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# CORPORATE & INCENTIVE TRAVEL

THE MAGAZINE FOR CORPORATE MEETING AND INCENTIVE TRAVEL PLANNERS



## The Theme Park Difference

Planning Meetings That March to the Beat of a Different Drummer

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Colonial Williamsburg's fife and drum corps escorted TriSept meeting attendees from the Williamsburg Lodge to the taverns.

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Photo courtesy of Axel Edling and David Spicer



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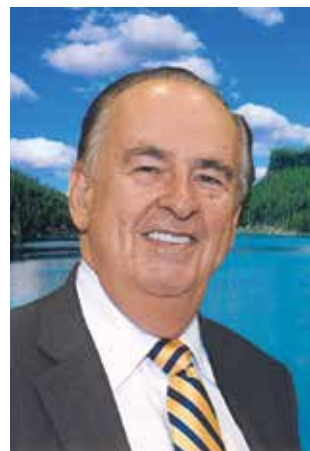
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# Publisher's Message

## Looking Ahead

As we enter our 39th year of magazine publishing, I am heartened to witness another recovery from a recession. At this time last year we noted that because the hospitality industry is so vitally connected to the general health of our economy, we expected slow but steady improvement. And that has come to fruition. Due to the increase in business investments, stable corporate profits and the slowly improving U.S. economy, the Global Business Travel Association predicts travel spending to reach \$288.8 billion in 2014, a 7.2 percent increase over 2013. They also predict that trip volume will increase as well, as will growth in all business-travel spending, including group and international travel.



Planners weigh in on next year in "Outlook 2014 — An Overall Sense of Optimism Prevails as Flat Budgets Trigger New Challenges" on page 16. Christine Gorham, CMP, senior associate at Booz Allen Hamilton, suggests companies are "holding tight and adopting a wait-and-see attitude in terms of what they're doing. On the other hand, our clients understand that meetings are important, so we are continuing to plan future meetings.

However, with prices increasing for next year, as a planner we have to either reduce budgets or reduce the size of or cancel some meetings."

What's a meeting planner to do? Gorham and others say the trend is shorter meetings for one thing. "For example, what used to be a two-day meeting is being reduced to a one-day meeting," she says. "And some organizations are keeping their meetings more local as a way of reducing costs and travel time."

Still, companies recognize how important it is to say thank you to their employees for their hard work and extra efforts. In "The Theme Park Difference — Planning Meetings That March to the Beat of a Different Drummer" on page 28, Robert Spicer, president of TriSept Corporation, rewarded 65 attendees with a weekend event in Colonial Williamsburg over the July Fourth holiday. One of the highlights was a fife and drum escort from the Williamsburg Lodge to the taverns, which is depicted on our cover this month.

The Meeting & Incentive Travel Industry Events Calendar 2014, a special calendar that notes all major industry events, is included in this issue. This "keeper" calendar is ready for you to pull out and use all year long.

Harvey Grotsky  
Publisher

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## Las Vegas Leaders Attend 'Connecting America Through Travel' Conference

LAS VEGAS, NV — Leaders from Las Vegas's travel and tourism industry and business community participated in the inaugural Connecting America Through Travel (CATT) conference on November 20 in Washington, DC.



Las Vegas Convention and Visitors Authority President/CEO Rossi Ralenkotter (l) and U.S. Travel Association President and CEO Roger Dow (r) meet with U.S. Secretary of Transportation Anthony Foxx at the inaugural Connecting America Through Travel Conference in Washington, DC, to discuss how transportation infrastructure impacts the tourism industry.

The event featured speakers including U.S. Secretary of Transportation Anthony Foxx; the Honorable Ray LaHood, the former U.S. Secretary of Transportation; the Honorable Edward G. Rendell, former governor of Pennsylvania who now serves as the co-chair of Building America's Future; Jonathan Tisch, Chairman of Loews Hotels & Resorts; and, Roger Dow, president and CEO of U.S. Travel Association. [www.lvcva.com](http://www.lvcva.com)

The forum was organized by the U.S. Travel Association and was co-chaired by Las Vegas Convention and Visitors Authority (LVCVA) President/CEO Rossi Ralenkotter, former chairman of U.S. Travel. The event focused on the condition of America's travel infrastructure and how it affects the travel industry's bottom line and its prospects for growth.

More than 200 people participated in the event, which addressed a variety of topics from new research examining the links between infrastructure investment and growth in the travel sector to the challenges in maintaining and building efficient, connected transportation systems.

## Marriott Meetings Booking Comes With a Free iPad Mini

BETHESDA, MD — Earlier this year, Marriott Hotels introduced the Red Coat Direct meetings app, which gives meeting organizers the ability to adjust and edit their requests and preferences without ever leaving the meeting room. Planners who book a meeting at participating Marriott Hotels in the U.S. between now and April 30, 2014, during value dates will receive a free iPad Mini. The Red Coat Direct meetings app allows planners to make requests — such as more chairs, more coffee, a change in room temperature — or check the status of their request through the app. Using any Web-enabled device, organizers' requests are routed to the department that can enact the change as well as to the event manager assigned to their event. Each app is personalized for the meeting and sent to the meeting organizer three days ahead of the meeting. The promotion also is valid at participating Renaissance Hotels and JW Marriott hotels in the U.S. In order to qualify for the free iPad promotion, meetings must have 75 cumulative nights. For full terms and conditions, participating hotels and dates, visit [www.ipadpromotion.marriott.com](http://www.ipadpromotion.marriott.com).

## Site 'Celebrates the World of Motivational Experiences'

ORLANDO, FL — Site welcomed 400 motivational events and incentive travel professionals representing more than 250 industry organizations from 47 countries to Orlando to celebrate "40 Years Forward" at the Site Global Conference 2013 held December 7-10 at the Loews Portofino Bay Hotel at Universal Orlando Resort. Site and conference host Visit Orlando showcased the best of Orlando motivational experiences with entertainment extravaganzas and numerous tour options. The educational program offered more than twice the total hours of learning as last year.

Site recognized and honored the contributions of Site's past presidents and introduced the formation of the Site Past Presidents' Council. Twenty-five past presidents attending the conference jointly presented the first Richard

Ross Past Presidents' Award for outstanding service to the incentive travel industry. The award, named in honor of Site's ninth president, who died in the September 11 terrorist attacks in New York City, recognizes an individual or organization that has furthered the vision, ideals and ethics of Site.

"As the premier event where 'the world of incentive travel and motivational events meets,' this year's conference will honor and celebrate Site's past while also preparing us for the future," stated Kevin Hinton, chief staff officer for Site and the Site International Foundation. "Site members are experiencing a recovery first-hand in the incentive sector, and those present in Orlando will be able to make critical connections in order to sustain this success into 2014 and beyond." [www.siteglobal.com](http://www.siteglobal.com)



Photo credits: 1. Wynn Las Vegas © RD/ Kabik/ Retna Digital, 2. Long Beach CVB Jim Conner, 3. EIBTM, 4. & 5. FCP, 6. Christie's Photographic Solutions

1 Wynn Las Vegas recently unveiled two floral Installations by celebrity event designer Preston Bailey. Using more than 33,000 flowers, Preston's hot air balloon and majestic horse-drawn carousel (shown above) will reside indefinitely at the North and South Atrium of the hotel. 2 The Pacific Ballroom special event venue recently made its grand opening debut as Long Beach, California's newest, largest and most innovative meeting and special event space. The evening, titled "The Sky's the Limit," was a series of spectacular reveals, which showcased the Long Beach Arena ballroom's versatility as a special-events space. The more than 1,000 guests included professional meeting and special event planners from across the country. 3 Patrick Delaney, vice president, industry relations at MCI Group was presented with the EIBTM 2013 Lifetime Achievement Award in Barcelona by Graeme Barnett (r), senior exhibition director, Reed Travel Exhibitions, who said, "The timing is right for us to recognize Patrick's enormous contribution to our industry. His passion, commitment and enthusiasm are endless, and I know that his unique style and personality has endeared him to the many people he has met and worked alongside during his travels around the world." 4 Hospitality partners enjoying the 2013 FICP Annual Conference at the Sheraton Boston Hotel, and 5 Heather Huebner, manager, corporate events at Hartford Steam Boiler Inspection & Insurance Co. flanked by local entertainment at the conference, which boasted more than 650 attendees including a record-breaking number of planner registrations. Education sessions focused on areas such as meeting trends, professional growth and meeting planner solutions, among other areas of interest. The annual conference silent auction raised a record \$75,707 for Junior Achievement and Junior Achievement of Northern New England. 6 Site celebrated 10 extraordinary motivational programs with the presentation of the Site Crystal Awards at the Site Global Conference held December 7-10 in Orlando, Florida. "Always striving, never settling in the creation of exceptional motivational experiences that deliver business results — that is the hallmark of Site Crystal Award recipients," said Site President David Sand (r), who also presented Ray Bloom, chairman of IMEX Group, Site's long-term Crystal Awards sponsoring partner, with a token of the organization's appreciation.



By Michael J. Kelly

## 10 Things You Need to Know When Traveling Abroad

Traveling outside of the United States nowadays requires a great deal of planning and forethought. Whether your group is small or large, these 10 valuable points will help ensure a safe and successful journey.

**1. Always carry an IDP.** According to the American Automobile Association (AAA), International Driving Permits (IDPs) are valid in more than 150 countries and can be necessary if you plan to drive during your travels, since many countries do not recognize U.S. driver's licenses. Note that applicants must be at least 18 years of age, present two passport-sized photographs and a valid U.S. driver's license to avoid any hassles. An IDP from AAA or the National Automobile Club costs approximately \$15 and can be paid by check, money order or major credit card. While traveling, I recommend keeping the IDP in a safe place as sometimes it can be just as valuable as your passport.

**2. Protect your passport.** Your passport is the most important document to pack when traveling overseas. I suggest having a few copies in different places. I always keep a copy in my overseas suitcase and with my family members at home. I also have a picture of it stored in my phone for emergency purposes. Make sure you have your destination's U.S. embassy contact information on hand just in case your passport is lost or stolen. Having a travel assistance membership also can help. For example, On Call International assists with lost and stolen documents, which can aid in the passport retrieval process.

**3. Enroll in STEP.** In addition to sharing your itinerary with a trusted friend and/or family member, don't forget to register your trip with the U.S. Department of State's Smart Traveler Enrollment Program (STEP) if you'll be traveling out of the country. It only takes a few minutes to fill out the online form, and you'll not only automatically receive timely updates on travel alerts, but the information you enter (including your

emergency contacts) can help the embassy or consulate locate you in the event of an emergency.

**4. Protect your luggage.** While you can use a normal lock for your suitcase, the Transportation Security Administration (TSA) has the right to cut it off if they need to inspect it. Consider investing in TSA-approved luggage locks, which are sold in airports and retail stores nationwide. That way, you still have a lock after the inspection because TSA officials use a universal master

key to open it (they are also required to leave you a note before re-locking it). Also, make sure your luggage is properly identified with your contact information including full name, current address and phone number. Because black luggage is most common in the airport, it is important to have a key distinguishing feature on your suitcase, whether it be the stitching, a ribbon or just a different color or print. I recommend taking a quick photo with your smartphone of your items such as luggage, purse, etc., so you can easily show these to others in the event you misplace them or they go missing. If you misplace your bags in the airport, the first thing you should do is report it missing to a TSA official and your airline. Next, if you have On Call International's services or those of another travel assistance company, notify them immediately so they can start hunting it down with your airline while you continue your travels. Do not miss your flight if you still can't find your bags. Your stuff can always get on the flight, although you may not be able to.

**5. Understand the risks.** Different places require different levels of precaution. For example, Western women traveling to some parts of India have reported incidents of verbal and physical harassment by groups of men in crowded locations such as market places, train stations, buses and public streets. And some large cities in India such as Delhi experience the highest number of crimes against women. Before your next trip, check out the Department of State's Country Specific Information page for trustworthy guidance regarding the security landscape of your destination. Having a good handle



on the security nuances of your destination can go a long way in preventing potential security mishaps from occurring on your trip.

**6. Develop cultural awareness.** An important part of traveling abroad is paying close (and sensitive) attention to a country's culture. For example, consider learning some important key words and phrases in the country's language, such as "please," "thank you" and "help me." Google Translator is a great site to reference. They even have a mobile app that you can download and use on the fly. In addition to the language, learn anything and everything you can about the country's cultural norms, values and customs. This can include dress codes, local attitudes toward women, appropriate (and inappropriate) hand gestures, views on timeliness, limitations of local law enforcement and more. In addition to your trusted information sources, *CultureCrossing.net* is a great place to go for cultural information on commonly visited countries around the world.

**7. Be street smart.** Pickpockets are very common in all parts of the world. Unfortunately, pickpockets can happen in any large crowd environment. I suggest that women wear cross-body bags to have more control of their belongings, and men put a rubber band around their wallet to create resistance against their pants while sightseeing or navigating crowded public venues. Limit fancy jewelry or handbags and follow the local cultural standards so you blend in and are less of a target. Pickpockets are often well trained, so keep an eye on your personal belongings at all times.

**8. Keep a closed-door policy.** Most hotels will be filled to capacity and guests should expect constant foot traffic in and out of hotels. Think of your room as your home, and if someone is knocking on the door, make sure to ask the individual on the other end why they need to come in.

If you didn't request a hotel bellhop to bring up towels or shampoo, it's best to stay safe and communicate via phone or through the door. Don't open your hotel door to so-called "room inspectors" who will swipe a valuable or two as they pretend to check the quality of housekeeping. When leaving your room for the day, keep your hotel key with you, instead of at the front desk, and leave the do-not-disturb sign on your door so your room appears occupied.

**9. Mix up your money.** While credit cards are useful when visiting any foreign destination, it's also beneficial to have some currency from the place you are visiting. Don't use an ATM machine if someone is standing around you. Make sure to watch out for suspicious cameras meant to record your movements and/or the keyboard as you enter a PIN. Don't keep all your valuables in one place. In the event something gets stolen, you should have some extra cash or credit cards stored in the hotel safe or another secret, secure place. Credit card companies can provide travelers with a new card very quickly; be sure to check which cards have the best policies before heading abroad. Travel assistance companies also can assist travelers with credit card replacement and obtaining emergency funds in the event a wallet or purse is lost or stolen.

**10. Get covered.** Travel assistance companies provide proactive travel assistance to prepare for travels abroad before travelers leave home. On Call International also provides assistance for travelers who may experience emergencies of all kinds, including emergency medical evacuations back home or to a safe and qualified local hospital, access to a 24-hour nurse helpline, security assistance including political and natural disaster evacuation, as well as worldwide legal assistance, translation and interpreter assistance, and help with lost or stolen travel documents and credit cards. **C&IT**

“Your passport is the most important document to pack when traveling overseas. I suggest having a few copies in different places.”



Michael J. Kelly

is the president and CEO of On Call International, which he founded in 1995. Located in New England, the company makes available medical, personal, travel, concierge and security services to more than 10 million customers annually. Kelly is a founding board member of the U.S. Travel Insurance Association and vice-chairman of The International Assistance Group — an international network of medical assistance companies. [www.oncallinternational.com](http://www.oncallinternational.com)

# Transform YOUR Meetings



## Use These Powerful Tools to Increase Engagement

By Derek Reveron

Experts predict a growing demand for meeting planners who can plan meetings and incentives that support corporate engagement goals.

Sandra Daniel, president and CEO of Fire Light Group, a WI-based meeting planning and incentive consulting firm, explains why: “Corporations are driving engagement, not meeting planners. But planners are becoming a piece of engagement strategy. Many planners have a background in moving people from place to place efficiently, but that is completely different from engagement. Planners who aren’t well versed in engagement need to partner with somebody who is or get educated on it. Planners who don’t could be left behind in coming years,” says Daniel.

Companies increasingly want planners who are also knowledgeable about the business strategy of engagement — increasing employees’ emotional and intellectual attachment to an organization’s goals and mission. Engagement also applies to the level of attachment that customers, vendors and clients have to products and services.

Engagement is becoming more popular because it impacts the bottom line.

Engaged workers have higher productivity, loyalty, commitment and job satisfaction, according to “Economics of Engagement,” a white paper released by the Enterprise Engagement Alliance (EEA), a Washington, DC-based organization that supports education and outreach in the emerging area of engagement. Additionally, data collected over several years by The Center for Talent Solutions reveals that engaged employees perform 22 percent better than non-engaged workers.

Encouraged by such data, more corporations are implementing company-wide engagement strategies that also include engagement goals for meetings and incentives. According to the 2012 Trends in Global Engagement Report by human resources solutions provider Aon Hewitt, goals are typically based on these factors known to increase engagement: recognition, brand alignment, organization reputation, career opportunities and managing performance.

Bruce Bolger, managing di-

rector of the EEA, notes that the growing role of engagement gives planners an opportunity to elevate their roles within their companies. “The implications of engagement for meetings are almost transformational. Engagement involves having strong communica-

tions programs, learning, collaboration, rewards and recognition — all of which involve meetings. When you look at meetings in the context of engagement, they are powerful tools because they involve face-to-face interaction, building personal relationships and unforgettable experiences,” says Bolger.

The idea of meetings and incentives without engagement goals is starting to change, says Daniel, who planned a five-day incentive trip for 60 salespeople for a client that conducted the event for years without an engagement strategy. About two years ago, a key executive from the company told Daniels that the company wasn’t getting the results it should from the incentive program.

The problem? Daniel says the incentive program lacked a strategy that encouraged engagement between the sales team and product vendors. “In the past, they just put people in resorts and said have fun. The salespeople weren’t engaged with vendors about how they support sales efforts in the field. Vendors wouldn’t see much of the salespeople during the trip and would ask, ‘How can we engage with these top producers when we don’t even see them for five days?’” says Daniel.

So Daniel ramped up interactive activities. “Right

now, we are changing the mindset from not doing anything with engagement. We started doing some networking sessions, receptions, dinners and gatherings where they could both be involved. We matched salespeople with vendors for activities such as tours of popular sites,



Sandra Daniel, President and CEO  
Fire Light Group, Madison, WI

*“While the company can’t send everybody on an incentive trip, it can engage that next tier of workers by offering a system where they could earn...a trip, flat-screen TVs, dinners, sporting events, gift cards and movie tickets.”*

horseback riding and catamaran sailing,” adds Daniel.

The company’s efforts to engage employees through rewards involved more than modifications to the annual incentive trip. The company also conducted a survey of the sales staff to determine why turnover was so high and how employees felt about the company. The survey sought responses to statements such as: “My employer understands what I do” and “I am valued by my leader.”

The survey revealed that 95 percent of salespeople who didn’t qualify for the incentive were actively disengaged because they felt they helped increase business while watching others get the exotic trips.

Based on the survey results, the company broadened its incentive program. According to Daniels, the company decided to implement an online engagement-type portal that offers various levels of recognition and reward for all employees. “While the company can’t send everybody on an incentive trip, it can engage that next tier of workers by offering a system where they could earn points and at the end of the year exchange them for things such as a trip, flat-screen TVs, dinners, tickets for sporting events, gift cards and movie tickets,” says Daniel.

The portal allows employees to earn points by engaging in quizzes

and product information to learn more about the company. In addition, employees can nominate each other for rewards, and the portal encourages managers to give on-the-spot rewards to an employee for exceptional performance.

The next step is to centralize every company engagement program online,

including incentive trips, says Daniel. “We will also involve higher-level engagement tactics such as a corporate social responsibility program (CSR),” says Daniel.

### CSR as an Engagement Tool

The Minneapolis office of Aimia, a global loyalty management company, developed an engagement-oriented CSR program for Oracle, a Redwood Shores, CA-based manufacturer and marketer of computer hardware and software systems and products. Tina Gaccetta, Aimia’s vice president of client services, explains, “We recently developed (a CSR program) with our client Oracle as part of a larger incentive travel program to Hawaii. Oracle had very specific goals — to engage attendees in a CSR activity that was extraordinary and enjoyable yet contributed to a cause dear to the local community,” says Gaccetta.

Oracle’s CSR consisted of spending an entire day in Maui’s Maalaea Bay helping shark researchers from the University of Miami’s R.J. Dunlap Marine Conservation Program capture and tag sharks for research purposes. “This experience was an eye-opener for the Oracle guests who not only had to rid themselves of shark fears, but learn and react quickly around these creatures in order to accomplish the task at hand — all in a short period of time. The activity exceeded the client’s expectations as attendees took a







Photo courtesy of CurA-Sea Aquatic Adventures

Oracle attendees engaged with shark researchers to capture and tag sharks during the company's CSR program in Hawaii — increasing employee engagement.

giant step out of their comfort zone, and helped the local community by catching and tagging four sharks," says Gaccetta.

Gaccetta says the shark program worked. "From a business perspective, it increased employee engagement and motivation to achieve the trip award in future years. Moreover, the client appreciated that the activity took a single event experience and extended it throughout the year since participants are able to track 'their' sharks via a special website," says Gaccetta.

The Oracle CSR program also serves to illustrate Aimia's philosophy on fostering engagement through meetings and incentives. "When working with companies to engage with employees, we tailor the event or experience to make sure it aligns with not only with the company's business objectives and brand, but with the corporate culture and attendee interests," says Gaccetta.

### Targeting the Whole Work Force

Meetings and incentives also can target specific groups of employees who feel disengaged. Bolger cites an example of a technology company that sponsored an incentive trip for salespeople at a resort in Florida. The company expanded its three-day incentive to include service technicians, increasing the number of participants to 250, to send a message to the entire work force that service technicians are as important as salespeople and deserve the same star treat-

ment. "There were events in which technicians and salespeople participated together — golf, tennis, deep-sea fishing and snorkeling. At the awards banquet, technicians were recognized in the same manner as salespeople. Salespeople were awarded for sales goals, and service people got awards for productivity and quality goals. Bringing different compa-

ny departments together for an incentive is becoming more common than it used to be because of the engagement movement. Companies are realizing that their brand is their people," says Bolger.

### Tweeting to Improve Engagement

The use of new tech tools and social media such as Twitter also play a growing role fostering engagement among meeting and incentive attendees, according to experts like



**Jessica Levin, CMP, CAE, President and Chief Connector**  
Seven Degrees Communications LLC, Edison, NJ

Jeff Hurt, executive vice president, education and engagement of Twinsburg, OH-based Velvet Chainsaw Consulting.

Hurt, in an October 2013 blog "Now Proven! Using Twitter at Conferences Increases Attendee Engagement" cites compelling research by Education Professor Christine Greenhow, Michigan State University, who devised a study on Twitter as a new form of literacy. Hurt says Greenhow's results showed that adults who tweet during a class and as part of the instruction are more engaged with the course content; are more engaged with the instructor; are more engaged with other students; and have

higher grades than the other students.

Greenhow explains, "The students get more engaged because they feel it is connected to something real, that it's not just learning for the sake of learning. It feels authentic to them."

Twitter and other forms of social media can be beneficial tools for meeting planners once they improve social media literacy among their attendees. A comment posted to Hurt's blog by a former social media concierge and educator for a large corporate event in the IT world noted that when attendees were asked whether or not they used social media, answers included "I'm not interested in what people had for breakfast," and "Isn't that just for kids?"

"However," Greenhow said, "when we explained how important and valuable social media are for their career and business goals, you should have seen their eyes light up. Once they got this, they were eager to get going. We would then provide a quick experience for them, such as setting up their profile on Twitter or creating a tweet with

the conference hashtag. In addition, we provided short 15-minute tutorials for those who had more questions."

Jessica Levin, CMP, CAE, and president of Seven Degrees Communications LLC an Edison, NJ-based company that provides meeting strategy, design, engagement and education services agrees that training is very important when it comes to new tools. Her firm employs various forms of social media such as Twitter, mobile apps and more on behalf of their clients. "It might be the use of a mobile app at the event. It might be using games. You can do anything from building an entire event around a game

or using it in a session or networking event or bringing it onto a trade show floor and getting attendees and sponsors involved," says Levin.

Activities that Levin uses to boost engagement include scavenger hunts that require attendees to use mobile phones to scan QR codes. The codes provide hints that include websites, online videos or messages providing information about a company's products or services, says Levin. The hunt can take place in any meeting venue, indoors or outdoors, and as part of an educational session or fun activity that connects attendees with each other and their companies.

Levin also promotes engagement with mobile apps such as Goosechase, which allows users to customize a scavenger hunt using photos. "We can give people different missions to take pictures and upload them once they are completed. It can engage attendees with the company by, for instance, having them find and take pictures of its various products. People get points for each mission and can win by accumulating the most," says Levin.

Levin suggests using the appropriate technology to engage attendees. "If it's the wrong audience, you can have the opposite effect and disengage people. If

### Expert Advice

Meeting planners who focus on engagement strategies and other experts in the field offer the following advice.

To gauge a company's engagement strategy for meetings and incentives, Bolger suggests asking these questions:



**Tina Gaccetta, Vice President of Client Services**  
Aimia, Minneapolis, MN

*"The activity exceeded the client's expectations as attendees took a giant step out of their comfort zone, and helped the local community by catching and tagging four sharks."*

- Does the company have engagement goals for meetings and incentives intended to impact revenue, profits or other bottom-line results?
  - Are there company-wide engagement goals?
  - Does the company measure the results of meeting-specific engagement goals?
- Susan Adams, director of engagement, Dittman Incentive Marketing, a Brunswick, NJ-based provider of incentive, recognition and rewards programs, keys in on the client's brand. "After meeting with a company, a planner should always come away with an understanding of

*"Engagement really must start with an organizational culture and defined goals. The message comes first. Then the means to deliver it can be developed."*

**Susan Adams, Director of Engagement**  
Dittman Incentive Marketing, New Brunswick, NJ

they aren't technologically savvy about games, apps and social media, they may get frustrated with it and end up resenting the company or not enjoying the activity. That's why, when we introduce technology, we make sure there is training and onsite support so people can become comfortable with it," Levin says.

the organization's brand values and how it intends to engage and inspire employees to live that brand through the event. The planner must understand the organization's brand message to the outside world," says Adams.

When it comes to measuring the impact of engagement initiatives, planners must move beyond the traditional post-

meeting event surveys. Bolger notes that traditional questionnaires measure the success of meetings with questions such as: "Did you like the meeting?" "Did you like your room?" "Did you like your food?"

Bolger says a better measurement of engagement efforts includes questions about changes in attitude and behavior

such as: "Are you more likely to refer someone to work for this company?" "Are you more likely to recommend our product or services to customers?" or "Are you more likely to work harder?"

Are there certain types of meeting and incentive activities that are more likely to promote engagement? Not really, says Adams. "It is not as simple as just holding a certain kind of meeting or having a specific teambuilding activity to somehow ignite engagement. Engagement really must start with an organizational culture and defined goals. The message comes first. Then the means to deliver it can be developed with the specific audience in mind," Adams advises.

Gaccetta agrees. "We have found that there is no single solution or incentive that appeals to everyone, and that's why it is so vital to listen and take insights from the company and incorporate them into the planning and execution of any program," she says.

Engagement strategies are becoming more and more common as companies attempt to tie meeting and incentive activities to specific engagement goals. "By linking the rules to the rewards and by keeping the promise of the event front of mind throughout, the incentive travel program or event becomes a powerful tool for engagement," notes Adams. **C&IT**





# Outlook 2014



## An Overall Sense of Optimism Prevails as Flat Budgets Trigger New Challenges

By John Buchanan

For the first time in five years, professional meeting planners are generally optimistic that the industry is once again healthy, and that although it might never return to the free-spending days before the recession, the dark clouds that once loomed over it are gone.

But just as there is a positive outlook for 2014, there are serious concerns, too, most of them related to rising costs that must be reconciled against budgets that are not growing.

Kati Quigley, CMP, senior director of worldwide partner community marketing at Microsoft in Redmond, WA, is optimistic that 2014 will be another year of recovery and growth for the meeting industry. "I think there is generally a very positive outlook overall," says Quigley, who plans Microsoft's major user conferences and customer events. "I'm hearing more optimism, not just from planners, but also from supplier partners."

Gia Staley, CMP, manager, meetings and events, at Fort Worth, TX-based Smith & Nephew (Biotherapeutics), which holds about 50 meetings a year, shares Quigley's optimism. "From a corporate standpoint, we're as busy, if not busier, than we were last year," Staley says. "We're growing, and we have new products that we're launching. And our field sales group is expanding. As a result of that, we're having more meetings. And that includes more training meetings. We invest heavily in our salesforce, which has increased by 50 percent."

Jennifer Borth, CTE, director of travel services at Knoxville, TN-based educational enterprise Edison Learning, is guardedly optimistic. "I feel like the demand for meetings is increasing, and the industry is getting back to normal," says Borth, who plans about 60 U.S. meetings each year.

However, planners in some segments of the industry are slightly more concerned about next year.

Christine Gorham, CMP, senior associate at Booz Allen Hamilton, a management consulting firm in Herndon, VA, leads an 18-person team that is involved in 100-150 meetings and events a year, both for corporate and government entities.

"Because of ongoing economic and political concerns in our market, what I'm seeing is people holding tight and adopting a wait-and-see attitude in terms of what they're doing," Gorham says. "On the other hand, our clients understand that meetings are important, so we are continuing to plan future meetings. However, with prices increasing for next year, as a planner we

have to either reduce budgets or reduce the size of or cancel some meetings."

As a result, Gorham says, she is seeing trends toward shorter meetings or a reduced number of attendees. "For example, what used to be a two-day meeting is being reduced to a one-day meeting," she says. "And some organizations are keeping their



**Gia Staley, CMP**  
Manager, Meetings and Events  
Smith & Nephew (Biotherapeutics)  
Fort Worth, TX

"We're growing, and we have new products that we're launching. And our field sales group is expanding. As a result of that, we're having more meetings. And that includes more training meetings. We invest heavily in our salesforce, which has increased by 50 percent."

meetings more local as a way of reducing costs and travel time." And in some cases, she notes, those one-day meetings no longer include overnight hotel accommodations.

### Budgets

Despite a general sense of optimism

for 2014, one thing planners agree on almost unanimously is that budgets remain flat.

Like a majority of her peers, Borth is facing flat budgets. "There's always an interest in trying to save money," she says. "And now that relates to things like saving money on food or bringing in our own audio-visual equipment and people."

Quigley's budgets at Microsoft also are flat. However, she says, flat is better than reduced, given that there is now so much additional scrutiny on meeting expenditures and budgets in the age of strategic meetings management.

Jody Brandes, CMP, senior meeting partner at South San Francisco-based Genentech, a medical company in the genetics field, also is facing flat budgets. The overarching issue the industry faces is reducing costs, she says, even for the kinds of high-end meetings traditionally hosted for doctors and other medical professionals.

And as a result of tight budgets and rising costs, she is now looking at second-tier destinations for 2014. "When we noticed the lack of availability and higher costs in some of the destinations we had traditionally used, we started looking at our calendar and saying, 'OK, what do we know we are going to have to do in 2014 and let's start planning those meetings now,'" Brandes says.

"And then we started looking at alternative destinations for some of our meetings as a way of reducing costs."

### Hotel Costs and Issues

One key factor that will have a major impact on the meeting industry for 2014 is that the proverbial pendulum has swung back to a strong seller's market. Not only are room rates and F&B costs rising sharply, but in many cases major meeting hotels in A-list destinations are once again being booked years in advance, meaning that availability also is limited.

In its 2014 Global Meetings and Events Forecast, American Express Meetings and Events predicts a relatively modest 3-5 percent increase in hotel costs in all areas of the world, ex-



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**Jody Brandes, CMP**  
Senior Meeting Partner  
Genentech  
South San Francisco, CA



**“When we noticed the lack of availability and higher costs in some of the destinations we had traditionally used, we started looking at our calendar and saying, ‘OK, what do we know we are going to have to do in 2014 and let’s start planning those meetings now.’”**

cept Europe, which will remain largely unchanged. But with planners almost universally facing flat budgets, even that will be a challenge, planners agree.

And by definition, the seller’s market also means a tougher negotiating climate.

“I’m seeing less flexibility from some hotels,” Borth says. “And that includes less willingness to negotiate. There’s more dotting of every ‘i’ and crossing of every ‘t’ when it comes to contracts now.”

The only bright spot Borth currently sees on the hotel horizon is that hotels are still willing to cut deals on short-term bookings when they have a hole on their calendar. “And so because we book a lot of meetings in a short-

term window, we’re usually able to get something from the hotel in return for our business,” Borth says. “And that helps us tremendously.”

On the other side of the equation, however, are rising occupancy taxes and assorted resort fees that drive up the total cost of hotel rooms.

“It seems those taxes have gone up across the board around the country,” Staley says. “Now that the seller’s market is pushing hotel rates up, it is much more challenging to find the overall ‘good deal’ we had grown accustomed to in years past. By the time you add in the higher taxes and other fees, including higher F&B fees, your total meeting expense has risen significantly.

At the same time, Staley says, finding available hotels that have the right amount of meeting space remains a challenge for companies that host breakout-intensive meetings, such as pharmaceutical companies like Smith & Nephew.

At the same time, Staley says, finding available hotels that have the right amount of meeting space remains a challenge for companies that host breakout-intensive meetings, such as pharmaceutical companies like Smith & Nephew.

“We need a lot of meeting space,” Staley says. “And those hotels are typically booked years in advance when the market is healthy. So it’s harder and harder for me to find that perfect hotel that meets my exact requirements.”

That challenge, she says, is now being exacerbated by a return to a long booking window, with major flag hotels booked several years in advance. That often means that even if a suitable property can be found, it is no longer available for the dates she needs.

Quigley agrees that the availability of meeting space is a key challenge for the future. “That’s something we have been fighting for some time, especially because we tend to book a lot of meetings short-term,” she says. “And it can be really hard to find the space you need.”

Borth is facing the same challenge. “Many times now,” she says, “I’ll find

a hotel that is flexible in its negotiations, and the room rates are good. But the breakout rooms are on the second level or we’re going to be divided up into three different areas so we can’t have all of our sessions and people together in one place.”

As a result of the frustration she sometimes faces, Staley has started to look at destinations once considered second tier. For her 2014 National Sales Meeting for 500 attendees, she booked Nashville and the Gaylord Opryland Resort and Convention Center in Nashville. “We had never even thought about Nashville before,” Staley says. “But as we have grown so quickly, it made sense, based on the

**Jennifer Borth, CCTE**  
Director of Travel Services  
Edison Learning  
Knoxville, TN



**“Many times now, I’ll find a hotel that is flexible in its negotiations, and the room rates are good. But the breakout rooms are on the second level or we’re going to be divided up into three different areas so we can’t have all of our sessions and people together in one place.”**

amount of meeting space, weather conditions and room rate we needed.”

## Food and Beverage

When it comes to hotels, many planners are more concerned about rising F&B costs than they are hotel rates.

“That can be a real problem,” Quigley says, “because F&B is such a huge part of your budget.”

As a result of steadily rising F&B costs, Quigley now looks at budget-conscious practical alternatives, such as more flexible “grab-and-go” lunches rather than a traditional sit down buffet.

Borth now works more closely with chefs to optimize what can realistically be delivered based on her budget. She also is concerned about sharply rising F&B service fees, which are now as high as 22 or 23 percent in some destinations. “And that is a huge markup on your food budget,” Borth says. “And haven’t seen much willingness on the part of hotels to negotiate down the higher service fees. So that means I have to depend even more on the creativity of the chef to make our budgets work.”

Quigley agrees that rising F&B service fees are a significant concern. “And it’s hard to negotiate those down when you’re in a seller’s market,” she says.

Gorham tries to negotiate the fees down, but finds that it’s usually difficult if not impossible. “So where we try to negotiate is on the F&B minimums and how we can get those down,” she says.

And like Quigley and other planners, Gorham is always looking for ways to reduce F&B costs, such as replacing a lunch buffet with box lunches or leaving some nights open for attendees with no formal dinners. “We are doing all of those things,” Gorham says, “because today you have to keep your costs down.”

Because Staley typically books major convention hotels, she has been able so far to negotiate higher room rates back down, using the leverage of her total F&B spend. “But I do have to budget for higher F&B costs,” she says. “That is just a reality now.”

## Airfares and Airlift

For 2014, airfares — in general

— will only increase on average by about 1.6 percent, with a 1.1 percent increase predicted for 2015, according to American Express’ 2014 Global Meetings and Events Forecast.

**Kati Quigley, CMP**  
Senior Director of Worldwide Partner  
Community Marketing  
Microsoft  
Redmond, WA



**“For most attendees now, it’s not about the registration fee to come to the meeting. It’s about the travel. So you have to make sure your destination selection offers convenience, and also hotels at a range of prices.”**

However, planners who host meetings in some major U.S. destinations are already reporting increases significantly larger than that. And an even bigger concern for some planners is the availability of airlift to and from particular destinations.

As a result, a comprehensive analysis of the availability and cost of flights before a destination is officially approved

is now an additional step in the process for many planners.

“Many times in recent years we’ve ruled out a city because the availability of flights is limited and the cost is high,” Borth says. “And instead, we’ll look for a destination like Atlanta or Chicago, where there are lots of flights and the fares are generally good. But even with that, we now try to get our folks to book farther in advance to get better fares. But we also look more now at the convenience for our attendees and how easy it is to get to the destination.”

Staley is now more concerned about a lack of flights in some instances than she is about increasing airline costs. “And even if flights are available, it just seems harder and harder for more of our sales reps to get back home on a Friday night without having to either spend the night or get home at midnight,” she says. “And that’s because there are fewer flight options.”

She expects the situation will get even worse in the future, as airlines continue to consolidate and reduce capacity. As a result, Staley also now routinely runs a comprehensive flight analysis with her travel department before signing off on a destination. “And if I’m looking at several different destinations at the same time, I’ll use the flight comparison to make my decision based on the routes that are best for my attendees,” she says.

Quigley also is more attentive to the availability of flights and routing for her attendees.

“More and more, the places we go to for meetings is based on airlift,” she says. “And that is especially true for our international meetings. If there is a city that you have to make a couple of connections just to get to, people are just not going to come. For most attendees now, it’s not about the registration fee to come to the meeting. It’s about the travel. So you have to make sure your destination selection



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offers convenience, and also hotels at a range of prices.”

## Technology

Although planner concerns about hotel costs or the availability of convenient flights for attendees tend to come up in almost any given year, one legitimately new concern for 2014 is the capability of hotels and other meeting venues to meet the demand for bandwidth, as attendees carry more and more devices as mobile technologies transform the way meetings are conducted.

Somewhat surprisingly, planners agree by broad consensus that even many major flag hotels in A-list destinations fall short of being able to meet the demand for or performance of bandwidth and other technology-related meetings infrastructure.

“And even with all the right people involved,” Borth says, “it’s still very common to find in working through the details that our people and the hotel people are not talking the same language. In turn that means that it’s sometimes hard for us to be sure that our needs are going to be met. And part of that, I find, is in hotel people not anticipating and then not delivering what we are going to need.”

Given the speed with which technology has transformed the meeting industry, Borth says, that surprises her. “Not only is it surprising to me that the technology isn’t always there, but it is more surprising to me that sometimes that can be real problem for you as a planner,” she says. “For example, at one of our recent meetings, one of our general sessions was a failure because the bandwidth we needed just wasn’t there.”

And that was made even more surprising by the fact the meeting was held in a major flag hotel in a well-known, top-tier meeting destination.

“That kind of problem is especially surprising when you think you’ve looked at every detail and carefully

considered everything you think you’re going to need,” Borth says.

How is it possible that hotels could fail to meet such a basic need as technology?

“I think a lot of it has to do with the

**Christine Gorham, CMP**  
Senior Associate  
Booz Allen Hamilton  
Herndon, VA



**“But sometimes challenges are good, because they bring out new and thoughtful ideas and good things can come from that... Rather than being reactive in dealing with the issues the meeting industry is facing, we have to be proactive.”**

big investments that are necessary to really keep up with the bandwidth that we need as meeting planners,” Borth says, adding that the situation was made worse by the deep, enduring recession and unprecedented slowdown in the meeting industry from 2008 to 2010.

Quigley agrees that one current industry surprise is the lack of sufficient bandwidth in too many hotels and meeting venues. “As a company, we now have a tremendous ability to stream information out to our attendees,” she says. “But in many cases, the physical infrastructure of the facility has not kept pace. And for hotels to update their capabilities is very expensive. So there have actually been a couple of recent instances where we went to destinations and provided advice on how to upgrade their technology.”

Gorham shares the concern about technology, but also broadens the context. “I think the hardest part of that issue is that it’s very difficult for a lot of planners to say I am going to have X number of attendees and as a result, I am going to need this much bandwidth because each of my attendees will have three devices,” Gorham says. “And in that scenario, it’s too easy for the hotel to come back and say, ‘We have that much bandwidth.’ But what you have no way of knowing is how many other meetings are going to be in-house and how their use of some of the available bandwidth is going to impact your meeting. And there’s really no way to analyze or test that. So you have to rely on the hotel.”

And even if a particular hotel has upgraded its capabilities to resolve the issue, that automatically brings up the issue for planners of increased costs. Given the expense of installing and maintaining increased bandwidth and performance, Gorham says, it is inevitable that technology costs will rise, putting more pressure on flat budgets.

That is just one issue, among many, that will make 2014 a challenging year for planners, Gorham says. “But sometimes challenges are good, because they bring out new and thoughtful ideas and good things can come from that. And as meeting planners, I think the important thing is that rather than being reactive in dealing with the issues the meeting industry is facing, we have to be proactive. And part of that is constantly reinforcing the importance of face-to-face meetings.” **C&IT**



# IT'S SO MIAMI

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## What's Trending

### Engaging Destinations and Value Top the List

By Karen Brost

As part of her role as event specialist for the Alerton and Trend divisions of Honeywell, Lacey Hein plans many international events. "We've done a couple of our conferences on the Trend channel overseas, mostly in England," she explains, "because our parent company is there. But incentives are mostly what we've been doing

internationally because it's a little bit more special. It feels like you're getting something more."

She described one trend that is impacting her planning. "Lead times are getting longer as things are rebounding. Rates are going up, and they're starting to sell out more, so it's definitely something that we're paying attention to.

(Previously) we've been planning six to nine months out, and now we're trying to get our 2015 lined up. We're really planning a year and a half and maybe two years out."

Two Maritz Travel executives, Meg Pisani, director of industry relations, and Heather Heidbrink, director, sourcing, say that the globalization of U.S. companies is creating new opportunities for international meetings. "Most of our clients with a global presence share their company's mission and sales strategies with their colleagues abroad. One way to achieve this is by recreating the same meaningful meetings held in the U.S. for those abroad, essentially creating regional events around the world. (By doing so), companies have the ability to allow employees in foreign areas to attend meetings closer to home that infuse their company and local culture. This strategy is becoming increasingly popular due to a few factors, including

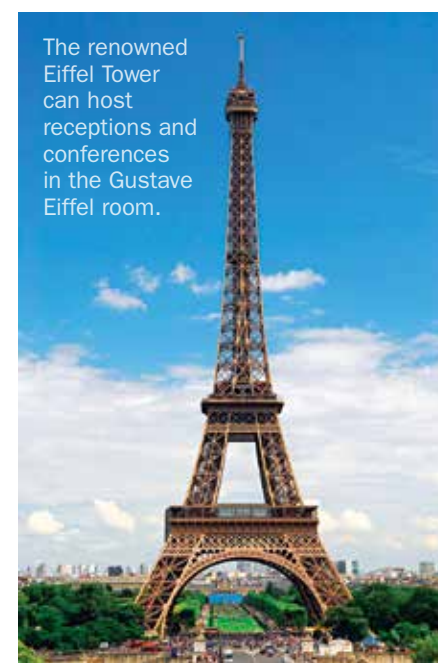
annual airfare increases and economic fluctuations."

Joe Lustenberger, director of marketing, North America, for euromic, an events and destination management partnership with offices in 36 countries, shares his company's global perspective. "What we see and perceive from corporations is that even if they are U.S.-based, when they become a global company, there is a reluctance to organize their events in the U.S., so they tend to move internationally. And the natural process takes them, usually for the first time out of the U.S., to Europe to one of the major destinations, i.e., London, Paris or Rome."

#### The Value Proposition

While the "wow" factors and/or convenience of a destination are important, so is the value that a destination offers. "I have found some great values overseas like Aruba in September," Hein notes. "It's not quite low season yet for them. It's a little bit of a shoulder season. I was able to get great all-inclusive rates at The Westin (Resort & Casino, Aruba). Additionally, we were just in Jamaica this year for another incentive in April, and again, I found that to be a great value. It was all-inclusive, as well."

Hein says they just started using



The renowned Eiffel Tower can host receptions and conferences in the Gustave Eiffel room.



Sandals Grande Antigua Resort & Spa, St. John's, Antigua.

and so if we can say 'if you do X,' you can go to Monaco, I think that's going to be a better increase for us."

#### Safety and Security

Minimizing risk is an important facet of any international program, and local destination management companies (DMCs) can play a

key role in helping to ensure a group's safety and security. "We can support the company's own security staff and supplement with local ones, Lustenberger explains. "We can also provide all types of warning information needed in the destination. As the 'feet on the ground,' we are more aware of local trends and

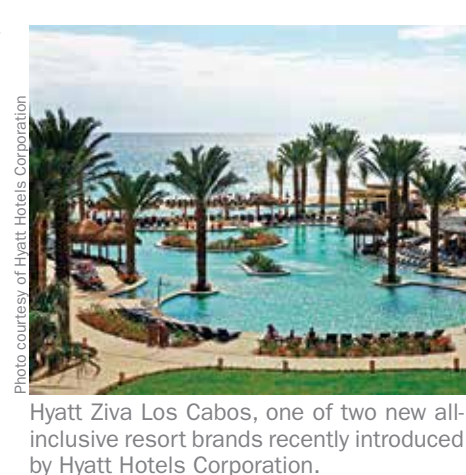
all-inclusive properties this year. She learned about them by attending shows such as the Incentive Travel Exchange and IMEX. "I've gotten exposed to more of what's out there. (All-inclusives) work out great. Your food is covered, your beverages are covered. You add in some activities and that's it."

She says that for another program, they looked at the Mexico destinations of Cabo and Cancun, and ultimately decided on Puerto Vallarta. "Los Cabos is where everybody on the West Coast goes, so Puerto Vallarta is just a little bit further and slightly more exotic."

Hein explains that she normally does a ski incentive trip that is coming close to pricing itself out of the market because of the rising cost of room rates at the high-end ski resorts her group is accustomed to staying at. "I can take them to Mexico or the Caribbean and pay half of that," she says.

"We're looking at a complete revamp of our programs for 2015, and we're looking at going even further internationally and looking at places like France and Barcelona, places again that are those incentive destinations where you feel like you're getting a much cooler trip," she adds. "We also looked at Monaco. It wasn't that badly priced. When you start looking at activities, you can add a lot of cost there because you have to transport everybody everywhere. But for us, it's an owners/managers trip, and we're competing for their travel time. These guys can afford pretty much to go anywhere they want. For us to take them, we have to make it worth their while. That's why we've really started ramping up our international trips. People are starting to expect it. We're also trying to drive sales,

have great knowledge of security concerns and contacts in the location."



Hyatt Ziva Los Cabos, one of two new all-inclusive resort brands recently introduced by Hyatt Hotels Corporation.

He noted some additional advantages of working with a local DMC when visiting an unfamiliar foreign destination. "The DMC knows the location and the suppliers. They speak the local language and know the customs and common business practices. They develop relationships with local suppliers, ensuring the best rates, services and venues."

That local knowledge can prove to be invaluable. Conceptours, euromic's affiliate in Athens, shared an example of an emergency situation they handled for a major client. The day before the group's 450 guests needed to be transported to the airport for their departing flights, the local bus owner's union unexpectedly announced a 24-hour strike.



Conceptours was able to overcome the situation by working throughout the night to contract public buses to get the guests to the airport in time for their flights. The fact that the DMC had those local contacts and relationships literally saved the day.

A representative of Destination China, another euromic partner, adds that a local DMC also can help planners create a more meaningful theme for



The entrance to Las Ventas Bullring in Madrid, Spain.

their program, one that incorporates the local culture and the reasons for meeting in that destination. They say that DMC representatives also can help ensure that the meeting's content and

email, phone numbers and social media outlets of euromic's partner DMCs around the world to facilitate convenient communications.

### Giving Back

Holding a meeting or incentive in a foreign destination also can provide opportunities to incorporate memorable community service projects into the program. Mark Jordan, sales manager for Amstar DMC in the Dominican Republic, says, "While Punta Cana has been a favored incentive destination for a number of years now, the increase in corporate groups deciding upon our destination for their meetings, events and functions has increased three-fold since 2010. The increase in groups has also seen a change in the activities and events that are now on the rise here in Punta Cana. The traditional activities of zip line and snorkeling adventures are still as popular as ever, but we have seen a lot of companies now combining these with outreach projects in the community such as helping to improve local schools and orphanages by building basketball courts, sports facilities, painting and improving buildings, donating



**"We're looking at a complete revamp of our programs for 2015, and we're looking at going even further internationally and looking at places like France and Barcelona...incentive destinations where you feel like you're getting a much cooler trip."**

LACEY HEIN, Events Specialist  
Honeywell – Alerton & Trend, Redmond, WA

materials won't be in conflict with local customs to avoid offending anyone in the host city.

Euromic recently launched a new mobile website at [m.euromic.com](http://m.euromic.com) to provide planners with a mobile-friendly version of its website for use with tablets, smartphones and other mobile technology. It also links planners to the

school/sports supplies and providing water pumps where needed."

### Destination Decisions

Pisani and Heidbrink shared some of their top international meeting destination picks for value and safety. "Currently, we're finding high value in locations like London, Frankfurt, Beijing,



The Singapore skyline.

Shanghai, Singapore, Kuala Lumpur, Tokyo, Barcelona and Madrid. Value-wise, these cities are able to accommodate large group movements. In addition, these cities have fabulous airlift.

"Spain, Frankfurt and the Asian cities offer competitive pricing and are major international centers of commerce, making them great sourcing cities when seeking an international meeting destination. Also very popular, London, Madrid and Dubai are major international centers of commerce. These cities provide great options for meetings (including 10,000+ conference attendees) of any size with great airlift and a high concentration of hotels."

As for "up and coming" destinations, Pisani and Heidbrink are noticing that Asia, South America and the Middle East (Dubai specifically) are all experiencing a lot of growth. "In addition, many of our hotel partners are showing huge growth in China, India, Brazil and Russia."

Nikki Nestor, president and CEO of World Class Travel by Invitation, has been planning incentive programs since starting the company in 1991. International programs are the company's specialty. "I think Italy, no matter how expensive it gets, seems to be a destination that individuals who perform highly cannot get enough of," she



**"Currently, we're finding high value in locations like London, Frankfurt, Beijing, Shanghai, Singapore, Kuala Lumpur, Tokyo, Barcelona and Madrid. Value-wise, these cities are able to accommodate large group movements. In addition, these cities have fabulous airlift."**

MEG PISANI (LEFT), Director of Industry Relations  
HEATHER HEIDBRINK (RIGHT), Director, Sourcing  
Maritz Travel, Fenton, MO



notes. "They do the iconic destinations first — Florence, Venice and Rome — and then they say, 'What about Tuscany and how about a cruise of Italy?' We also like South America, which is coming along very well in terms of its infrastructure. We really like Peru and Argentina, which have really been popular with our clients."

She adds, "We always like Tahiti because it's such a fantasy destination. In Moorea and Papeete, for what you can buy in terms of theme parties and entertainment, it becomes very cost effective. It takes knowledge of how to move people around and how to work in the island, but Tahiti has what I call 'authentic hospitality.' It comes from the heart. It comes from who they are."

### Incentives for Success

One sure way to motivate incentive program participants to achieve their goals is to offer them a program that will allow them to check off multiple "bucket list" items in one trip. In that case, New Zealand may very well fit the bill. Tourism New Zealand has developed a series of sample itineraries to demonstrate the number of amazing experiences that can be packed into a single memorable trip. For example, a group could start out in Auckland by touring the city on the back of a Harley Davidson, learn the ropes of sailing on a racing yacht that once competed in the America's Cup and dine on the city's scenic waterfront — and that's just the first day!

"We really like New Zealand," Nestor states. "It has two wonderful islands. It takes time to do two islands, so what we've done in the past is to do South Island and the Queenstown area because of all of the wonderful activities and the natural beauty. The people are lovely and the food is fabulous and the wines, of course, are one of the things that they're very famous for. Then we do a pre- or post-program extension for people who want to see Auckland or another area."

From its stunning setting on Lake Wakatipu, Queenstown makes the ideal base for outdoor adventures that include river rafting, bungee jumping, jet boating, hiking, golfing, helicopter tours, skiing and off-roading. Fans of the "Lord of the Rings" films can even visit many of the sites where the movies were filmed. Their experience will quickly reconfirm the fact that director Peter Jackson knows a thing or two about choosing scenic backdrops. For the group's awards dinner or farewell gala, it's hard to beat a gondola ride to the top of Bob's Peak to watch the sunset and take in magnificent lake and mountain views over dinner at Skyline Restaurant.



Atlantis, The Palm in Dubai.

### To Tax or Not to Tax?

"There are certain destinations that are more tax-friendly," Nestor explains, noting Monte Carlo and Mexico as examples. "It's an advantage when they're bidding against another destination, another country." Monaco, for example, has passed legislation that allows for the





A breathtaking view of Queenstown, New Zealand, which is enjoyed by patrons of the Skyline Queenstown Restaurant.



refund of the Value Added Tax (VAT) on certain business expenses. In Mexico, meetings are exempt from VAT as part of the country's commitment to winning international meeting and event business. Nestor says that getting the taxes refunded may require some extra effort, but it's well worth it in the end.

### All About Airlift

Hein also pays close attention to the amount of time it takes to get to a destination. She says, for example, that an island destination that would require multiple flights and then a ferry would be a deal-breaker. "If it's too hard for people to get there, no matter how exotic it is, that's all they're going to remember and all they're going to complain about, especially if it's three or four nights."

### Keeping Attendees Engaged

Pisani and Heidbrink also report, "One of the key trends we're seeing in international meetings is a focus on quality and employee engagement, specifically making sure that guests' cultural viewpoints are incorporated into the meeting. When designing any meeting, domestic or international, it's always important to consider design and guests' expectations. Overall, meeting design helps create a high level of engagement and relevance for participants."

For many groups, having the opportunity to attend a meeting or incentive in an international destination offers a rare opportunity to embrace and explore a different culture. The challenge for planners, however, is that many groups

today are composed of attendees from multiple generations, each of which has different expectations. For some incentive participants, having a chance to chill out on the beach or spend some quality time in a spa is a dream come true. For others, it's the thrill of extreme adven-



**"What we see and perceive from corporations is that even if they are U.S.-based, when they become a global company, there is a reluctance to organize their events in the U.S., so they tend to move internationally."**

**JOE LUSTENBERGER**, Director of Marketing  
euomic, Chicago, IL

tures. So what's a planner to do? The obvious choice is to find a destination that offers something for everyone.

Costa Rica is one such destination. For many U.S.-based companies, it's a natural choice because they already have operations here. For others, the country offers a choice of spectacular coastal resorts for beach lovers as well as eco-friendly coffee plantation tours and other activities for those passionate about sustainability. But the country is prob-

ably best known for its stunning tropical terrain and diverse ecosystems. It is one of the most biodiverse countries in the world. This natural setting enhances the experience of thrill-seekers as they soar through the treetops of the rainforest on a zip line, go white-water rafting down the rapids or ascend through the mystical beauty of a cloud forest as they climb to the top of a volcano. With one visit to this tropical wonderland, visitors quickly understand why the national saying of Costa Rica is "Pura Vida" which translates into "Life is Good."

The 372-room Real InterContinental, located in the capital of San Jose in Costa Rica's Central Valley, offers a balance of luxury and adventure. Set in the upscale community of Escazú, the hotel features five dining venues, a luxurious spa and a separate club tower with 98 rooms and suites to accommodate VIPs, including the largest Presidential Suite in Central America. Costa Rica's most modern shopping mall, Multiplaza, is just across

the street, and a wide variety of rainforest adventures are readily accessible in the surrounding area.

### A World of Options

With so many choices around the world, it pays to stay flexible. As Hein says, "We're just taking it as it comes and looking at things and not necessarily setting our hearts on a destination until we figure out what it's going to cost."  
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EVERY MOMENT REWARDED



# The Theme Park Difference

## Planning Meetings That March to the Beat of a Different Drummer

By Patrick Simms

Colonial Williamsburg's fife and drum corps escorted TriSept meeting attendees from the Williamsburg Lodge to the taverns.

Corporate planners have long used the “themed event” as the centerpiece to their meetings. Typically, it’s an awards ceremony or final-night banquet that is inspired by anything from cultural or historical periods such as ‘50s America, to concepts such as “breaking barriers” or “embracing the future,” to color schemes such as the

elegant black-and-white motif. But the entire meeting, not just a night or two, is made memorable when staged at one of the country’s great theme parks

There are the familiar bastions of amusement created by Disney and Universal, and parks with more specific themes, such as SeaWorld and Colonial Williamsburg. And the

industry is still growing, with developers recently announcing plans to open a Grand Texas theme park in the spring of 2015 on 600 acres of land 30 miles northeast of downtown Houston. Grand Texas is expected to include a ballpark for an independent minor league team and a water park.

Whether the theme is the Lone

Star State or the Magic Kingdom, some planners feel less pressure when staging a meeting at a theme park, as the opportunities for group events and diversions are all at their fingertips.

### Walt Disney World Resort

“It does make my job a little easier,” remarks Jackie Lang, Event

Planning Manager at Lakeville-Middleboro, MA-based Ocean Spray Cranberries Inc. Just this March, the company held its North American National Sales Meeting at Walt Disney World Resort for the fourth time, bringing just over 100 attendees to the 867-room Grand Floridian Resort & Spa.

“There are so many entertainment

options offered by Disney,” she continues. “Even if attendees didn’t go on theme park adventures, they had plenty of beautiful pools to lounge by. I didn’t have to go out and source any convention bureaus; it was a one-stop shop.” The Disney events team was very “hands-on,” she adds. “I would give them a budget for an event, and they would come back to





Photo courtesy of Walt Disney World Resort

Disney's Grand Floridian Resort & Spa.

me with what they felt would best fit for my group, along with other suggestions. They really do a deep dive into who their attendees will be for that function, their ages and preferences.”

The wealth of venues and entertainment surrounding the group may lighten the planning load, but at the same time, there is often the concern that it will distract from business. Lang, however, feels that once attendees are in a well-appointed meeting room that is removed from the commotion of leisure guests, it will be business as usual.

“The Grand Floridian has a separate conference area. We had no distractions, so it worked out extremely well,” she says. All of the hotel’s 40,000 sf of meeting space, including its 18,219-sf Grand Floridian Ballroom, 5,885-sf St. Augustine Hall and 16 meeting rooms, is on one contiguous level. What’s more, the Florida Department of Environmental Protection recently renewed the Green Lodging designation for the Grand Floridian, along with all other Disney-owned and operated resorts in the state.

### Universal Orlando Resort

Attendees who have been to Universal Orlando Resort many times have new attractions to explore with this summer’s opening of Transformers: The Ride-3D based on the popular Transformers films; and Springfield, an environment themed after The Simpsons animated series. And next year, they’ll be able to board The Hogwarts Express and commute between the two Wizarding World of Harry Potter theme parks, Hogsmeade and Diagon Alley, the latter also opening next year.

Universal Orlando is not short on

theme reflecting nostalgic Americana. The property will house 900 guest rooms and 900 family suites. While no traditional meeting space will be onsite, Cabana Bay will feature several informal gathering spots designed for groups, according to Universal Orlando.

### SeaWorld Orlando

Last year, SeaWorld Orlando officially became part of SeaWorld Parks & Resorts, which also includes Discovery Cove,



**Robert Spicer**  
President  
TriSept Corporation  
Chantilly, VA

an all-inclusive swim-with-dolphins resort, and Aquatica, SeaWorld’s water park. Antarctica: Empire of the Penguin is SeaWorld’s newest addition, which debuted last spring. The tuxedoed inhabitants fit right in when attendees enjoy reception-style events in the “coldest theme park attraction in the world” (accommodating up to 750 people), including entertainment from the Iceberg Stage.

Planners also can arrange tours for 40–100 attendees at a time, and secure front-line access to rides such as Kraken, Journey to Atlantis, Wild Arctic and

Manta. A two-hour teambuilding activity is also available, where groups of 15–250 participants set out on various “missions” throughout the park, whether searching for flamingoes or taking pictures with dolphins.

SeaWorld is complemented by the 1,094-room DoubleTree by Hilton Orlando at SeaWorld, with 60,000 sf of meeting space, but the park has its own specialized venue for groups: Ports of Call. Here, groups of 100–750 can enjoy a covered patio, tropical gardens, and convene in a 12,000-sf ballroom, divisible into three sections.

### Colonial Williamsburg

Chantilly, VA-based TriSept Corporation, a systems engineering services provider, has held one of its corporate getaways at Walt Disney World Resort, but more recently took 65 attendees, including employees and spouses, to a very different kind of theme park in the company’s home state:

Colonial Williamsburg. While the focus was “strategic planning,” says TriSept President Robert Spicer, the meeting was also “my way of saying thank you to our folks for all their hard work and extra hours. So we have the all-day company meeting, but we also give them free time to go enjoy the theme park.” Moreover,

Colonial Williamsburg fit the group demographically. “They are very patriotic people to begin with, and we visited over the July 4th weekend. We figured, what a great place to learn about where our country began.” Of course, pride in being American doesn’t necessarily go along with a deep interest in American history. “Some of our people weren’t big history buffs,” noted Cathy Spicer, TriSept’s vice president of contracts, “but they absolutely had a great time, and it actually inspired them to get more interested in the history.”

In the same way that the Disney events team gave Lang very personalized planning assistance, Colonial Williamsburg’s

*“They are very patriotic people to begin with, and we visited (Williamsburg) over the July 4th weekend. We figured, what a great place to learn about where our country began.”*

SeaWorld’s new Antarctica: Empire of the Penguin attraction can be reserved for reception-style group events.



Photo courtesy of SeaWorld

team was instrumental in designing TriSept’s corporate getaway. “They had a lot of great ideas, and they really helped out by explaining all the different events they had going on there,” says Robert Spicer. “They actually encouraged us to go to Yorktown and Jamestown and places nearby, including Busch Gardens (free bus service is available to these destinations). So they helped us plan out what we were going to do that entire weekend.” For example, “we didn’t know the



Photo courtesy of Hersheypark

A thrilling roller coaster ride at Hersheypark.

five and drum was available as an escort from the Williamsburg Lodge to the taverns. They helped us with that and set up the tavern night,” adds Cathy Spicer. “If you do it yourself, there are many things you wouldn’t even know are available.”

While planners can be surprised by what Colonial Williamsburg offers, so can attendees. As the TriSept group was

enjoying dessert one evening, “Patrick Henry” popped in to tell a story from revolutionary history. The Founding Father and post-colonial governor of Virginia even encouraged questions from the attendees, Robert Spicer relates, adding that other Founding Fathers, such as Thomas Jefferson and George Washington, also are available to add even more colonial authenticity to a meeting, and their speeches can be customized to relate to corporate objectives.

Speaking of corporate objectives, Colonial Williamsburg offers a variety of meeting spaces to complement its various hotels, including the Williamsburg Inn, Colonial Houses, Williamsburg Lodge, and Woodlands Hotel & Suites, which comprise 1,060 guest rooms. The Lodge features a 70,000-sf conference center, part of a total 105,000 sf of function space at the theme park, and the 12,000-sf Virginia Lawn.

### Hersheypark

Farther up the East Coast is a theme park that celebrates the sweet side of American history. Milton S. Hershey built the world’s first modern chocolate factory 110 years ago in Hershey, PA, and today’s Hersheypark is a tribute to the success of that endeavor. The park has long been a reliable mid-Atlantic site choice for planners, particularly with the

consolidated services of Hershey Meetings. The team helps clients find the best lodging and meeting spaces across Hersheypark’s properties: the 665-room Hershey Lodge (100,000 sf), the 276-room Hotel Hershey (25,000 sf), and Hershey Country Club (10,672 sf). Teambuilding activities, from kayaking to paintball, are coordinated through Hershey Outfitters and the Hershey Leadership and Development Center.

For attendees who just want to unwind, there is The Spa At The Hotel Hershey, designed as an homage to High Point Mansion, the home of Milton and Catherine Hershey.

### Universal Studios Hollywood

Theme parks such as Colonial Williamsburg and Hersheypark are integrated with hotels, which does tend to make the planning process more streamlined. But nearby hoteliers see their share of theme park-bound groups, and are typically quite well versed in what the park offers. Such is the case with the 489-room, AAA Four Diamond Hilton Los Angeles/Universal City, located just a block away from the entrance to Universal Studios Hollywood. Trissa Weiser, director of corporate communications for North Hollywood, CA-based IPC: The Hospitalist Company, also serves as meeting planner for the national physicians group practice. She regularly works with the Hilton, which is a “very value added” property that easily accommodates her meetings’ various breakouts with 60,000 sf of indoor and outdoor function space, including the 16,000-sf Sierra Ballroom.

“I do a lot of events without an assistant or a staff. When I go to negotiate with a property, I look for partnership above everything else, and the Hilton is outstanding (in that regard),” Weiser comments. “They feel comfortable providing input to me, from the space to the setup to the meal selection. For example, someone will call me back and say, ‘You’ve made great lunch selections, but we noticed that the dessert served at lunch on day one is the same as day three, so we’re going to go ahead and change



that for you.' They put a lot of thought into my program and take ownership of it." Also, our company is very culturally diverse, so I always need to have kosher, vegan and other meal options, and they're able to accommodate all of our needs in a very delicious manner."

On the last night of their leadership retreat, the IPC group takes the 5-10 minute stroll to Universal Studios Hollywood, where Weiser rents the bowling alley at Jillian's in CityWalk for three to four hours. The venue accommodates up to 1,200 attendees and offers 10 lanes of bowling, pool tables and arcade games, catering, two full-service bars and a private suite for groups. Overall, the proximity to Universal Studios serves to make the program more attractive, especially for attendees flying in from towns that lack major theme parks. "For somebody that has never been here before, say from Kansas City or St. Louis, Universal Studios is a huge deal for them and has strong brand recognition," says Weiser, adding that "10-15 percent of the time they'll bring their families out and stay the weekend, since we have a Wednesday through Friday program."

Adults have plenty of diversions on hand with The Blues Brothers ride, the Studio Tour, The NBCUniversal Experience and CityWalk with more than 60 restaurants, shops and nightclubs, while children can look forward to Water World, Shrek 4-D, Transformers: The Ride 3-D and much more.



Universal Orlando's new Transformers: The Ride – 3D.

Photo courtesy of Universal Orlando Resort

For some events, such as Ocean Spray's growers meeting, the "family factor" does tip the scales in favor of theme parks. "Ocean Spray is a cooperative owned by our growers, and so many of the owners are family-run cranberry farms," Lang explains. "So they will come to the meeting with spouses and kids." The March 2012 growers meeting went so well, says Lang, that she rebooked Disney World for 2016 and will be expecting more than 600 attendees.

#### Disneyland Resort

Just as Disney World properties are busy maintaining their Green Lodging designations, Disneyland Resort, in Anaheim, CA, is also making strides on the eco front. This April, the venerable theme park was honored by the Clean the World Foundation Inc. for donating nearly 20,000 pounds of partially used soap and bottled bath amenities last year.

And in June, the four-year transformation of the Disneyland Hotel was capped off with the opening of the Blue Sky Suite in the Fantasy Tower. Designed by Walt Disney Imagineering, the 3,000-sf space is intended to encourage "blue sky" thinking for groups of up to 15 attendees. Situated on the 11th floor, the suite offers panoramic views and an open-air lanai; bright, modern furnishings and classic Disney artwork; and built-in audio-visual equipment including three televisions, two of which feature 55-inch screens that can be programmed to show presentations simultaneously. Complimentary Wi-Fi is also available. The AAA Four Diamond Disneyland Hotel offers 969 newly refurbished guest rooms and a 136,000-sf convention center, along with two new private event lawns totaling 20,000 sf.

#### A Culture of Creativity

The Blue Sky Suite is born from Disney's culture of creativity, another factor that motivates Lang and her company to bring meetings to Disney. "One of our values as a company is respect for innovation. And I think Disney shares that value," she notes. In a similar vein, Colonial Williamsburg is an embodiment of TriSept's patriotic spirit, and so the site choice is a natural fit. In general, planners do well to consider whether the concept and inspiration behind a theme park in some way reflects their corporate values or culture. Granted, attendees can likely have both fun and a productive meeting at any of the major parks. But why not make the site choice that much more meaningful?

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The Disneyland Hotel completed a four-year transformation in June.

Photo courtesy of Disneyland

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# On The Move



SHEA

Visit Orlando, Orlando, FL, has promoted **Fred Shea** to senior vice president of convention sales and services. He had served as the organization's vice president of strategic partnerships since 2010.

Benchmark Hospitality International has appointed **Pat Weldon** director of sales and marketing for The Heldrich, a Benchmark hotel located in New Brunswick, NJ. She was previously director of sales and marketing for the DoubleTree by Hilton in Valley Forge, PA.



WELDON

Destination Hotels & Resorts has appointed **Jim O'Donnell** as director of national sales for the Northeast region. He formerly served as the New York and New Jersey in-market national sales manager for Caesars Entertainment.

**Gretta Brooks** was named corporate director, global sales, for Omni Hotels & Resorts, Dallas, TX. She most recently served as the regional vice president of sales and marketing for Aimbridge Hospitality, headquartered in Austin, TX.



O'DONNELL



BROOKS

**Dan R. Maurer** was named director of sales and marketing for the Marriott Minneapolis West Hotel, Minneapolis, MN. He most recently served as director of sales and marketing for the Minneapolis Marriott Northwest.

**Jamie Jordan** was named director of sales and marketing for the Hilton Orlando Lake Buena Vista in Orlando, FL. She most recently was director of group sales at the Harbor Beach Marriott Resort & Spa in Fort Lauderdale, FL. **C&IT**



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