

INSURANCE & FINANCIAL MEETINGS MANAGEMENT

THE EXECUTIVE SOURCE FOR PLANNING MEETINGS & INCENTIVES

Testing the Waters

More Planners Are Onboard With
Cruise Incentives
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A rendering of Norwegian Cruise
Line's Breakaway ship, which
launches in April 2013.

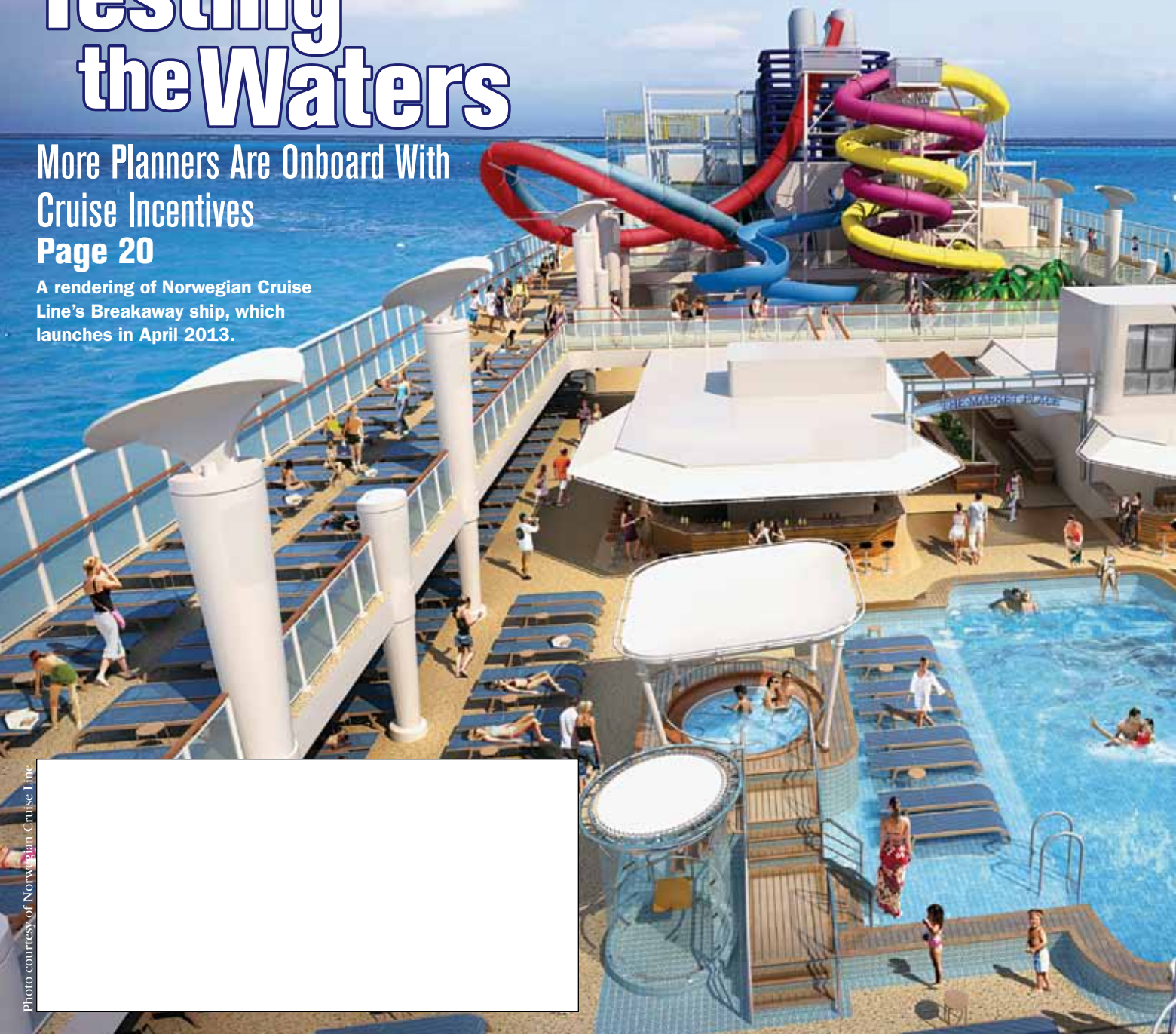


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Photo by Mark Loyack, Orlando, FL/courtesy of Securian Financial Group

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Photo courtesy of Inn at Palmetto Bluff

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Photo by InSight Foto Inc./courtesy of Passport DMC

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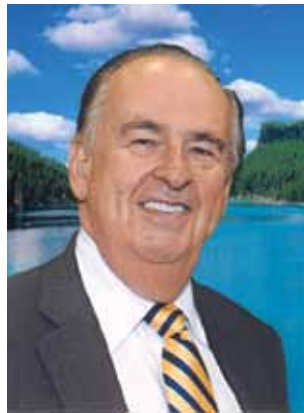
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Publisher's Message

Travel Rewards Are Top Motivators

Studies from the Incentive Research Foundation (IRF) demonstrate time and again that travel rewards are not only top motivators but that "incentive travel programs have a strong impact on not only individual motivation, retention and performance, but also on organizational culture and business results."

Planners seeking the latest in travel rewards need look no further than the incredible amenities and features now found on cruise ships (see cover



story on page 20). Unlike ships from 25 years ago with one buffet and one show, ships nowadays feature every imaginable activity. Thrills await on Norwegian Cruise Line's Breakaway ship (which graces our cover this issue), setting sail for the first time in 2013. The ship's top deck features an aqua park with five water slides, including twin free-fall slides, and a sports complex with the largest ropes course at sea, a nine-hole miniature golf course, rock-climbing wall and more. The ship also features adults-only outdoor enclaves, such as Spice H2O with video screen, hot tubs and waterfall.

At night, Spice H2O transforms into a hot spot where groups can dance under the stars or chill out at the lounge.

Gary Sain Remembered

The industry lost a consummate professional and visionary on May 4, when Gary Sain, the 61-year-old president and CEO of Visit Orlando died suddenly and unexpectedly of a massive heart attack, stunning the greater Orlando community as well as his meetings, tourism and hospitality friends and associates all over the globe. On May 12, hundreds came together at his funeral to honor Gary Sain and praise him for his creativity, his passion and his efforts in making Orlando the first U.S. destination to reach 50 million visitors.

At the funeral, Visit Orlando Chairman Paul Tang said, "This is really a sad day for Orlando but also is a celebration of life, for the legacy that Gary has created for us." Orange County Mayor Teresa Jacobs said, "His visionary leadership in marketing our community made Orlando and Orange County the best place in the world to visit. His passing has left a huge hole in our hearts."

Truly, Gary's death has left a huge hole in our hearts and in our industry. But, fortunately, his legacy and his magnificent contribution to tourism and Orlando will live on.

Harvey Grotsky

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■ **Hilton Sandestin Beach Golf Resort & Spa, Destin, FL.** The VIP Meeting Planner Package includes 1/50 comp room; complimentary transportation to Silver Sands outlet center; luxury airport transportation for up to five VIPs. Plus, planners can choose one of the following: beach bonfire event; Hilton Signature Welcome Gift delivered to room; \$500 credit to teambuilding program; \$500 credit to a Kids Krew evening program; one-hour wine-tasting; one-day Internet Café Package; \$500 gift certificate to the Sea Turtle Conservancy in the group's name. Offer valid for new meetings contracted now to June 28, 2012 and held now through December 27, 2012. 850-267-9600, www.sandestinbeachhilton.com/meeting-meeting-package.

■ **Charleston Place Hotel, Charleston, SC.** Groups that hold meetings in the month of July 2012 are offered rates starting at \$150 per room per night, plus: complimen-

tary meeting space; opening-night reception; 10 percent of the block upgraded to Club Level; 10 percent off contracted spa services (Sunday to Thursday); 10 percent off catered food and beverage. 800-455-2427, www.charlestonplacemeetings.com

■ **Sawgrass Marriott, Ponte Vedra Beach, FL.** The All in It to Win group all-inclusive package includes: meeting space; room rates; self-parking; public dining for breakfast, lunch and dinner; option to upgrade to private dining for \$100 per person per night; option to add local attendees for \$100 per person per day (includes F&B, parking and meeting space); commissionable 70 percent of package rate. August 1–September 16, November 16–30 and December 16–25, \$199 single occupancy; September 17–30, November 1–15 and December 1–15, \$275 single occupancy. 904-285-7777 ext. 6640, www.sawgrassmarriott.com

Industry News

Sustainable Meeting Standards Package Available

ALEXANDRIA, VA — The first green meetings and events standards, introduced by the Convention Industry Council Accepted Practices Exchange (APEX) and The American Society for Testing and Materials International (ASTM) in February 2012, are now online and available for purchase as a complete compilation. The APEX/ASTM standards are broken down into nine individual “sector” standards, covering all facets of event planning and management. Previously available for sale separately at a cost of \$40–\$46, meeting planners and suppliers now have the option to take advantage of cost savings and buy eight of the nine standards in a bundle for \$149. The ninth and final standard, accommodations, will be added to the compilation in the coming months after it receives final approval from ASTM. The standards include audio-visual; communication and marketing materials, destinations, exhibits, food and beverage, meeting venue, onsite office, transportation and accommodations. For more details, go to www.conventionindustry.org.

Miramonte Resort & Spa to Renovate Guest Rooms

INDIAN WELLS, CA — Miramonte Resort & Spa will begin refurbishing all guest rooms this summer. Highlights of the décor include a deep chocolate carpet, mahogany-toned case goods and cream wall coverings. The newly refurbished rooms will be unveiled this fall. Miramonte Resort & Spa is one of more than 30 independent, upscale hotels, resorts and conference centers managed by Destination Hotels & Resorts. www.destinationhotels.com, www.miramonteresort.com

Atlanta Marriott Perimeter Center Rolls Out New Meeting Space

ATLANTA, GA — The 341-room Atlanta Marriott Perimeter Center recently revealed 3,600 sf of additional meeting space, redesigned guest rooms and suites, a new great room, new restaurant, a revitalized concierge lounge and an enhanced new exterior. An additional 3,600 sf of meeting space was added to the lobby level, providing the hotel with a total of 18,400 sf of versatile function space. Two new meeting rooms were designed with floor-to-ceiling windows to welcome natural light. The great room is the bustling epicenter of the hotel and a hot spot for networking. The venue features

multifunctional social spaces including personalized work stations. Lunch, dinner and libations are available at the day to night bar, and the new Twisted Oak Restaurant, located adjacent to the great room, serves a

daily buffet breakfast and breakfast menu. All redesigned and refined guest rooms and suites feature wired and wireless Internet access, plug-in technology, 37-inch HDTVs and more. www.atlantamarriottperimeter.com

Marriott's QuickGroup Adds Online Booking

BETHESDA, MD — Marriott's QuickGroup allows planners to book 10–25 rooms or meeting space for up to 50 attendees with just a few clicks online at the QuickGroup site (www.marriott.com/quickgroup). In addition, planners can choose audio-visual services, add food and beverage catering options, and request a complimentary custom Web page to promote their event. Planners will be presented with a simple, standard online contract that can be secured with a credit card — no negotiations required. Once the reservation is made, the customer is sent an instant email confirmation. Planners also can earn up to 50,000 Marriott rewards points and credit toward Elite status. Customers can compare group room rates at participating JW Marriott, Renaissance Hotels, Marriott Hotels & Resorts, Courtyard by Marriott, Fairfield Inn & Suites by Marriott, SpringHill Suites by Marriott, Residence Inn by Marriott and TownePlace Suites by Marriott across North America. www.marriottmeetings.com

LOCATION LOCATION LOCATION

Parker and Vann Thomson Plaza. Photo by Robin Hill.

Greater Miami has revised, refreshed, and restored nearly every part of its user experience. With locations from the beach to the mainland, Miami's got new hotels, amazing restaurants and a great cultural vibe for your attendees to enjoy. It all adds up to Miami's record-breaking attendance for meetings, small and large. After all, Miami has every amenity your attendees are looking for — in all of our locations.

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Industry Mourns Loss of Visit Orlando's Gary Sain

ORLANDO, FL — Visit Orlando's President and CEO Gary Sain died suddenly from a heart attack at the age of 61 on Friday, May 4. During Sain's tenure, Orlando was the first U.S. destination to break the 50-million-



visitor milestone. Orlando Mayor Buddy Dyer has said that Sain "helped put Orlando on the map as the No. 1 tourism destination in the world."

Visit Orlando's president since 2007, Mr. Sain was the organization's creative force behind campaigns such as "Orlando Makes Me Smile" and "Orlando: Where Creative Minds Meet."

Paul Tang, the chairman of Visit Orlando's board of directors, said Visit Orlando will launch a nationwide search for a new leader. "We have not set any timelines," said Tang, the vice president and managing director of the Hyatt Regency Grand Cypress. Day-to-day

operations will be overseen by Visit Orlando's COO/CFO Larry Henrichs, functioning as interim CEO.

Mr. Sain came to the bureau from Ypartnership, where he was executive vice president and chief marketing officer. Previously, he held executive positions at Premier Cruise Line, Hyatt Hotels and Ritz-Carlton, among other companies. He was active in numerous organizations including the U.S. Travel Association, Brand USA, Visit Florida and the Central Florida Hotel and Lodging Association.

Hyatt French Quarter Opens in New Orleans

NEW ORLEANS, LA — Hyatt Hotels Corporation announced that Hyatt French Quarter opened May 15 in New Orleans. The third Hyatt hotel in the New Orleans market during the last year, the property is located in the French Quarter and just steps from world-renowned restaurants and the city's attractions. The \$18 million renovation includes upgrades to the hotel's 254 guest rooms as well as the hotel exterior, lobby, landscaping, and pool and deck area décor. Newly designed food and beverage outlets include a market called Powdered Sugar and the lounge Batch, which features high-quality bourbons, fresh accompaniments and flask service. The property offers more than 10,660 sf of function space, located on the hotel's first floor. Restaurants include the popular Red Fish Grill, owned and operated by Ralph Brennan Restaurant Group, and a Hard Rock Café, which will open in 2013. www.frenchquarter.hyatt.com



Photo credits: 1. Cruise Lines International Association; 2. Walt Disney Company; 3. Chuck Fazio; 4. and 5. Macau Government Tourist Office; 6. Visit Newport Beach Inc.

1 Cruise Lines International Association's President and CEO Christine Duffy (center, red t-shirt) and cruise3sixty conference delegates demonstrate support for U.S. Travel Association's "Vote Travel-Get America Moving" Bus Tour Campaign April 29 in Greater Fort Lauderdale, FL. **2** George Aguel (left), senior vice president for the Walt Disney Company, and Harvey Grotsky, publisher, Insurance & Financial Meetings Management, attend a Disney reception during the ASAE Springtime Expo in Washington, DC, May 2–4. Aguel received the 2012 Professional Achievement Award at the 2012 PCMA Education Foundation Dinner May 2 at the Washington Hilton. **3** A networking luncheon at the Association of Corporate Travel Executives' Global Education Conference in San Francisco April 22–24. **4** The Macau Government Tourist Office (MGTO) hosted a black-tie gala dinner in early May for more than 100 guests at the Waldorf=Astoria in New York City honoring the 50th anniversary of the New York Chapter for the Pacific Asia Travel Association (PATA). **5** During the same week, the MGTO also hosted an exclusive luncheon for the trade and travel community at the Modern Restaurant at the Museum of Modern Art in Manhattan to promote the destination. **6** Lori Hoy (left), national account manager with Visit Newport Beach Inc., surprises Liz Planz, a meeting planner for financial services firm Raymond James Financial Inc., with the news that she won the "Live The Dream" sweepstakes and a luxury vacation to Newport Beach, CA. The sweepstakes was part of a campaign to encourage group bookings to the destination.

Air Travel

By Michelle DeClerck, CMP



Pointers to Improve the Trip

In the good old days, there used to be air travel experts. They knew all the ins and outs of air travel, from the most cost-effective routings to the most direct routings. Today, one feels lucky to just arrive at the correct airport.

Help — This Is Confusing!

You have an event to arrange, and you don't have time to deal with this! Is there anyone out there who can help you cut through the incredibly frustrating process of air travel as we know it today? If you're like us, you try a few ticketing agencies until you finally find one that can provide favors and offer advantages for your group. What are they? If we told you today — they'd change by tomorrow. Fortunately, we've found a reputable mega agency that stays abreast of all changes for the benefit of our clients.

What Do You Mean I Don't Have a Seat?

Your producer booked their airline reservations and purchased a ticket and now, the day before the event, they call you in a panic and say, "I don't have a seat assignment, what's going on here?" (That's if they say it nicely!)

You call us, and we find out they were ticketed properly, and there is nothing that could have been done differently in the travel reservation process to get that seat assigned for them. Frustration reigns. To minimize your producer's frustration, it's important to understand that this is a common practice — despite how illegal it seems. The airlines typically only preassign 70 percent of the seats to the general public on a flight, and the rest of the seats are held out for elite level airline frequent flier members, for pur-

chase (yes, a fee!) and for airport check-in that the ticketing gate agent may use at their discretion for families with small kids, special needs passengers and/or as they see fit.

The reason only 70 percent of the seat inventory is allocated for advance assignment is because the airlines sell/confirm anywhere from 110 percent to 130 percent of the seats. Yes, they purposely oversell every flight to reach their goal of 100 percent occupancy at all times. The airlines have a formula that they use to determine how much they will overbook any given flight, which depends on many variables like the city pair, flight time, equipment, etc. They oversell because they know that *usually* (key word here) a certain percentage of travelers will either cancel at the last minute or not show up. By overselling each flight, they make it impossible to allow everyone with a confirmed reservation to confirm a seat in advance.

When your producer doesn't have a preassigned seat, they won't be able to complete their online check-in process from home. This is probably when they first become aware of it and when you get the call. This certainly is another frustrating moment (and it happened to one of our traveling staff here at CEM recently). So what do we do? Check online with the airline or with your ticketing specialist 24 hours or less prior to departure to see if any seats have opened up for preassignment. If no luck, then we recommend that your attendee go to the airport early on the day of travel (and using their best manners), ask the agent to assign their seats for that flight and any connecting flights as needed. This usually works unless more than the estimated number of confirmed

travelers have already checked in for the flight. The key is to arrive early, which may provide your attendee with more choices. However, if a passenger checks in less than 30 minutes prior to flight time, their preassigned seat can be given to someone else, and they may have to wait for the next flight.

Group Seat Blocks

For groups that contract to fly together on the same flight, once most airlines receive the deposit, seats are blocked for the group as a whole. When name lists are submitted later on to secure ticketing, seats are randomly assigned to each traveler in the group. However, at the time of name list submission, some airlines may allow the agency or group manager to include seat preferences for each traveler, to allow for the possibility of honoring neighbor and aisle/window preferences, which would need to be accommodated within the seat block previously held. When under contract, it's unlikely group travelers would be bumped. On the other hand, we all know air travel is completely unpredictable.

More Reminders

The TSA has certain requirements that all travelers must comply with. It's always a good reminder to advise your producers that before they book their travel arrangements (or an assistant books them) that we must have the traveler's "official" name, meaning it needs to read on their airline ticket EXACTLY as it appears on their passport or driver's license (use the same form of identification that they will use to check in for their flight).

As simple as that sounds, when we ask travel-

ers to pull out their driver's license to verify their name, it's not surprising when they say, "Oh, I didn't know that name was on my license."

If the producer makes an error and doesn't provide the exact name, the passenger will not be allowed to board. For example, if the passenger's name on his driver's license reads *Theodore A. Jones*, yet the passenger inadvertently tells

The airlines typically only preassign 70 percent of the seats to the general public on a flight.

our meeting planner to ticket him as *Allen Jones*, because he always uses his middle name *Allen*.

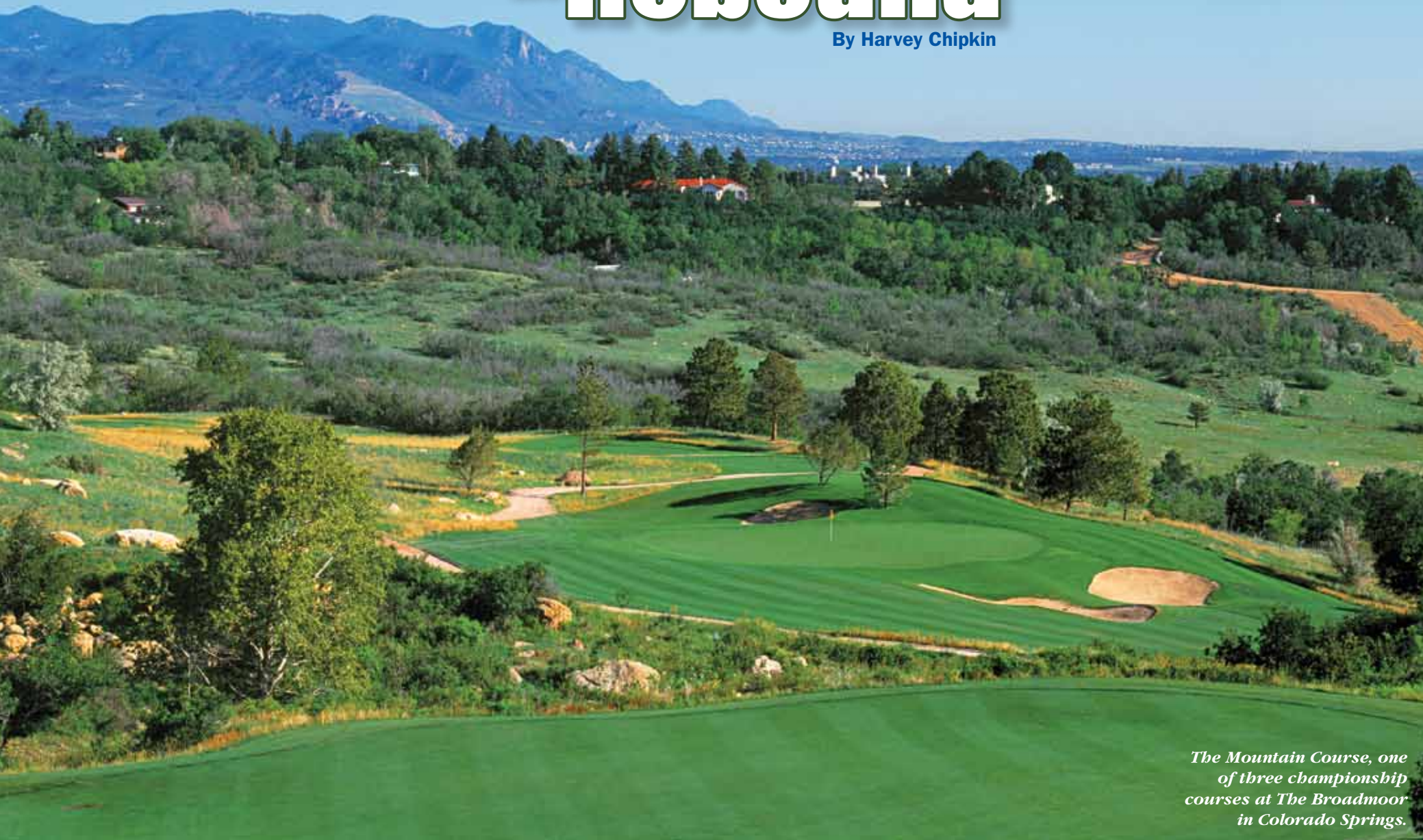
The TSA also requires that travelers provide their date of birth and gender, which must be entered into their traveler record in the airline reservation system at the time of reservation/ticket purchase.

I&FMM

Michelle DeClerck, CMP, is founder of Conference Event Management (CEM) and Financial Speakers Bureau — an award-winning, woman-owned business that provides event, conference, incentive travel and meeting experiences and reward strategies, individual Travel MyWay travel bookings and financial speaker bookings for financial and insurance organizations. She can be reached at michelle@mycem.com. www.mycem.com

Golf Incentives on the Rebound

By Harvey Chipkin



The Mountain Course, one of three championship courses at The Broadmoor in Colorado Springs.

Photo courtesy of The Broadmoor



"I spend a lot of time visiting courses and resorts. ...I check out how long the transfer is from the rooms to the course, and you want that to be 20 minutes or less."

R. Shelton Moynahan, President
Moynahan Travel & Events, New Braunfels, TX

Travel & Events. "You used to have executives ranging down to vice president — now the groups are smaller although the total revenue might be the same, because they're going to a nicer property with fewer people."

"People are also doing a lot of charity events," said Moynahan. "They will invite their suppliers and customers and choose a charity."

Rick Rosen, president of Plymouth, MN-based TriStar Incentive Group Inc., says, "For one insurance company client, golf has been a very heavy part of the program, and that held up through the recession. I recently brought 40 agents to Loews Ventana in Arizona, and the nice part was that Loews has 36 holes right on-property, which allowed us to play three days on the property, and one off-property. They like to play as many courses as they can, though one exception in four rounds is okay."

"At the Loews, the duplicated course was the fourth day, and many of them had left already anyway. Loews knows how to cater to golf groups. There are so many small details — like moving clubs from one place to another. When you go off-property you need to get those clubs back to the original course or to the resort."

"For certain groups," says Rosen,

agents. They set up foursomes so that the hosts are in each foursome and get that interface that's so crucial to relationships."

Ken Pickle — who now operates Pickle Meetings Management in Edmonds, WA, specializing in corporate incentives — was a meeting planner for Safeco Insurance for many years, and until last year, planned an annual golf incentive involving 300 participants with anywhere from 80 to 100 golfers on a given day.

"We usually had 300 insurance agents, the top producers who are not Safeco employees, with one regional employee. It was always about relationship-building."

Typically, Safeco did not do tournaments because of the wide range of skill but would play games like "ball closest to the hole."

And Pickle says that the company once had a CEO who was not a big golfer, but instead would go to a signature hole and man the beverage cart, "serving the agents who came through and getting to chat with everyone," says Pickle. "Basically, it was the company's opportunity to communicate with independent agents, to train them on new products. If you spent an afternoon with an agent you would know them a lot better. That

Still a Top Motivator & Relationship-Builder

For golf at meetings, PAR has come to mean Prior (to or) After Recession. The game of golf may not have changed — still 18 holes

and a bag of clubs — however, golf at meetings has evolved to meet changes in budgets, time and the lingering perceptions of meetings themselves.

The good news is that insurance and financial companies are starting to reward their agents again — and that means golf.

"Companies are more selective on the groups that go to these events," said R. Shelton Moynahan, president of New Braunfels, TX-based Moynahan

"golf is a top motivator. We all know that in the insurance and financial industries the host company gets a great opportunity to mix with their

would facilitate your doing business with them throughout the next year."

According to an executive at the Fairmont Scottsdale Princess, groups

incorporating golf into their programs is definitely rebounding, albeit gradually. It's not a full rebound to the amount of golf included in a program from 2006–2008. However, he notes, golf is rebounding for group program inclusion at a more rapid pace than spa, as the benefits of networking, teambuilding and exercise for the attendees has a more defined value when it comes to golf.

Resorts are aiming to be more competitive in their approaches to golf — and more flexible. If a group wants to do only nine holes, the resort simply has to make it available.

Golf First or Resort First?

Sometimes golf is primary — but often a resort is chosen because of its location and other attractions.

As Pickle notes, Safeco had one event at Hyatt Regency Tamaya Resort & Spa in Santa Ana Pueblo, NM, because “the hotel was new and had good function space and was a reasonable distance from Albuquerque but close enough to Santa Fe that we could access Sante Fe for afternoon tours and/or dine-around.

“Our group was able to learn about the culture of the local tribes, and a number of these actually worked at the resort. And, besides golf, we could do horseback riding, river floating and more.”

Moynahan handles many golf groups and specializes in corporate groups of between 10 and 25 meeting participants — 20 and 50 total including spouses. Many are incentives. Since he deals mainly with privately held companies, they have been more resistant to the issues involving the perception of meetings in recent years.

Moynahan tends not to run tournaments but instead plans “fun” events. “Sometimes if we have two companies involved, we'll pair a person from the host company with a customer. Golf is the best teambuilding and networking activity there is. You can team up people from different sections of the company to give them an opportunity to get to know each other. It's good whether they talk about work or not.

“The first thing is to understand budget restraints,” says Moynahan. “Then I qualify the golfers to make



Loews Ventana Canyon Resort in Tucson.

sure they get a course that's appropriately challenging but also scenic. I spend a lot of time visiting courses and resorts. I also try to play when I can. I check out how long the transfer is from the rooms to the course, and you want that to be 20 minutes or less.”

Following is a look at some top golf resorts and how they see trends involving meetings.

Teeing Off in Tucson

Golf seems to be making a bit of a comeback, according to an executive at Loews Ventana Canyon in Tucson, AZ, who notes that golf had become almost taboo after the AIG affair and

recession. If you had golf in the name of your property, he says, it was even worse. Now that it seem to be okay to hold a meeting, that has trickled down to golf.

The executive says he now has groups surprised at how big their golf registrations were. It was necessary to book more tee times than anticipated.

Located just steps from the front lobby, Loews Ventana Canyon offers two Tom Fazio-designed championship, 18-hole golf courses, both recently rated among the top 10 in Arizona and tops in Tucson.

Both courses are designed around the Santa Catalina Mountains' natural features, weaving through the desert cacti and scenic canyons of the Sonoran Desert landscape. The 6,902-yard Mountain Course boasts the most photographed hole west



Omni Tucson National Resort

of the Mississippi, No. 3, a 107-yard par 3 that plays across a plunging ravine to a granite-encased green. And the 6,836-yard Canyon Course winds through the inspiring beauty of Esperero Canyon and incorporates the massive rock formation known as Whaleback Rock. The par-5 18th hole showcases a partial island green and a steep, cascading waterfall.

Southern Arizona's scenic Santa Catalina Mountains form the backdrop for another inspiring Tucson golf resort the Omni Tucson National Resort, which offers two distinctly different and challenging golf experiences.

The more well-known Catalina Course, with its traditional parkland layout, eight lakes and 80 bunkers, has hosted more than 30 PGA Tour events. The Sonoran Course offers a uniquely Southwestern experience as

a desert-style target course. Designed by Tom Lehman, the Sonoran features native desert vegetation, dramatic elevation changes, two lakes and 69 strategically placed bunkers. *Golfweek* recently named Omni Tucson National Resort one of the best courses in Arizona.

The 650-acre resort offers 128 guest rooms, a Forbes Four Star-rated resort spa, a new infinity-edge pool

and 10,000 sf of newly renovated indoor spaces that invite the outdoors in with natural light and views of the golf course and mountains. There also is nearly 20,000 sf of terraces and gardens for outdoor events.

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Alternatives to 18 Holes

While budgets and time may now limit the traditional, afternoon 18-hole tournament, there are many alternatives. Here is a look at some:

- **Make golf a free-time option.** Groups negotiate a special golf rate for the attendees and assist with tee time arrangements, but individuals are on their own for golf, shopping, hot air expeditions or desert jeep tours, etc. A large percentage of group attendees tend to choose golf.
- **Make golf interactive.** Offer golf clinics, putting contests, swing analysis and sand wedge contests for groups. It's important to make it easy for planners to make arrangements by having pre-packaged programming available with pricing by person or time period.
- **Book a pro.** With an abundance of golf professionals living in golf resort areas, they are available to attend events. Groups are wowed by a visit from a well known golf professional for receptions, breakfasts, etc.
- **Hold a golf-themed event** during a meeting break where a golf cart pulls up filled with Rice Krispie golf balls or golf bags made out of fruit. It gets



Photo courtesy of Innisbrook Resort

Level the playing field for novice golfers by offering golf clinics and/or individual instruction by a PGA golf professional.

people in the spirit of things. Or the serving staff might dress up as caddies.

- **Hold teambuilding contests** — driving, putting, hitting from a bunker — all in a team atmosphere, and perhaps with instruction.
- **Demonstrate equipment.** Bring in equipment representatives to demonstrate clubs or other equipment. — **HC**

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Soffer and the Miller courses, with impressive water features, contoured fairways and subtropical foliage. Turnberry's Golf Director Bob Coman notes that 60 percent of all



Turnberry Isle Miami

resort guests playing golf come from groups. "We've certainly built up that business," he says. The Miller Course is more forgiving, he explains, while the Soffer Course is longer and puts a premium on shot-making. "It's one of the more difficult courses you will find in South Florida." Coman says that the quality of each course is the same, even though each has a different degree of difficulty.

The major architectural feature of the Soffer Course is a 64-foot waterfall on the south side of the 18th green. Coman and his crew capitalize on the location by scheduling "neon golf" for groups. Participants in this nighttime event use neon golf balls and hit into the island green, which is encircled with neon glow sticks. Turnberry Isle's Magnolia Courtyard — a 4,800-sf space with decorative columns and a covered loggia area — overlooks the green, giving groups an attractive venue to schedule cocktail parties while incorporating a little bit of night golf. "It's something that's a little out of the ordinary," says Coman.

Tampa's Four-Course Deal

An executive at Innisbrook Resort near Tampa said that up until 2007, meetings tended to run 3½ days followed by an afternoon of golf or spa. Then with the downturn, golf was eliminated from many programs. It is now returning but, says the executive, "we see it coming back, but as

an industry we have had to reinvent ourselves. We are not going back to half-day meetings with golf the other half day.

"What we are seeing is the meeting goes to 3 or 4 in the afternoon when the avid golfer can sneak in nine holes. It's up to us to be flexible and create the experience that is right for the customer."

The Innisbrook Resort is situated on 900 wooded acres of rolling hills in the St. Petersburg/Clearwater area on Florida's Gulf Coast, and is located just 25 minutes from Tampa International Airport. The resort features four courses of championship golf designed by Larry Packard, and the Innisbrook Golf Academy. Innisbrook recently went through a \$25 million renovation, including the addition of the new luxury Indaba Spa.

The resort hosts the PGA Tour Transitions Championship at its



Innisbrook Resort near Tampa.

famed Copperhead Course; and the LPGA-supported Legends Tour Open Championship, held annually at the equally challenging Island Course.

Innisbrook is part of Grand Golf Resorts of Florida — three resorts that cross the state with Reunion just outside Orlando, Innisbrook near Tampa and Hammock Beach Resort on Florida's west coast.

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Ken Pickle, CPCU, CMP
Pickle Meetings Management, Edmonds, WA

property's golf manager, the resort, which hosted the LPGA's 2011 U.S. Women's Open, has made improvements to all three of its courses. The West Course is in the final phase of a \$1.7 million renovation including



The Broadmoor's Mountain Course

new tees, bunkers, greens, mound-ing and cart-path relocation. There are new tees and bunkers on the East Course. And concrete paths are being installed on the Mountain Course.

Designed by master golf course architect Donald Ross, the original Broadmoor Golf Club's 18-hole course opened with the hotel in 1918. In 1948, Robert Trent Jones Sr. was hired to design an additional nine-hole course. Jones' new nine-hole course joined with nine of Ross' original holes, opening in 1952 as the new East Course. The first nine holes of the original Ross 18 became known as the "Back Nine." In 1964, Robert Trent Jones Sr. was asked to come back and design nine new holes in addition to redesigning nine holes of the original course, forming the West Course. In 2006, the Mountain Course, originally designed by Arnold Palmer, was renovated and reconfigured by Nicklaus Design.

Hill Country Four-Holer

Beautifully integrated into the surrounding Texas Hill Country, two championship courses at The Westin La Cantera Hill Country Resort in San Antonio offer 36 holes — The Palmer Course and The Resort Course. Both feature all the amenities golfers expect, including driving range, pro shop and preferred tee times for resort guests.

It's a short and easy walk from the main resort grounds to the adjacent Resort Course, while the Palmer Course is a bit farther out. The resort provides complimentary shuttle service to both courses and stores golf clubs until guests are ready to use them.

Pre-recession, according to La Cantera executives, golf tournaments would be sizable, with up to 72 players. That has now evolved to a diminished use of golf with groups now starting to return but with fewer players. And, as other resort spokespersons said, golfers begin play late in the afternoon and complete only nine holes.



The Westin La Cantera Hill Country Resort in San Antonio.

At La Cantera, the resort is aiming to make it easier to play in every way. A four-hole course was established

that takes only an hour to play.

Doing Good in the High-Desert

Twin Warriors Golf Club at Hyatt Regency Tamaya Resort & Spa in Santa Ana Pueblo, NM, offers a nationally ranked, Gary Panks-designed course at the state's first high-desert, true destination resort club. Routed in and around 20 ancient cultural sites of previous habitation and activity, this spectacular New Mexico course — ranked No. 49 by *Golf Digest* for best public courses and host facility for the 42nd PGA Professional National Championship in 2009 and 2003 — has beautiful grassy knolls and ridges dotted with juniper and pinon pine.

According to resort executives,



The Hyatt Regency Tamaya Resort & Spa in Santa Ana Pueblo, NM.

corporate meeting business is starting to come back — though smaller in size. However, golf rounds for the Twin Warriors course was up in 2011. There were many more charitable events as well. Tying into a charity, says one executive, keeps everybody happy.

Groups are doing shorter, late-afternoon competitions with fun prizes and a small reception. For a nine-hole tournament, everybody will hop on carts to save time.

Golf is the only sport, said one golf director, where you let people into your little comfort zone. "You're sitting in a golf cart, and you have complete strangers sitting next to you," he says. "But you do it because you have something in common. If you came into my office, I would be comfortable with you coming to my side of the desk."

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Photo courtesy of Norwegian Cruise Line

Testing the Waters

More Planners Are Onboard With Cruise Incentives

By George Seli

As a company stages incentive programs over the years, what results is a population of sales reps who are not just consistently motivated and productive, but also well-traveled. One kind of travel reward, however, remains a frontier that many insurance and financial companies are only recently exploring. It's not an exotic destination, but rather a way of getting there: cruising.

The "friendly seas" have been welcoming incentive groups for a long time, but there are reasons for the novelty factor cruising has acquired among many firms, according to Wallack, president of Buy the Sea, a cruise brokerage based in Plantation, FL. One is less resistance to the idea of cruising from upper management, as the baby-boomer CEOs begin to retire. Some of these CEOs "didn't have

A rendering of the three-story aqua park on Norwegian Cruise Line's Breakaway ship, which launches in April 2013.

the best cruising experiences when they were in their 40s, 25 years ago, and so they didn't want to take their top producers on cruises," Wallack explains. But the new CEOs who are in their 40s today "have been on technologically advanced big ships, so they're more open to incentives at sea. The industry has grown by leaps and bounds, and what was not available a dozen years ago exists today: onboard wireless Internet, dedicated conference facilities, and multiple dining and entertainment options. Years ago you went on a ship and it had one restaurant, a lido buffet and a main show." Wallack also cites available PDAs enabling communication among attendees, digital maps for onboard wayfinding and even 3D movies as examples of features that some modern ships offer.

The Ritz of the Seas

As to the quality of the facilities,

many ships these days offer nothing short of an upscale hotel experience. "I compare Royal Caribbean's Allure and Oasis of the Seas to the new mega-hotels in Las Vegas, or perhaps the Gaylord hotels, with a very open, atrium kind of a feel and lots of restaurants and shops under one roof," Wallack says. "A high-end Celebrity product you would compare to a Grand Hyatt or a JW Marriott, and the boutique cruise products to Ritz-Carlton or St. Regis."

And a cruise usually ends up being less expensive than a counterpart event at a hotel due to the all-inclusive pricing, which avoids surprise surcharges and fees. Cruise lines even have more generous cancellation policies than hotels, often allowing groups to cancel penalty-free from nine months to a year or more in advance. "Their market is such that they know they're going to be able to fill the ship with transient guests," notes Eldon Gale, director, Nationwide Meeting & Event Management Group. "Beyond that, when you do cancel you're typically paying a cost per head to cancel" as opposed to paying for room nights, which is more costly.

Of course, the time of rampant cancellations is now behind the incentive industry, and many companies have been looking for great post-recession "comeback" programs. That's another reason for the rising tide of cruise incentives. Companies "had to produce something incredible for their incentives," Wallack says. As a result, "we had our best year ever in 2011, and I would say now we're completely back on track" in terms of corporate cruise business.

Wallack's trend analysis is confirmed by Gale's experience: "We did a cruise in 2005 on Royal Caribbean. In 2009 we were scheduled to do another one, but along with everybody else in the industry, we canceled all of our incentives," he relates. "And then we came back in 2011 with a program on Oasis of the Seas, the 'latest and greatest' from Royal Caribbean." About 1,200 incentive qualifiers, in-

cluding families and guests, boarded the "leviathan of luxury," as it has been called in the press. Five times larger than the Titanic, Oasis accommodates more than 6,000 passengers and features a theme-park layout comprising seven districts, including its own Central Park. "This trip was really all about the ship," says Gale.

Compelling Itinerary

Majestic ships such as Oasis of the Seas can certainly be the "selling point" for potential incentive qualifiers, but the other side to cruising — the itinerary — can be equally compelling. Some reps have yet to experience group travel to a series of destinations that have a more adventurous quality. "You can saturate a market as a planner, and so you're always looking for that new and interesting opportunity," says Koleen Roach, director, meetings and conference management with Securian Financial Group. "I've been proposing cruises for years, but the timing has never been right. There has always been an option to go to Australia or New Zealand, or to South Africa or South America."

But after years of "continent hopping," the timing was finally right for



"Our CEO said it was one of the healthiest things we've ever done for our top performers. We've been bitten by the cruising bug."

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

a cruise in March on a private charter with Seabourn. The eight-day, seven-night program was a round trip out of St. Thomas, BVI, for the company's Chairman's Club.

The marketing initiative was particularly impactful given that it would be Securian's first travel reward of that kind. "The initial brochure detailed many of the ship's features and talked about what they could expect from a Seabourn experience," Roach relates. "It hyped up the islands we were going to be stopping on, gave a brief history of each, and then the mailers that we sent out every other month thereafter featured a particular island: St. Thomas, St. Barts, Antigua, Nevis and so on. The final piece they



Photo by Mark Loyack, Orlando, FL, courtesy of Securian Financial Group

Securian Financial Group used a cruise ship, the Seabourn Spirit, for the first time for an incentive program in March. Participants are pictured here on St. John's, Antigua.

received was a map of all the islands and the route the ship was going to take. Everybody couldn't wait to go to Jost Van Dyke and see the Soggy Dollar Bar."

A total of 135 participants eventually boarded the small, luxury ship Seabourn Spirit, with 104 double-occupancy cabins. "One of the things my guests really loved about their first cruising experience was being together in one environment where they didn't have to pack up and move just to go to a new destination. Every single morning we woke up on a new island," Roach says.

Like a hotel, the ship provides a "home base" for attendees, while the destination experience is, of course, much more varied.

Consistent Quality

That translates to "consistency of the food product" throughout the program, observes Todd Zint, CMP, CMM, head of meetings and event strategy at NFP in Austin, TX. PartnersFinancial, owned by NFP, holds an annual incentive trip with mainly a baby-boomer

demographic and "often favors localized food with a familiar American-style presentation when traveling abroad," says Zint. "So the cruise is an ideal solution delivering a consistent and reputable five-star food-and-wine experience throughout the voyage."

During the day, participants of PartnersFinancial's most recent charter on Silversea Cruises through Singapore, Vietnam and Hong Kong could explore the indigenous dining of Southeast Asia, or return to the ship. About 350 attendees, including spouses and staff, boarded the ship.

The staff of the ship itself becomes a very reliable extension of a planner's staff since "there's no turnover or handoff," Wallack notes. Unlike hotel employees, "the staff is living on the ship 24/7, and they're dedicated to arranging activities, in case you want to do a trivia contest, song contest and so on, perhaps with only a nominal charge for the coordinator." Memorable special events are cost-effective as well. "On some of the ships you can do dinner under the stars. They can put a band on deck, use col-

orful tablecloths, and you can create a jazz nightclub free of charge," she explains. "So there are things you can do on a ship that on land would cost you hundreds of dollars per person."

Norwegian Cruise Line, for example, offers a variety of customized options for corporate groups, either complimentary or for a reasonable add-on fee. These include: private cocktail parties, award ceremonies and receptions; a private art auction with champagne; sport tournaments; personalized door plaques; company logos on menus and daily activity programs; and group photos. A group services coordinator handles all of these events and services.

Choose a Cruise That Fits the Group

Looking at group service options is just part of "comparison shopping" among cruise lines. A planner must also consider ship features, itinerary, onboard entertainment and more, in light of the program's budget, goals and group demographics. "The cruise lines are all good, it's just a question of

which product is right for you," says Wallack. "Each has something that sets it apart. For Royal Caribbean it's their variety of onboard dining, venue and entertainment options. Celebrity's real signature items are their food, service and beautiful ships, but their entertainment isn't as elaborate or extensive as that of Royal Caribbean."

The average age of attendees should also be taken into account. "On Carnival and Royal Caribbean brands, you'll find a lot families and younger people, especially on the shorter cruises. On Celebrity and Holland America, you'll typically find a slightly older, more sophisticated crowd," she adds. That's not to say middle-aged attendees would not enjoy the surf simulators, rock climbing walls and skating rinks to be found on a Royal Caribbean ship, if they're the active sort.

Meeting and Event Space

Yet another factor is dedicated meeting space, which is an area where "cruise ships definitely fall short" compared to hotels, Wallack

says. Although incentive participants generally have a higher onboard spend than tourists, the percentage of corporate business that big cruise lines do is very small, perhaps less than 10 percent. So they understandably do not invest a great deal in onboard meeting space. That said, some ships do offer very suitable venues.

"Many Royal Caribbean ships offer 400-seat flexible conference centers that work extremely well for corporate clients," Wallack notes. And Norwegian Cruise Line offers the Diamond Head Auditorium on its Pride of America ship. The multi-level, circular facility features multiple audio-visual screens. "Such spaces provide nice alternatives to the traditional hotel space," Wallack says. "Flexibility is the key. All ships can accommodate meetings and events, but it may not be exactly what a client is used to on land. You need to get out of the mindset of the traditional award gala dinner and perhaps look at an awards ceremony with

"The theme of the conference was Find Your Place, and the idea was that, with all the opportunities on the ship to do anything you want, what do you want your experience to be?"



Eldon Gale
Director, Meeting and
Event Management Group
Nationwide
Columbus, OH

cocktails in the show lounge followed by dinner in the dining room."

One of Wallack's cruise clients, for example, was going to stage their awards gala at an offshore venue but ended up successfully "translating" it into an onboard event, thereby saving thousands of dollars in venue rental, décor and transportation costs, Wallack relates. "We did a cocktail

Norwegian Cruise Line.

The highest performers may be lucky enough to qualify for the Haven by Norwegian on select ships. Accessible only by special key card, the complex includes deluxe suites, a private courtyard and other VIP amenities. Norwegian Cruise Line's

next ship, Norwegian Breakaway, will debut in April 2013, sailing year-round from New York City. The 4,000-passenger Breakaway will feature a three-story sports and water park that includes free-fall slides, two twister slides and "The Plank," which extends 8 feet over the side of the ship. Participants in safety harnesses "walk the plank." A sister ship, the 4,000-passenger Norwegian Getaway, launches in 2014 with a home port in Miami.

Carnival Cruise Lines. Carnival Destiny will undergo a \$155 million makeover next year that will incorporate all of the line's "Fun Ship 2.0" dining, bar and entertainment features. The refit also will include a reconfigured



A rendering of the exclusive Haven by Norwegian.

layout, the addition of a partial deck, the expansion of two other decks within the forward section of the ship and the addition of 182 cabins. The ship will be renamed Carnival Sunshine following the 49-day dry dock, which will take place from February to April 2013. Following the dry dock,

Carnival Sunshine will embark on a schedule of nine- and 12-day Mediterranean voyages from Barcelona and Venice from April to October 2013, and then launch year-round, seven-day Caribbean departures from New Orleans beginning November 2013.

Disney Cruise Line. The Disney Fantasy, the fourth ship in the Disney Cruise Line fleet and sister ship to the Disney Dream, launched on March 31, offering seven-night Caribbean itineraries. The Disney Fantasy features a sophisticated adults-only entertainment district called Europa, two new Broadway-style shows, and AquaLab, a brand new water play area. The ship's 1,250 staterooms have a décor that harkens

back to ocean-liner travel of the 1930s, while the lobby is in the Art Nouveau style. Venues for groups include the 1,340-seat Walt Disney Theatre and 399-seat Buena Vista Theatre.

Regent Seven Seas Cruises.

In March, Regent began accepting reservations for cruises from April 2013 to December 2013. Its Summer Collection features more than 50 itineraries in the Mediterranean, Northern Europe and Alaska, as well as fall cruises to New England and Canada and an Amazon River itinerary. This summer, Regent kicks off its 20th anniversary season with the debut of Sette Mari at La Veranda, a new gourmet restaurant featuring distinctive Italian wines and al fresco dining.

Royal Caribbean International. Royal Caribbean International has launched the latest version of its online portal dedicated to corporate meetings, incentives and charters at sea: www.RoyalCaribbeanIncentives.com. Meeting planners can use the website to create their own accounts, search for availability across Royal Caribbean's



Royal Caribbean's Splendour of the Seas.

22 ships, save searches and profiles, request a proposal, and access a library of information and resources. As of February, Royal Caribbean's newly refurbished Splendour of the Seas now features iPads in every stateroom. All Vision-class ships will offer iPads following scheduled revitalization over the next two years.

Viking River Cruises. Viking River Cruises has commissioned six more Viking Longships for delivery in 2013. The six vessels will be joining Viking Freya, Viking Idun, Viking Njord and Viking Odin, which were christened in March, and Viking Embla and Viking Aegir, which will be delivered later this year. Viking Longships each feature two Explorer Suites, which at 445 sf will be the largest river cruise suites in Europe; seven two-room Veranda Suites; 39 Veranda Staterooms; 22 French Balcony Staterooms; a new all-weather indoor/outdoor Aquavit Terrace, with retractable floor-to-ceiling glass doors; and sustainability upgrades, such as solar panels and an onboard organic herb garden.

— GS

“The cruise is an ideal solution delivering a consistent and reputable five-star food-and-wine experience throughout the voyage.”



Todd Zint
Head of Meetings and Event Strategy
NFP
Austin, TX

party, awards in the theater, and then brought them out on deck and did dinner under the stars. It was ‘James Bond’ casual as opposed to cocktail gowns and heels. They loved it and were very happy they didn’t spend all that extra money.”

Los Angeles-based Crystal Cruises’ Serenity is just one example of a ship that offers a variety of sizable venues for galas and banquets, including: the Hollywood Theatre, equipped with the latest projection technology and accommodating 205 guests; the Galaxy Lounge, accommodating 530; the Crystal Dining Room, seating 530; and the Starlite and Stardust Clubs, each accommodating 290 for dancing after dinner.

The Charter Experience

Many groups choose to trade the beaucoup facilities and entertainment options of the larger ships for the exclusivity and greater customization of a charter experience. A “middle road” would be to buy all the suites on a big ship, which would give the group an “elite” feeling and access to all the big ship amenities, Wallack suggests. Of course, the group is still subject to the ship’s schedule.

“The beauty of a private charter is that you can really customize your ports of call, and you have a lot of flexibility with times that you’re in and out of the ports,” says Roach. “You can also customize the entertainment and activities.” Roach sourced her

own musical entertainment for the Seabourn cruise, including a dueling pianos show, jazz under the stars on the upper deck, and a tribute of popular songs through the decades starting in the 1940s. “Having our first experience be a private charter, it’s hard to wrap your head around the idea of simply buying cabins,” she says.

There are, however, a couple of aspects to chartering that a planner should bear in mind. First, “you’re going to pay for every bed on that ship whether you use it or not. So you really need to know what your attendance numbers are going to be, so that you’re not buying a ship that holds 450 people and you only have 200,” Wallack advises. Second, a charter contract is written in stone. “You can’t get out of it, and there’s no attrition. Typically the charter company is also going to ask you to sign an irrevocable letter of credit. You’re putting up collateral to secure that ship, and you own it.”

Find Your Own Oasis

Gale related that he is definitely considering “owning” a vessel for future cruise incentives, but the 2011 program simply demanded the Oasis of the Seas’ size and number of venues. “The theme of the conference was Find Your Place, and the idea was that, with all the opportunities on the ship to do anything you want, what do you want your experience to be?” Gale explains. “Surprisingly, with 6,000 passengers on the Oasis, it didn’t ever feel crowded,” since they are spread out across vast “neighborhoods,” such as the Royal Promenade shopping and dining district; The Boardwalk, which has a full-size carousel; and the Aqua Theater in the back of the ship, which is completely open-air and features synchronized swimming and other aquatic entertainment.

“We did our opening reception in the Boardwalk/Aqua Theater space,” says Gale. “They have lampposts

that run the length of the Boardwalk, and we had 14-foot banners strung between them, welcoming our attendees onboard. We also played up the Boardwalk theme with corn dog stands and so on,” says Gale.

CSR Opportunities

Since attendees are likely to encounter unfamiliar ports and towns, a planner may elect to bring a port lecturer or historian onboard, as PartnersFinancial did on its cruise of Southeast Asia. The group also found an opportunity to engage in a CSR initiative. “PartnersFinancial embraces CSR opportunities during its Annual Convention trip in lieu of pillow gifts. The attendees find it incredibly rewarding to interact with those directly impacted. As we docked into the port of Ho Chi Minh City, formerly Saigon, we were greeted by representatives including children from the Saigon Children’s Charity.

“The children then came aboard for a traditional Vietnamese dance demonstration and receive the donation,” Zint recounts. Founded in 1992, the charity helps to give the most disadvantaged Vietnamese children a quality education, and PartnersFinancial provided \$31,732 (which the Vietnamese government matched) toward a new kindergarten that will benefit 150 children when it opens this fall.

Sold on Cruising

Securian’s “inaugural” cruise was memorable for the sheer camaraderie that developed over eight days at sea on a private vessel. “Many attendees thought an eight-day, seven-night program is a long time to be away from work and family, but in the end they were so thankful for the time they got to spend with each other and the friendships that were reinforced or developed. Some of them said, ‘I probably would have never talked to so-and-so on a shorter program,’” Roach explains. “Our CEO said it was one of the healthiest things we’ve ever done for our top performers. We’ve been bitten by the cruising bug.” **I&FMM**

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Executive Retreats

‘Spark Creative Thinking and Create a Learning Environment’

Meetings at the Ocean Reef Club, Key Largo, FL, are private, discreet and secure — a desirable feature for executive retreats. Security staff monitors the premises 24/7, and the U.S. Secret Service says it is one of the most secure communities in the country.

By Mike Bassett

Getting the right people together in the right location — that’s the meeting planner’s ultimate goal. For small meetings, such as an executive retreat, it’s a critical combination, which if achieved, can create an environment that helps attendees recharge their depleted batteries.

“I think that quite often the worst environment (for a small group) trying to get some serious business done is the big hotel with a gazillion things going on,” says Bruce Withrow, the founder of Meeting Facilitators International. “I find it to be much better to be a large fish in a small pond, rather than a small fish in a large pond, just in terms of getting things accomplished.”

The point of these retreats, Withrow says, is that a group is trying to get very focused for a period

of time on important discussions, so it has to avoid any kind of distraction that’s going to interfere with the meeting’s flow.

“I definitely have a bias towards smaller places — like country inns or boutique hotels,” he adds, “That’s where a group can really make it their own or find a niche or place within it.”

Surrounded by Water

What venue could provide a better retreat than one surrounded on three sides by water? One that offers exclusivity and privacy as well? The Ocean Reef Club, a private, member-owned oceanfront community set on 2,500 acres in Key Largo, FL, fits the bill. The Ocean Reef Club includes a 144-room inn as well as townhouses and private residences along with more than 30,000 sf of flexible meeting space. The property’s list of

recreational amenities is extensive and includes 36 holes of golf, boating, fishing, tennis and a variety of water sports.

Teambuilding opportunities abound at the venue and include the Ocean Reef Cooking School, with classes featuring culinary greats such as chefs John Besh and Frank Brunacci, and celebrated cookbook authors Patricia Wells and Joyce Goldsten as well as Ocean Reef Club’s own master chefs.

Meeting on the Chesapeake

If Gregory Powell, managing director of the Chesapeake Investment Group and president of the Chesapeake Trust Company in Kilmarnock, VA, wants to hold a meeting in an atmosphere conducive for business, he heads for the Hope and Glory Inn in Irvington, VA.

The Hope and Glory is located on

the Chesapeake Bay, just a few miles south of the company’s home office, so it certainly has location working for it, says Powell. “We’ll use it once or twice a year for employee events, client events and staff meetings. It’s a small venue in terms of space, but it is a very unique and beautiful spot.”

The inn is a boutique hotel consisting of six rooms and 10 cottages. “We are small,” says owner Dudley Patterson. “But with smaller properties you can get the whole place and our total attention, as well as dedicated meeting space with all the bells and whistles.”

The meeting house at the Hope and Glory is a renovated space with vaulted ceilings, wireless technology and an adjacent kitchen. “It’s an excellent space for a small, elite gathering,” says Powell.

The inn has its own vineyard, which is located just a short walk from the inn. The “Dog and Oyster” vineyard consists of about six acres of Vinifera and French-American hybrid vines, as well as four three-bedroom cottages, a pool and a kayak dock.

The inn also has its own cruise vessel — an oyster boat called the “Faded Glory” that can be used to ferry guests out into Chesapeake Bay — as well as a restaurant and spa, and is located next to the small town of Irvington, which has its own share of dining and upscale shopping options. “So while we’re small,” says Patterson, “we’ve made ourselves different from the typical inn and hotel, and we still have a lot to offer.”

Chesapeake Trust is a regional institution, so when it holds events attendees usually come from within a 100-mile radius of the inn. Powell has used the inn for smaller staff retreats and meetings as well as day-long customer events of between 100 and 150 people.

The last time Powell used the inn for a smaller event it was to bring

together his investment group — certified financial planners, chartered financial analysts, attorneys and top managers — of about 25 to 30 people.

“For a small group like that, it’s just a great space — charming and intimate,” says Powell. “And it is a very client-oriented experience.”

As for how meeting at the Hope and Glory facilitates getting business done, “people are certainly happy and pleased with the environment,” Powell says. “The rooms are charmingly shabby-chic, very 19th century, and the gardens are beautiful and relaxing. So

“I find it to be much better to be a large fish in a small pond, rather than a small fish in a large pond, just in terms of getting things accomplished.”



Bruce Withrow
Founder
Meeting Facilitators International
Toronto, Ontario

once you get into the conference room you just want to get your work done so you can get out and relax.

“It makes for a very collegial atmosphere where people know they are going to be well treated, can get some work done and have a little fun, too.”

Can’t Be Too Relaxed

Withrow believes that when it comes to small meetings, there is no such thing as getting too relaxed.

“I know some people think that if they’re meeting in a room with a panoramic window overlooking this gorgeous lake, that it is going to be too distracting,” he says. “I don’t think that’s the case at all. You should be able to focus on what you need to focus on, and then have the time to get outdoors and relax.

“If just the environment can distract you from getting your business

done,” he adds, “then it can’t be very important business.”

The historic Gasparilla Inn & Club built in 1913, located on Gasparilla Island on the Gulf Coast of Florida between Fort Myers and Tampa, provides an environment that both stimulates and relaxes meeting attendees. The Inn has 63 guest rooms, as well as suites in the main inn. Another 74 rooms are located among the 17 private villas and cottages near the inn.

The historic Gasparilla Inn & Club, built in 1913, can accommodate meetings up to 300 attendees, but also has a number of intimate rooms that can handle smaller events such as board meetings. Activities at the inn range from golf, tennis and spa to boating and deep-sea fishing in an area known as the “Tarpon Fishing Capital of the World.”

Ellen Tibbs, event management specialist at American Financial Group in Cincinnati, booked her company’s annual strategic planning meeting at the Gasparilla Inn & Club last November for four days and three nights. Tibbs says she learned about the club from one of her company’s senior officers who had participated in another program there and thought it would suit her company’s needs. Those needs include warm weather, “since we always have the meeting in November, and we’re from the Midwest,” Tibbs says.

In addition, Tibbs was looking for a smaller facility with plenty of amenities ranging from meeting and conference capabilities to dining and recreation options. While her group of about 50 executives has been to smaller hotels and inns as well as larger resorts, she says that her group had found better success with smaller properties for this type of group and meeting format.

“We do like the smaller boutique hotels or inns,” Tibbs says. “We’re a family-owned business, and we’re very proud of that. Gasparilla Inn & Club has more of a family feel to it, which is good for our group because that’s the kind of message that I think

Photo courtesy of Ocean Reef Club



Photo courtesy of Tulalip Resort Casino

Tulalip Resort Casino near Seattle, WA, provides state-of-the-art meeting rooms for executive retreats as well as built-in entertainment and casino gaming.

our company is trying to send to our senior officers — we're family."

In this case, the attendees had planned group events, but also plenty of opportunities for networking and blocks of time for flexible scheduling. She ended up booking half of her group in the main inn and the other half in the cottages. And although the cottages have private sleeping rooms, some of them share bathrooms.

"There was some discussion about that," Tibbs says. "But we did like the idea of splitting up into groups according to company departments, like actuarial or financial. So they did get more of a nice casual bonding experience during unscheduled times that really lent itself to group discussion because they were sharing space."

The four-day event centered on meetings and meals, although there was time for relaxation, which included golf at the Pete Dye-designed, par-72 golf course nestled along Charlotte Harbor and some deep-sea fishing.

"I think everyone was pleased," Tibbs says. "It was well-received, although we did get some feedback about sharing bathrooms! But for the most part, everyone was very relaxed, which is what you want in order to spark creative thinking and create a learning environment."

20,000 Acres of Swamp and Forest

About 500 miles to the north sits

another small, exclusive property that specializes in hosting board meetings, executive retreats and small client events. The Inn at Palmetto Bluff is located in Bluffton, in the middle of the South Carolina low country between Savannah and Hilton Head. The inn, an Auberge Resorts property, sits in the middle of 20,000 acres of low-country forest and swamp, about a 45-minute drive from Savannah.

Once visitors hit the entrance to the property, they must drive several miles through that forest and swamp to get to the inn — an experience that a resort executive says can profoundly impact the inn's guests.

Ann Newell, project manager for Maritz in Detroit, agrees with that assessment. Newell, who in March brought a small group of attorneys from the banking industry to the property, says that as soon as her car turned into the driveway towards the inn, "you got this incredible feeling. It's really inexplicable, but once you start seeing that forest and swamp, your brain does really turn to mush, and you just want to relax."

The inn, which opened about seven years ago, is adjacent to a small residential village called Wilson's Landing, which has a "Southern Norman Rockwell" feel to it, says the executive.

The Inn at Palmetto Bluff's room product consists of 50 cottages, all of which sit along the May River or an interior lagoon. They are all more than 1,000 sf in size, have fireplaces and screened-in porches overlooking the water.

For bigger groups, the inn also has access to 38 two- and three-bedroom homes, so it can host groups up to and more than 100 persons, although they also focus on smaller programs.

Each room comes with complimentary bicycles, which is really all that's needed for guests to navigate around the inn and adjacent village. For those non-cyclists, golf-carts are available for rent.

The average group size is 25 to 30, although it's not unusual for groups

to buy out the whole property. In that sense, the down economy helped the Inn at Palmetto Bluff, the executive says, as companies that used to book incentives in the Caribbean or Mexico began looking at upscale, Southern stateside properties instead so their incentive business really picked up.

One of the most distinctive meeting/function spots in the facility is the Canoe Club, located near the ruins of a 72-room mansion that burned down more than a century ago.

The club is a 10,000-sf bar and restaurant (combined with a canoe storage facility) overlooking the May River. The interior of the building includes an arched ceiling that resembles an upside-down canoe. Newell's group had its opening-night reception there and "it was just a beautiful room, with this great ceiling and windows and a veranda overlooking the water as the sun went down."

A favorite low-country pastime is the oyster roast, and the inn has an outdoor facility about a 10-minute trolley ride away that includes a riverside brick fireplace and oyster pit. "It's a great place to kick back and get down with oysters," says the executive.

Proximity to the water means plenty of boating opportunities, including kayaking, canoeing and deep-sea fishing (the May River runs out into the Atlantic Ocean). The property sits next to a salt-water embayment, which means that guests can frequently see dolphins swimming nearby, which "is pretty magical" says the executive.

A few members of Newell's group also took the opportunity to play the Jack Nicklaus-designed course at the May River Golf Club, which is rated No. 22 on *Golf Digest's* list of "America's 100 Greatest Public Golf Courses."

It was the perfect environment for a group of professionals "who are doing three times more work than normal and are completely stressed out," says Newell. "You could just see the stress coming out of their pores." **I&FMM**



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Photo by InSight Foto Inc./courtesy of Passport DMC

New Mexico

A Unique Mix of Art, Beauty and Culture for Memorable Meetings

When financial and insurance meeting planners seek a truly unique destination, one of the places they turn to is New Mexico. Corporate meeting and incentive groups choose New

By Derek Reveron

Event Planning Solutions, a full-service Albuquerque-based DMC specializing in incentive, conference and leisure groups. Attendees were housed in 65 casitas and casita suites with wood-burning kiva fireplaces, and enjoyed only-in-New Mexico activities. The main lodge of the Encantado Resort & Spa includes Terra restaurant and lounge, 5,000 sf of meeting space, a large courtyard with outdoor fireplaces, a full-service spa and movement studio, and pool.

Many of the incentive group's activities were connected to Santa Fe's thriving art scene, which has an international reputation and is one of the nation's top art markets in size and sales. Attendees toured some of the city's more than 240 art galleries, located mostly in the Canyon Road area. They attended glassblowing sessions with local artists and dinner at the home of an art dealer.

During a trip to Bandelier National Monument, the group toured pueblos, rock paintings and rock engravings of

A securities firm experienced an authentic Native American powwow including drumming to the heartbeat of the Earth and a Friendship Dance.

New Mexico's ancestral Pueblo people. They also enjoyed lunch at a vineyard and dinner at the Encantado Resort featuring traditional New Mexican foods. During the final night banquet, also featuring local fare, the group enjoyed a guitarist strumming melodies influenced by New Mexican culture. During after-dinner cocktails, guests watched stars in cloudless skies with the help of a professional star gazer and a telescope. "It was the group's first time in Santa Fe. They were mostly young adults. They thought it was a great place to visit for more adventures, and they are contemplating returning," says Helmken.

New Mexico's Draw

A financial firm's five-day incentive for 70 salespeople in Santa Fe illustrates the uncommon variety of activities that attract business groups, says Arlene Schiffer, president of Passport DMC Inc. in Santa Fe. "We did hands-on cooking classes at Santa Fe School of Cooking, toured galleries on Canyon Road. We also visited the Georgia O'Keeffe Museum and took a pottery class with artist Heidi Loewen at her studio. We did golf at the Black Mesa Golf Club and Towa Golf Club. We also offered options for mountain biking, fly fishing and white-water rafting. We brought in expert speakers to explain more about New Mexico culture," says Schiffer. The group also did a dine-around at restaurants that feature traditional New Mexico foods.

In Santa Fe, an incentive group of 50 attendees from a financial services company took full advantage of New Mexico's Native American and Hispanic cultures, according to Helmken. "The group held a dinner on the grounds of a local art gallery. The theme for that night was 'art and soul.' We set up tables and a big tent on a big grassy area. We had a flutist play during cocktails, displayed Native American art and brought in

Native American dancers after dinner. At another dinner, we had mariachi and marimba bands alternating," adds Helmken.

New Mexico's unique mix of offerings also makes it popular for corporate teambuilding activities, says Helmken. "One group worked on painting a giant canvas and then cut it into sections, and everyone gets their own piece as a reminder of the group activity. There's a lot of teambuilding that can work into the hiking as well. We break groups into teams and do scavenger hunts through the woods with GPS devices. We also do it in downtown Santa Fe and Albuquerque, which are big draws because they have so many historic places," says Helmken.

Santa Fe

Located 7,000 feet above sea level, the state capital of Santa Fe has long been a popular destination for small and mid-size groups. For several years, Santa Fe has appeared on many lists of the top U.S. cities for travelers and vacationers. In 2011, readers of *Condé Nast Traveler* magazine voted Santa Fe as the third most popular travel city in the U.S. Santa Fe certainly lives up to its slogan, "The City Different," says Christine Madden, director of sales for the Santa Fe Convention & Visitors Bureau (SFCVB). "Santa Fe is popular among corporate groups because it's authentic, and people want something that's real. There's a mystique about us. We may technically be a second-tier city, but it's on a lot of people's bucket lists," adds Madden.

In an effort to attract even more meetings and provide value, the SFCVB and its hotel partners recently introduced "Experience Santa Fe On Us." The special promotion invites groups that book at least 500 rooms per night for three or more nights to receive the following benefits: complimentary meeting space at the Santa Fe Convention Center; complimentary transportation between the center and

hotels; a complimentary welcome reception with beer, wine, local foods, Native American dancers and Native American flute player; and refund of site visit expenses up to \$1,000 after booking a qualified meeting.

"We are targeting meetings of around 500 or larger because a meeting of that size would mean use of at least

that Spanish vibe, that old-world look. It's the kind of property that's unique to Santa Fe. For us, it was a difficult place to get to because it's an hour from the (Albuquerque International Airport). Our group said that the hotel and Santa Fe was a great place for a vacation or romantic getaway, but not for a quick two-day meeting because of the transportation time involved to



Arlene Schiffer, President
Passport DMC Inc., Santa Fe, NM

"We did hands-on cooking classes at Santa Fe School of Cooking, toured galleries on Canyon Road. We brought in expert speakers to explain more about New Mexico culture."

two to three hotels in the downtown area," says Madden. "And those hotels not chosen for the meetings would receive the overflow of leisure travelers and smaller groups so that, at the end of the day, everybody's happy."

Many small groups, particularly from the Midwest, visit New Mexico to hold brief meetings. A meeting planner for an insurance firm (that wishes to remain anonymous) recently held a two-day sales meeting in Santa Fe for 40 attendees. The meeting was held at the Inn and Spa at Loretto, which has 134 guest rooms and more than 12,000 sf of meeting space. "The hotel had

and from the airport," said the meeting planner for the insurance company.

Still, small group business has increased recently, says Madden. "We were lucky enough to not get hit hard by the downward spiral of the economy, and things are picking up now," she adds.

Hotels and Meeting Space

Santa Fe has ample meeting and hotel space for the small and medium-size groups it seeks to attract. The four-year-old Santa Fe Convention Center (SFCC) features 40,000 sf of total event space, an 18,000-sf ballroom



Photo courtesy of High Desert Event Planning Solutions

Albuquerque-based DMC High Desert Event Planning Solutions arranged a reception for attendees among the sculptures at one of Santa Fe's thriving art galleries.

and four meeting rooms. More than 1,500 guest rooms are located near the SFCC. Located just north of Santa Fe, the 395-room Buffalo Thunder Resort & Casino features 66,000 sf of meeting space. Owned and operated by the Pueblo of the Pojoaque, Buffalo Thunder showcases pueblo architecture and décor, including three giant

lection of more than 15,000 historical items. Indoors, the building can host up to 300 people. Outdoor spaces accommodate 500 guests.

Groups can experience authentic New Mexican culture within short drives of Santa Fe. Tesuque Pueblo has been continuously occupied since the

“It was the group’s first time in Santa Fe. They were mostly young adults. They thought it was a great place to visit for more adventures, and they are contemplating returning,”

Coryn Kiefer Helmken, Vice President and Creative Director
High Desert Event Planning Solutions, Albuquerque, NM



bronze sculptures and more than 200 pieces of art. There is a Las Vegas-style casino with 1,200 slot machines and a 10-table poker room, as well as an indoor pool and a large whirlpool. Fine New Mexico-style cuisine is available at the Red Sage Restaurant, Turquoise Trail Bar Grill and Mica Restaurant.

The DoubleTree by Hilton Santa Fe is undergoing a renovation of its 130 guest rooms, lobby and 4,000 sf of meeting space.

Unique Santa Fe

Santa Fe has a number of museums that can accommodate groups. These include the Georgia O’Keeffe Museum, which showcases more than 3,000 American works of art and can host receptions for up to 150 people in the foyer, galleries and courtyard. The Museum of Indian Arts and Culture has more than 75,000 exhibits and accommodates groups of up to 800 people for receptions and black-tie galas. Venues include the 100-seat O’Keeffe Theater and a sculpture garden that accommodates 15 people. The Museum of International Folk Art, which includes more than 130,000 items from more than 100 countries, boasts a 165-seat auditorium for groups. Built in 1610, the Palace of the Governors is the nation’s oldest continuously occupied structure and features a col-

lection of more than 15,000 historical items. Indoors, the building can host up to 300 people. Outdoor spaces accommodate 500 guests. Groups can experience authentic New Mexican culture within short drives of Santa Fe. Tesuque Pueblo has been continuously occupied since the

Albuquerque

Albuquerque is New Mexico’s largest city and one of the nation’s most affordable for travelers. The city ranks No. 9 on *Hotwire.com*’s top 10 Travel Value Index cities for travelers. The rankings evaluated prices on hotels, rental cars, airfares and entertainment. Albuquerque also offers convenient access by air. The city’s airport, Albuquerque International Sunport, is located less than a 30-minute drive from any meeting destination in the area, including the multipurpose Albuquerque Convention Center (ACC), located downtown. The ACC, which completed a multi-million-dollar renovation three years ago, provides more than 167,000 sf of exhibit space and 27 meeting rooms. There also is a 31,000-sf ballroom and a 2,500-seat auditorium.

Meeting Space and Hotels

There also is a growing supply of new and renovated hotels. The Albuquerque area offers more than 16,000 hotel rooms with more than 900 within walking distance of the ACC. Albuquerque’s largest downtown hotel, the Hyatt Regency Albuquerque, is located near the ACC and offers 395 rooms and more than 30,000 sf of newly renovated meeting space.

Located six miles from the Albuquerque International Sunport, the Crowne Plaza Albuquerque reopened in September 2011 after a \$14 million renovation and a brand-name change from a Hilton property. The 261-room hotel offers 26,000 sf of meeting space, including an 8,000-sf conference center.

Located between Santa Fe and Albuquerque, at the base of the Sandia Mountains, is the Hyatt Regency Tamaya Resort & Spa. The property features 350 pueblo-style guest rooms. More than 70,000 sf of indoor and outdoor meeting space is available, along with the 12,000-sf Tamaya Ballroom. More than 8,000 sf of outdoor function space sits along the Rio Grande River. Southeast of Albuquerque, the Inn of the Mountain Gods Resort & Casino is owned and operated by the Mescalero Apache Tribe. Located near the mountain resort community of Ruidoso, the Inn of the Mountain Gods offers 273 luxury rooms and suites, and 40,000 sf of event and meeting space, including 15 meeting rooms. There’s also a 38,000-sf Las Vegas-style casino and an 18-hole championship golf course. Entertainers have included country music star Ray Price, Mescalero Warrior Challenge Cage Fights, and Grammy-nominated Kellie Pickler, who appeared on the “American Idol” television program.

Only in Albuquerque

Groups visiting Albuquerque will not go wanting for truly unique activities. Every October, more than 500 hot-

air balloons surge skyward as part of the Albuquerque International Balloon Fiesta, the world’s top ballooning event. The Santa Fe Farmers Market is one of the largest in the nation. The 50-year-old market includes a 9,000-sf facility suitable for receptions and meetings for groups up to 600 people. Old Town is among Albuquerque’s most historic areas, featuring distinctive New Mexico architecture and ambience. The district features more than 150 galleries, shops, cafes and restaurants.

Las Cruces

Located between the Rio Grande River and the Mesilla Valley, Las Cruces is becoming an increasingly popular destination. No wonder — the city averages 350 days of sunshine a year and offers a variety of historical and cultural attractions. Additionally, the meeting infrastructure is growing. The Las Cruces Convention Center (LCCC), which opened in December 2010, boasts a 15,000-sf exhibition hall,

more than 30,000 sf of meeting space and a 9,000-sf ballroom.

Most recently, Philip San Filippo was named as the new executive director of the Las Cruces Convention & Visitors Bureau. He brings more than 20 years of experience in the hospitality and tourism industry to his new position. The city offers more than 2,200 hotel rooms with more than 98,000 sf of meeting space. Properties include the Hotel Encanto de Las Cruces with 203 rooms and 10,000 sf of meeting space. The Days Inn & Suites Mesilla Valley Conference Center features 158 rooms and 8,000 sf of meeting space. The 114-room Ramada Palms de Las Cruces has 7,000 sf of meeting space.

Venues and Activities

The New Mexico Farm & Ranch Museum in Las Cruces showcases agricultural methods historically used in the state. Several indoor spaces are available for group events. Built in 1848, Alameda House is one of the

city’s oldest historic properties. The estate offers more than 3,000 sf of indoor meeting space and 10 guest rooms. Constructed in 1926, the 422-seat Rio Grande Theatre is available for group rentals.

Final Thoughts

From golf and gaming to centuries-old cultures and skiing, New Mexico has a rare combination of activities for planners and attendees. The Land of Enchantment, which celebrates its statehood centennial this year, offers a mix of hotels combining the best of intimate old-world style and modern properties. From Santa Fe and Albuquerque to Taos and Las Cruces, New Mexico infuses meetings with an authentic and unique blend of Native American, Spanish, Mexican and Western cultures as well as awe-inspiring landscapes of mountains, canyons, plains and forests. Planners and attendees will surely be enchanted by New Mexico.

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Park Hyatt Beaver Creek Resort and Spa, Beaver Creek, CO, has named **James Steinbach** as director of group sales, responsible for the Northeast market, as well as international corporate and association markets. Steinbach was vice president of conference sales for the Vail Valley Partnership. **Rowland Cheeks** was named as senior sales manager for the mid-Atlantic, Southeast, Texas corporate and association markets. Cheeks was senior sales manager at Cheyenne Mountain Resort in Colorado Springs.

Angelina Preza was named director of sales and marketing for the Sheraton Keauhou Bay Resort & Spa,

Kona, HI. Preza, a native of Hawaii, was senior director of sales for the Big Island Visitors Bureau on the Island of Hawaii.

Juan J. Garcia was named area director of sales and marketing for Hiltons of Washington, DC, representing Capital Hilton and Washington Hilton. He was director of sales and marketing for Hilton Orlando.

Kasia Bronisz was named director of sales and marketing for the Mandarin Oriental, Atlanta in Atlanta, GA. She was director of sales and marketing for Mandarin Oriental, Prague.

Mayfair Hotel & Spa, Coconut Grove,

FL, has named **Saun Lightbourne**, CHSP, CMP, as executive director of sales and marketing. He was area director of sales and marketing for Menin Hotel Group in Miami Beach.

Silversea Cruises has named **Cecilia S. Blevins** as corporate and incentive sales director. She formerly served in incentive sales at Windstar Cruises and Norwegian Cruise Line.

The Hilton Sandestin Beach Golf Resort & Spa, Destin, FL, has named **Micah Carter** as regional sales manager responsible for Kentucky and Tennessee. He previously worked for R.L. Campbell Management, based in Jacksonville, FL.

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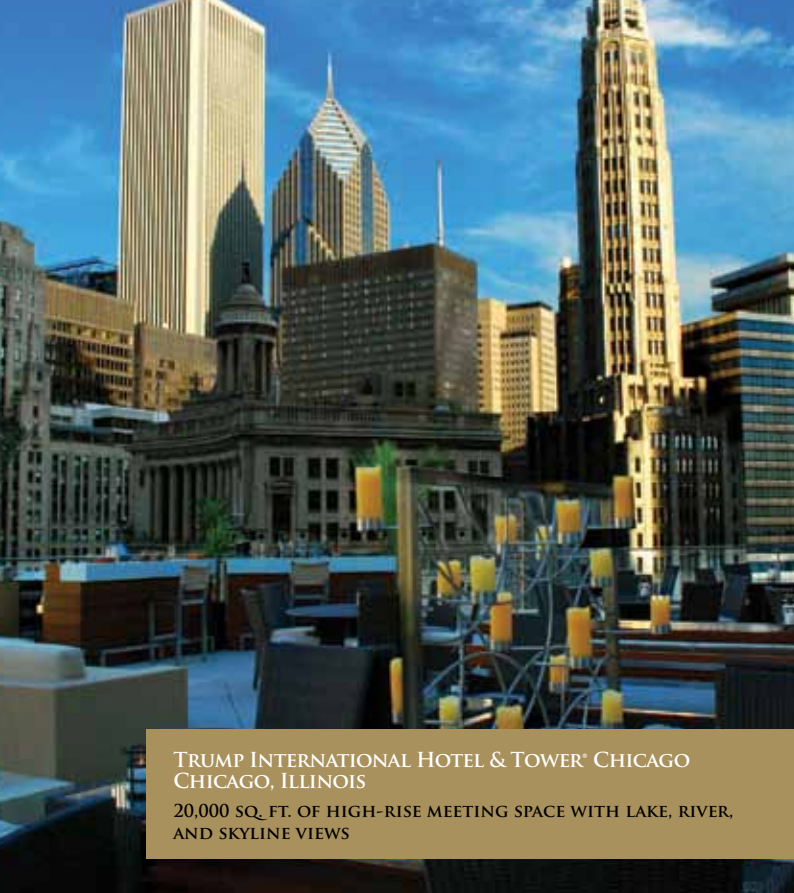
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