll provide you with extra staff at low cost

— or even no cost — depending on the size of your meeting.”

Shackman added that electronic check-in can help reduce the need for extra staff at registration tables.

And Villacres has several ways of reducing her clients’ reliance on outside staff: “It used to be that, in transporting people to a venue, we’d put at least one extra staff person on each bus,” she said. “But we no longer do that. We used to have too many staff at the hotel, and they weren’t really needed. And we used to staff a hospitality desk every day of the meeting. Now, we only do it on the first day; that’s the only time people really have questions.”

Golden Rules for Planners

Wilde gives planners the hotel perspective.

“My No. 1 Golden Rule?” she said. “Communicate! And my No. 2 Golden Rule? Communicate! Communicate with us often, and in depth. We can’t give you what you want if we’re not sure what you need. And communicate to us in hard numbers and hard figures — be specific. Otherwise your expenses can get out of hand. And we’re all spinning our wheels for nothing.”

Carter said that there are no questions too dumb or too small, and that you have to ask the hotel all of them.

“Is there an event in the next room? If so, will they have a band? Is your registration area large enough? Does your company or your client have a detailed checklist, with every conceivable expense and situation? If not, does the hotel have one?”

And Shackman added the DMC perspective.

“My Golden Rule for planners? Don’t make assumptions,” she emphasized. “They limit your meeting, and they could potentially increase your budget. Now more than ever, venues that were once very rigid in their pricing will work with you, because they want to host your future meetings, as well. Don’t assume something is not within your budget. Ask!”

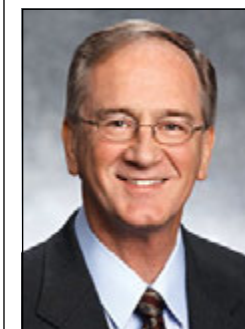
The End Game

Results from MPI’s 2011 FutureWatch survey show that although the average spend per meeting will increase by 5 percent this year, so, too, will budget and meeting performance scrutiny increase through 2011 and beyond — proving that the quest for producing great meetings for less continues. **I&FMM**



Wichita Villacres
President/Owner
PRA Destination
Management, SE Florida
Fort Lauderdale, FL

“We’re now using more locally based speakers and entertainment. Our clients are telling us they enjoy the presentations just as much.”



Gregory Carter
Speaker, Author
Knoxville, TN

“Sometimes (the local CVB will) provide you with extra staff at low cost — or even no cost.”

The Florida Factor

'It Adds a Layer of Incentive Without Having to Be an Incentive'

Stephen W. Clark, CMP, ran the meeting and travel department at CUNA Mutual for nearly 18 years and then founded his own meeting-planning firm, Stephen Clark & Associates LLC, specializing, naturally, in insurance and financial meetings. As such, he has his finger on the pulse of that industry segment, observing that in recent years many companies have reduced if not eliminated free time for attendees during

By George Seli

their business meetings. But when the destination is Florida, "at least after hours, attendees can go out and experience a little bit of a nice destination," said Clark, who has planned events in Orlando, Naples, Miami and other cities in the Sunshine State. "Florida is always a good draw because even when you're doing sales, educational or training meetings, it



TD Ameritrade Event Group Director Katrina L. Kent, CMP, CMM, is flanked by former presidents Bill Clinton and George W. Bush, keynote speakers at TD Ameritrade's annual Institutional National Conference, held at Orlando's Rosen Shingle Creek (above).

"Shingle Creek is very large without feeling like a convention center, which is ideal for a large program where you still want to maintain a sense of intimacy. And we typically have very high-profile keynote speakers at this conference, and we were really comfortable with having them at the venue."

Katrina L. Kent, CMP, CMM, TD Ameritrade, Jersey City, NJ

adds a layer of incentive without having to be an incentive."

That aspect often results in attendees extending their stays or arriving early to take advantage of Florida's beaucoup attractions and activities, be it theme parks, golf, water sports

or shopping and dining. Regarding a program he staged at Loews Miami Beach Hotel in November, Clark noted that "there was no free time built into the agenda, but the group did want to provide some level of incentive to their destination, and probably 30 percent

of the group came in on the front end and another 20 percent stayed on after."

Katrina L. Kent, CMP, CMM, director, The Event Group at Omaha, NE-based TD Ameritrade, cited the same trend for her company's Florida programs, which include a national conference in Orlando every other year. "It's more of an incentive for them to come when they can tack days on to the beginning or end of the program on their own or with family," Kent said.

Orlando

Orlando in particular is a boon for insurance and financial groups, Clark noted, given its vast amount of meeting space. "Insurance and financial generally are space-intensive programs, and especially with the most recent training trend in the last two or three years of doing simulations," he said. "So you can go into an Orlando market and get a good value on your rooms and a little better volume of meeting space with your rooms ratio."

What's more, Orlando's meeting space has greatly increased in the last couple of years, thanks to the following three major developments:

The Peabody Orlando completed a \$450 million expansion in September, adding a new 34-story tower with 750 guest rooms for a new total of 1,641 guest rooms. The hotel now offers more than 300,000 sf of meeting space and is now connected to the Orange County Convention Center (OCCC).

The 1,400-room Hilton Orlando opened in the fall of 2009 with more than 175,000 sf of function space. It was the first hotel to connect by covered open-air walkway to the OCCC.

The 498-acre Bonnet Creek debuted in the fall of 2009 with two adjacent resort properties: the 1,000-room Hilton Orlando Bonnet Creek and the 497-room Waldorf Astoria Orlando. Together they house more than 150,000 sf of meeting space.

Other hotel developments, while not adding meeting space or rooms inventory, are sure to draw planners' attention. For example, the Hyatt Regency Grand Cypress recently com-

pleted a \$45 million renovation of all its 750 guest rooms and suites. The hotel offers 65,000 sf of meeting space, eight dining choices and 45 holes of Jack Nicklaus Signature Design golf.

News at Universal Orlando Resort centers on its blockbuster addition of the Wizarding World of Harry Potter theme park, which has enjoyed record-breaking attendance since its opening last summer. Universal Orlando Resort offers three Loews hotels with a combined



Stephen W. Clark, CMP
Principal
Stephen Clark & Associates
Marco Island, FL

total of 2,400 guest rooms and 133,000 sf of meeting space. Planners can book customized performances from the Blue Man Group.

Rosen Hotels & Resorts recently added the newly renovated and re-branded Rosen Inn at Pointe Orlando to the independent hotel company's four convention hotels. In addition, the 1,334-room Rosen Centre Hotel has started work on a pedestrian bridge from the hotel to the OCCC. Aimed for completion in early 2011, the \$2 million project will make the Rosen Centre the third hotel property to add a bridge to the OCCC, along with the Peabody Orlando and the Hilton Orlando.

The Event Group, TD Ameritrade's in-house meeting-planning team, staged the company's annual Institutional National Conference at Rosen Shingle Creek last year. The annual conference brought about 2,000 attendees to the 1,500-room property, including investment advisor clients of TD Ameritrade and about 150 exhibi-

tors. It was the group's first time using a Rosen hotel, and "it ended up being basically the perfect venue for our particular event," said Kent. "It's obviously not part of any of the parks and has a very independent feel. You feel like you're removed from 99 percent of that touristy feel, but if you or your attendees want access to that for your personal time, it's right there at your fingertips. Shingle Creek is also very large without feeling like a convention center, which is ideal for a large program where you still want to maintain a sense of intimacy."

Rosen Shingle Creek offers 445,000 sf of function space, including column-free ballrooms with 31-foot ceilings. "And we typically have very high-profile

keynote speakers at this conference, and we were really comfortable with having them at the venue," Kent added. "High profile" is an understatement as the keynote speakers were former presidents Bill Clinton and George W. Bush. The conference included two full days of meetings, a variety of dinner and evening events, and a final-night party in a transformed ballroom at the hotel. While Shingle Creek itself offers a dozen dining options, Kent points to several Orlando eateries that, in her experience, also work well for corporate groups, including Bice at Loews Portofino Bay Hotel at Universal Orlando Resort, Primo Orlando at the JW Marriott Orlando Resort, Seasons 52 and the Oceanaire Seafood Room. And in September, Delmonico's Italian Steakhouse opened on International Drive, the company's first location outside of New York.

For a different taste of Italy, groups can book the new Via Napoli Ristorante a Pizzeria at Epcot's Italy Pavilion. The casual dining, 14,000-sf restaurant has 300 seats and wood-burning pizza ovens. The Cantina de San Angel res-

taurant in the Mexico Pavilion is now more group-friendly with an additional 400 seats. Like the rest of the venues in Walt Disney World Resort, Epcot's attractions, from Future World to the 11 pavilions of the World Showcase, are replete with special event options, and The Disney Event Group can help a planner navigate them.

For an insurance group that stayed at Disney's Yacht & Beach Club Resort, Clark coordinated a series of dinners throughout Epcot with the help of the Event Group. "We had business lines that needed to break up, and they wanted to have dinners via business lines, so they helped me to determine which venues are the best ones to place the dinners at, coordinate the transportation, provided escorts on and off property and so on," he related. "One person was able to help me coordinate four different locations. It was a nice one-stop shop."

More Disney dining experiences, as well as shopping and entertainment, will await groups at Hyperion Wharf, a new waterfront district on what was Pleasure Island in Downtown Disney.

Apart from its undeniable theme-park appeal, Orlando also has its share of fine-arts venues, some of which are making news. For example, the \$383 million Dr. Phillips Performing Arts Center will break ground in January 2011. The 330,300-sf project will be built in two phases: The first will include a 2,700-seat theater, a 300-seat community theater and part of an out-



A corporate group enjoys a pirate-themed FAM tour at Omni Amelia Island Plantation.

door performance plaza; and the second a 1,700-seat theater, a rehearsal hall and completion of the outdoor space. Completion of the center is estimated for fall 2013.

Eco-conscious planners will also be interested to learn that the Central Florida Chapter of the U.S. Green Building Council, in partnership with Visit Orlando, has introduced the Central Florida Green Destination Initiative with the goal of making Orlando the greenest destination for conventions and tourism in the country. Planners can visit usgbc-cf.org/committees/hospitality-advocacy for green venue selection guidelines and more information.

Jacksonville

One reason Jacksonville is a particular draw for insurance and financial groups is that these industries figure so prominently in the city's economy,

with Blue Cross Blue Shield of Florida and Fidelity National Financial headquartered there, for example.

The largest full-service DMC in the region is Destination Planning Corporation, and President Anne Urban noted a variety of other factors behind Jacksonville's appeal to corporate groups, including accessibility, affordability and climate: "Meeting planners generally say Jacksonville is a place they can come to where it's not too hot in the summer nor too cold in the winter. Our average annual temperature is 78 degrees, which is different from most of Florida," she said. There's also a bit of the joy of discovery: "We're still kind of that secret destination where people get a new experience, compared to well-known first-tier cities like Orlando or Miami."

"Groups come here and they're just absolutely in awe of our history as well as the waterways," Urban continued, "the fact that our gorgeous (St. Johns) river flows right into the ocean." That means plenty of water sports and activities. "Unlike Central Florida, we don't have the manmade lakes, but our own natural water areas are great for river cruises, and our guests will kayak and see a dolphin swim up next to them."

Amelia Island River Cruises, for example, offers private charters so groups can experience the Fernandina waterfront on Amelia Island and Cumberland Sound. And Amelia Island itself is a draw for incentive travel with various luxury resorts. The 444-room Ritz-Carlton, Amelia Island expanded

its meeting space with the new 11,000-sf Talbot Ballroom about a year ago, affording the property 35,000 sf of interior meeting space. Omni Hotels & Resorts acquired the Amelia Island Plantation in October, rebranding the property as the Omni Amelia Island Plantation. The brand plans to expand the resort development with approximately 125 additional guest rooms and suites as well as a new 16,000-sf ballroom (currently the 249-room property offers 49,000 sf of meeting space). In addition, Fort Clinch State Park, whose well-preserved 19th century fort was built to protect the port of Fernandina, is available for corporate events.

Recently, the St. Augustine Pirate & Treasure Museum opened, adding another historical option for offsite events, particularly with its courtyard that overlooks the Matanzas River and the Castillo de San Marcos, the Spanish fort located directly across the street on the bayfront. Destination Planning Corporation is the venue's in-house event company, and according to Urban, "The collection is just unbelievable. It brings today's technology to the old history, where you can go inside the museum and actually shoot cannons and see how accurate you are in your battles. You've got Blackbeard as a talking head telling you his life, so it's very Disney-like. And planners can rent that facility out for receptions or dinners."

The newly renovated Jacksonville International Airport (JAX) can be a cost-saver for regional insurance and financial meetings. "All of the regional airlines that offer discounts have kept

our overall pricing extremely competitive," said Urban. "If the group flies into Atlanta and their hub is Delta, their pricing is not going to be nearly as competitive as it's going to be coming into here where we have all the different discount airlines." JAX offers some very convenient

"Meeting planners generally say Jacksonville is a place they can come to where it's not too hot in the summer nor too cold in the winter. Our average annual temperature is 78 degrees."



Anne Urban
President
Destination Planning Corporation
Jacksonville, FL

nient meeting facilities, including an Executive Conference Room opened in September 2010. Offering a view of the airfield and catering through Sam Snead's restaurant, the 17-seat room is ideal for small board meetings.

The Renaissance Resort at World Golf Village in nearby St. Augustine is

the Renaissance offers 86,000 sf of meeting and event space.

Midway between Jacksonville and St. Augustine in Ponte Vedra Beach is the five-diamond Ponte Vedra Inn & Club. Established in 1928, the historical property is an elegant enclave of oceanfront accommodations and amenities including two links-style golf courses and an award-winning spa. There is more than 25,000 sf of meeting space featuring two exquisitely appointed ballrooms and a boardroom.

Tampa/St. Petersburg

On Florida's west coast is Tampa, well known for the Spanish-Cuban culture of Ybor City. But no less intriguing for many attendees will be the fine arts, with the Tampa Museum of Art and, in St. Petersburg, the newly renovated Dali Museum, which debuted January 11. Doubled in size, the tribute to the Spanish surrealist is at the heart of St. Petersburg's cultural renaissance. Then there's Tampa's "wild side," with Busch Gardens, The Florida Aquarium and even the 35-acre wildlife preserve that surrounds the Grand Hyatt Tampa Bay.

State Farm agent Jack Wallace, who plans a biannual gathering of agents focused on best practices for running

their respective businesses, has brought the group to destinations as diverse as Mexico and Canada. They have met in Tampa twice, most recently at the 445-room Grand Hyatt, offering 22,000 sf of meeting space.

The group of about 40 agents was "a small fish in a big pond, but they treated us like we were big fish," said Wallace. "We had a first-class affair at the Hyatt

out by their swimming pool where they had a luau. And even though the hotel was in a rather secluded area, you can walk to a nice shuttle that would take you to different places in Tampa. For instance, we had a private dinner at the



Recent renovations doubled the size of the Dali Museum in St. Petersburg.

now offering complimentary transportation to and from JAX for new group business for programs in 2011 and beyond. Together with the adjoining St. Johns County Convention Center and the adjacent World Golf Hall of Fame,



The Hilton Orlando's 175,000 sf of meeting space is discreetly segregated from its resort-style amenities. The hotel connects to the Orange County Convention Center.



Photo courtesy of Naples Beach Hotel and Golf Club

The Naples Beach Hotel and Golf Club features tropical outdoor event space beachside on the Gulf.

Columbia Restaurant in Ybor City and at Bern's Steak House, the best steak house I've ever been to." High praise from Wallace, who hails from Houston.

Substantiating the trend cited by Clark, Wallace noted that there is no time for recreation during meeting hours: "If you want to play golf, you do it before or after the meeting." And one great choice is Majestic Pebble Creek, which celebrated its 40th anniversary in 2008 with new Champion Bermuda Greens, new sand bunkers, and a new Irish Pub as part of a \$2 million renovation.

In more recent renovation news, The DoubleTree Hotel Tampa Westshore Airport has just finished refurbishing its Bay Pointe Ballroom, Lake Forest Ballroom and prefunction space (totaling 16,000 sf), following a \$13 million renovation of its 489 guest rooms, public areas and outlets in September 2009.

Destin

The Emerald Coast town of Destin offers groups the enticement of 1,080 holes of golf on renowned courses such as the Regatta Bay Golf & Country Club, and the Fred Couples and Gene Bates-designed Kelly Plantation Golf Club, complemented by shopping at Destin Commons Mall and, of course, some of the state's freshest seafood.

But when it comes to the meetings business, Destin, along with Fort

Walton Beach and Okaloosa Island, are not exactly laidback. The 35,000-sf Emerald Coast Convention Center boasts 12 meeting rooms, a 21,000-sf Emerald Grand Ballroom, as well as a 6,000-sf state-of-the-art kitchen with in-house catering service by Aramark.

Planners also can find some unique offsite venues in the area that cater to various interests, including The Destin History & Fishing Museum, Fort Walton Beach's U.S. Air Force Armament Museum

and Point Washington's Eden State Gardens & Mansion. The latter's Wesley Mansion, built in the 19th century and surrounded by 600-year-old live oaks, features the country's second-largest collection of Louis XVI furniture and antiques.

Naples

Naples, Marco Island, Everglades City, Immokalee, and Ave Maria comprise the Paradise Coast region of Southwest Florida. Clark cites the area as among Florida's less obvious incentive choices, as well as a cost-effective choice for a business meeting. "There has been some value in Naples in the last few years," he said. "It's one of

those destinations where you can get some value at an incentive-level property for a business meeting." One such property is the 317-room Naples Beach Hotel and Golf Club, which opened a \$5 million swimming pool complex and enhanced its championship golf course in 2010. The hotel offers a total of 34,000 sf of meeting space. Its HB's on the Gulf is the only beachfront eatery in the city.

Naples and its environs are a boon for nature lovers, with Everglades National Park, Caribbean Gardens and the Conservancy Nature Center. In November, the Naples Botanical Garden opened the new cultivated gardens of Asia and Florida set in 90 acres of beautifully restored natural Florida habitat with hiking trails and a birding tower. Memorable teambuilding experiences are also an option with, for example, Adventure Training Concepts, which has a facility located near Corkscrew Swamp Sanctuary between Naples and Immokalee (perfect for Indiana Jones- and Survivor-themed events).

Daytona Beach

The headquarters of NASCAR is also home to "Biketoberfest," but it's not only motorsports-obsessed attendees that will be drawn here. The Club at Pelican Bay and the Indigo Lakes Golf Club will perhaps have wider appeal



Photo courtesy of the Greater Fort Lauderdale CVB

A pedicab cruises Las Olas Boulevard, which showcases South Florida's waterfront residences as well as chic boutiques, restaurants, lounges and cafés.

among a group, and the latter even offers The Palms of Indigo banquet room, suitable for up to 250 attendees. The city itself has completed an \$80 million expansion of the Ocean Center, adding 100,000 sf of exhibit space and 30,000 sf of meeting space. In addition, \$250 million has been invested in renovations to Ocean Walk Village, a six-square-block area comprised of the Wyndham Ocean Walk Resort, Hilton Daytona Beach Oceanfront Resort, Ocean Walk Shoppes and Ocean Center. In total, the Village offers groups 300,000 sf of meeting space and 1,200 guest rooms.

In Daytona Shores is the four-star, four-diamond Shores Resort & Spa, which has 212 guest rooms and 20,000 square feet of meeting space, including oceanview meeting rooms.

One new offsite venue is Vince Carter's, a 10,700-sf restaurant and sports entertainment establishment co-owned by Orlando Magic star and Daytona Beach native Vince Carter. The restaurant is approximately five minutes from Daytona International Speedway and the Daytona Beach International Airport, and 10 minutes from the city's beachfront hotels.

Palm Beach

Farther down Florida's east coast is Palm Beach County, whose answer to Daytona's Ocean Village renovation project is the \$30 million West Palm Beach Downtown Waterfront Revitalization. Completed in February 2010, the project brought features such as a \$250,000 lighting system for nightly light shows, a "Great Lawn," a visitor center and a 4,000-sf Pavilion that hosts public and private events.

More recently, in November, Worth Avenue in the town of Palm Beach received a \$15 million renovation. The "Rodeo Drive of the East" lets attendees browse 200-plus upscale shops, art galleries and antique stores. Scenic landscaping, pedestrian parks and a new clock tower at the avenue's entrance all enhance its allure.

The Henry Morrison Flagler Museum, Norton Museum of Art and Kravis Center for the Performing Arts

are among the major arts and culture venues in the city. For an upscale resort choice to complement a Palm Beach meeting or incentive, planners may consider the Four Seasons Resort Palm Beach, with 210 newly renovated guest rooms and oceanfront suites and 22,000 sf of meeting space.

Fort Lauderdale

This city has long outgrown its

reputation as a spring break mecca and is now a recognized destination for corporate meetings, with upscale hotels by Hilton, Sheraton, Westin and other major brands, and sophisticated entertainment venues such as the Broward Center for the Performing Arts. Currently celebrating its 20th year, the institution welcomes luminaries such as Sir James Galway, Diana Krall and Tony Bennett this year.

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The city is also a visual delight with more than 300 miles of inland waterways that run from the Intracoastal Waterway to the Everglades, and the stylish Las Olas Boulevard with its boutiques and trendy restaurants.

As points of departure to enjoy these activities, groups have many lodging options including the new 150-room Crowne Plaza Fort Lauderdale Airport/Cruise, which opened in February 2010 with 6,000 sf of function space. The hotel is easily accessible to the Fort Lauderdale-Hollywood International Airport, Port Everglades Cruise Port and the Broward County Convention Center. For groups that want an easy jaunt to the city's beaches, the 486-room Sheraton Fort Lauderdale Beach

Appreciating Fort Lauderdale's natural beauty during a meeting is also easy at The Harbor Beach Marriott Resort & Spa, which debuted a new 10,000-sf oceanfront ballroom in January 2010. The 650-room hotel offers a total of 40,000 sf of indoor function space.

Miami

With the Financial & Insurance Conference Planners' (FICP) 2010 Annual Conference bringing more than 625 planners and hospitality partners to Miami, it's a given that the city is an able host for insurance and financial meetings. The Fontainebleau Miami Beach was the headquarters hotel for the conference, and attendees also gathered for evening

of function space, an oceanfront pool and Elemis Spa. The Miami Marriott Biscayne Bay recently added a new boardroom and marina-view ballroom, and renovations were completed for all 600 guest rooms. The Epic hotel added a new 32,500-sf lawn event area on Biscayne Bay. A brand new JW Marriott Marquis recently opened downtown with 313 guest rooms and 80,000 sf of meeting space.

New and renovated properties with quick airport access include the Sheraton Miami Airport Hotel & Executive Meeting Center and the Miami Airport Convention Center (formerly known as the Miami Mart Exhibition Center), which is near the airport and adjacent to the newly renovated DoubleTree Hotel.

South Beach and Coconut Grove are attendees' natural choices for a trendy evening out in Miami after a long day of meetings. A more enriching group experience is available at The Coral Gables Museum, reopened in October in the historic Old Police and Fire Station. A variety of spaces are available for rentals, from the Museum Courtyard (accommodating up to 85 attendees) to the Fewell Gallery (up to 285). Villa Vizcaya, a National Historic Landmark and public museum, is also available for rentals and instantly instills any reception or banquet with the spirit of the Gilded Age of the 1910s. The Adrienne Arsht Center is a new performing arts center in downtown Miami with group event space. And soon to debut in Miami Beach is the new Frank Gehry-designed home of Miami's New World Symphony.

Listed on the National Register of Historic Places is the well-known Art Deco District, comprised of more than 800 buildings dating from the '30s and '40s located on the southern tip of Miami Beach. From that point up to the less whimsical but still fascinating naval history of Jacksonville, Florida enhances any meeting with much more than golf, watersports and R&R. Not to say those aren't well deserved for professionals in today's insurance and financial worlds.

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The Villa by Barton G. (former Versace mansion) is an elegant South Beach venue.

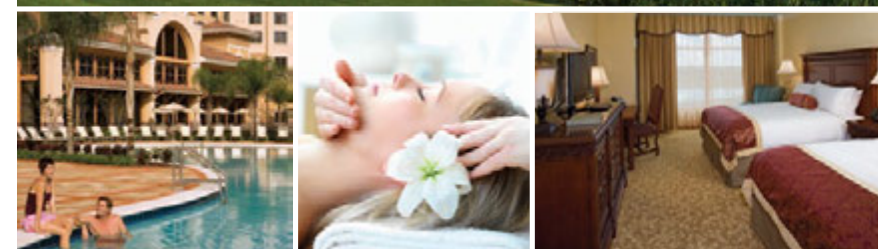
Hotel, formerly the Sheraton Yankee Clipper, has opened after a \$30 million property-wide renovation, including its 7,500 sf of meeting space.

The 433-room Westin Beach Resort & Spa, Fort Lauderdale, which reopened in January 2010 following a multimillion dollar renovation, now makes it easier to green a meeting. For a flat fee of \$250, Carbon Balanced Events, Powered by EarthEra will power the event with clean renewable energy. The hotel houses a 32,000-sf Conference Center, including the new rooftop Sky Terrace featuring more than 5,500 sf of outdoor space, with views of the Atlantic Ocean and the Intracoastal Waterways.

networking events at the 631-room Eden Roc Renaissance Miami Beach (46,000 sf of meeting space) and the 952-room Westin Diplomat Resort & Spa (220,000 sf of function space) in nearby Hollywood. About 25 planners gathered for a pre-FICP event at The Ritz-Carlton, Key Biscayne for networking capped by a dinner at the Villa by Barton G., housed in the former Versace mansion in South Beach. The 450-room Ritz offers a total of 20,000 sf of meeting space.

Planners also will take note of the 790-room Loews Miami Beach Hotel, which has recently completed a \$50 million renovation. It offers 65,000 sf

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Gregory Spiller was named director of sales at The National Conference Center, Leesburg, VA. He was senior sales manager at the Ritz-Carlton, Tysons Corner/McLean, VA.

The Cheyenne Mountain Resort, Colorado Springs, CO, has named **Tammy Page-Boettner** as associate director of sales. She was director of national sales, Rocky Mountain region, at The Broadmoor in Colorado Springs.

Loews Santa Monica Beach Hotel, Santa Monica Beach, FL, has promoted **Sarah Best** to director of sales. She was director of corporate and leisure sales.

The Hilton Anatole has named **Tim O'Brien** as senior sales manager. With more than 15 years of industry experience, O'Brien, who is based in Chicago, was senior sales manager for the Hyatt Regency Phoenix.

Joseph DiBenedetto was named director of sales for Gansevoort Miami Beach. He was director of sales at Wyndham Nassau Resort in the Bahamas.

Mission Point Resort, Mackinac Island, MI, has named **Deborah Denyer** as sales manager. She was account executive with Destination Michigan.

Millennium Hotels & Resorts has named

Daniel J. Dolce as vice president of sales for the U.S. region, based in NYC. He formerly was vice president of global sales at Dolce Hotels and Resorts.

Montage Hotels & Resorts has named **Charles L. Black III** as director of sales and marketing for Montage Beverly Hills, CA. He most recently served as director of sales and marketing at Cap Juluca, Anguilla.

Visit Newport Beach, Newport Beach, CA, has named **Lori Hoy** as national sales manager, representing the San Diego, Arizona, Texas and Southeastern markets. She was senior sales manager at Radisson Hotel Newport Beach. **I&FMM**

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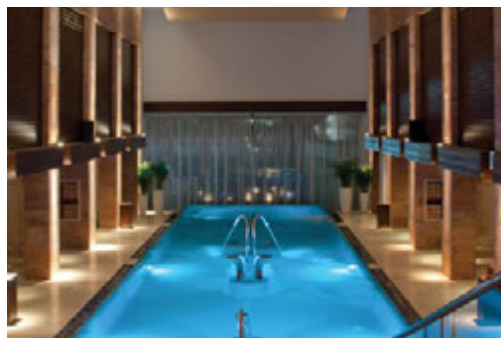
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