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Las Vegas

MEETING PLANNER GUIDE



Photos courtesy of Las Vegas News Bureau

Rossi Ralenkotter
President and CEO
Las Vegas Convention
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Like No Other Place in the World

By John Buchanan

Of all the major destinations that were severely impacted by the unprecedented meeting industry downturn of 2008-09, none was hit harder than Las Vegas. In fact, *Time* magazine published the official obituary that declared the city's fabled convention industry dead. However, what the editors of the magazine overlooked was the fact that for decades Las Vegas had maintained an uncanny ability to survive recessions, reinvent itself and come back stronger than ever.

And that is exactly what has happened over the last several years.

In April, *Trade Show News Network* — a publication that knows quite a bit more about the meeting and convention industry than *Time* — named Las Vegas the No. 1 trade show destination in the U.S. for 2012 for the 19th consecutive year.

In retrospect, despite the dire assessments made of Las Vegas' future at the low point of the recession, it was precisely the city's long experience and fierce resilience that brought it back to life and once again earned it the distinction of top dog among major destinations.

"One of the things we learned again in going through the recession is that the meeting industry really comes down to relationships," says Rossi Ralenkotter, long-time president and CEO of the Las Vegas Convention & Visitors Authority (LVCA). "And one of the strengths Las Vegas had developed over the years was the strong relationships we had with the many corporate and association clients that regularly hold meetings, conferences and conventions here. And since the recession, we have worked very hard to make sure those relationships are stronger and more productive than ever before. And that is one of the things that helped us survive the downturn that impacted the meeting industry and every destination out there."

Last year, Ralenkotter notes proudly, Las Vegas hosted nearly 22,000 meetings that drew 4.9 million attendees and generated \$6.7 billion in revenue for the local economy, which supports nearly 57,000 hospitality industry jobs.



Treasure Island — TI Hotel & Casino.

Phelps Hope, CMP, vice president, meetings and expositions, at Kellen Meetings, a division of Atlanta-based association management organization The Kellen Company, has used Las Vegas regularly for many years. What the naysayers who dismissed the city during the worst of the recession failed to understand is that the city only exists for one purpose: meetings and tourism. "The city is built for entertainment and meetings," Hope says. "That's the reason it's there. It is literally designed for conventions. And that is not just true of the infrastructure. It's also true of the service. Every service provider — every restaurant, every retailer, every entertain-

"One of the things we learned again in going through the recession is that the meeting industry really comes down to relationships."



Rossi Ralenkotter, President and CEO
Las Vegas Convention & Visitors Authority, Las Vegas, NV

ment venue — is in business because of conventions. So they understand that business more than any other destination on the planet."

Jerry Janove, vice president of sales at Cherry Hill, NJ-based independent meeting and event planning firm Resort Meetings Consortium, agrees with that assessment and adds a companion point.

"Just the mention of the name 'Las Vegas' creates excitement when it comes to meetings and events," Janove says. "Attendees know what Las Vegas is all about as a destination, and most people don't get there very often in their

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"But the other aspect is that for everyone, no matter where they're from, it's Vegas. And people want to go there. It's an exciting place."

Chris Brown, Executive Vice President, Conventions and Business Operations, National Association of Broadcasters, Washington, DC

personal lives. And because of that, there will never come a time when Las Vegas is not still a top meeting and convention destination. It will always be that simply because of the kind of destination it is."

In addition, says Dick Abram, vice president, corporate relationships at Dallas-based meeting planning firm EventLink International, another longtime regular user of Las Vegas, there is an even more clear-cut reason why Las Vegas maintains its heavyweight championship status year after year, decade after decade:

Almost invariably, Las Vegas delivers a spike in attendance.

"In our experience, organizations typically find that their attendance for a voluntary meeting will grow by 10-15 percent if the meeting is held in Las Vegas," Abram says. "And that is a huge benefit, whether they're a corporate or association client. When you have a destination that people really want to go to, the success of your meeting is greater. Your return on investment is greater. And that is also true of incentive programs, as well."

Chris Brown, executive vice president, conventions and business operations at the Washington, DC-based National Association of Broadcasters, oversees one of the biggest trade shows in history. The NAB Show, held each April for three decades and which drew more than 93,000 attendees this year, also clearly benefits from the powerful lure of Las Vegas as a destination. "And for us," Brown says, "that's true from two perspectives. From an industry perspective, we draw large numbers of exhibitors and attendees from Los Angeles, because it is a hub of the TV and movie industries. But the other aspect is that for everyone, no matter where they're from, it's Vegas. And people want to go there. It's an exciting place."

Aside from being exciting for attendees, however, Las Vegas delivers a long and comprehensive list of practical benefits for planners.



McCarran International Airport's new Terminal 3.

Photo courtesy of Las Vegas News Bureau

Phenomenal Airlift

One enduring aspect of the appeal of Las Vegas to both meeting planners and attendees is its formidable airlift. It's easy for attendees from across the country and around the world to get there easily and affordably.

"To use a one-word description, the airlift into Las Vegas is phenomenal," Abram says.

Jennifer Borth, CCTE, director of travel services at charter school operator Edison Learning in Knoxville, TN, seconds that opinion. "It's just a very easy destination to get to," she says. "And it's also very easy for attendees to get from the airport to the hotels. So it is very convenient for them. And our attendees like that."

Sherri Lindenberg, senior vice president of marketing at Roseland, NJ-based Crump Life Insurance Services, another loyal longtime user of Las Vegas, lists airlift as "one of the most important reasons we like Las Vegas so much. It's



"And it's also very easy for attendees to get from the airport to the hotels. So it is very convenient for them. And our attendees like that."

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

very simple to get there, and pretty much all of our attendees can get direct flights. We also like the convenience with which our attendees can get from the airport to the hotels."

In addition to also citing the city's airlift as a key reason she likes the destination so much, Pattie Lanktree, manager, conference planning, global events, at IT service management company Pink Elephant in Burlington, Ontario, Canada, praises McCarran International Airport. "It's just a beautiful facility," she says, "especially the new international terminal that recently opened."

The new Terminal 3 is a state-of-the-art facility that makes the process of entering the country and clearing U.S. Customs faster and easier than it has ever been —



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“Billions of dollars have been spent renovating all of our major meeting hotels and creating new restaurants and other kinds of new facilities.”

*Chris Meyer, CMP, CEM, Vice President of Sales
Las Vegas Convention & Visitors Authority, Las Vegas, NV*

which is yet another benefit for associations and corporate conference hosts who are seeing more and more international attendees come to their events.

Meanwhile, says Chris Meyer, CMP, CEM, vice president of sales at LVCVA, his organization, the airport authority and the city have worked closely with major airlines to increase the airlift and deliver even more flexible flight times during the day. The key to success, Meyer explains, has been a well-coordinated effort to convince route planners to address the burgeoning demand for flights into and out of the destination now that its meeting and convention industry is in full recovery and flourishing again.

In April, Virgin America began offering three daily non-stop round-trip flights from Los Angeles International Airport, adding capacity to its existing lift from San Francisco and New York's JFK International Airport.

“With mood lighting, custom-designed leather seats and touch-screen entertainment at every seat, we think our guests will agree that Virgin America is the perfect way to escape to one of the most iconic travel destinations in the world,” said John MacLeod, Virgin America's senior vice president of planning and sales, in a January announcement. “This route has been one of the most requested by our frequent flyers, and whether guests are traveling for a fun weekend getaway or headed to one of the many trade events or business conferences that Las Vegas hosts each year, we think this new ‘ride’ will be a stylish, welcome alternative.”

In early June, MGM Resorts International, which operates a portfolio of some of the city's most acclaimed



The balcony at MGM Grand's new Skyline Terrace Suite.

and popular meeting hotels, such as MGM Grand and Mandalay Bay, announced a new strategic alliance with Southwest Airlines that leverages their loyalty rewards programs to earn free flights and special perks at qualifying MGM Resorts properties. “The sky now, quite literally, is the limit for M life members,” stated Bill Hornbuckle, president and chief marketing officer for MGM Resorts International. “Teaming up with Southwest Airlines provides more experience options and rewards for our members traveling to Las Vegas,” he said in a news release.

This initiative is particularly significant because Southwest Airlines is the largest carrier of passengers to and from Las Vegas.

“With Southwest Airlines being the largest carrier at McCarran International Airport, it's clear how much our Rapid Rewards Members enjoy visiting Las Vegas,” said Jonathan Clarkson, director of rapid rewards at Southwest Airlines, in a statement. “We're excited that this partnership with MGM Resorts International and their M life members will now allow Rapid Rewards Members the ability to earn points for stays in nearly half of the rooms on the Las Vegas Strip!”

Huge Hotel Inventory

Another important distinction that clearly sets Las Vegas apart from other destinations is its hotel inventory, which is now approaching a whopping 151,000 rooms, according to LVCVA's Meyer.

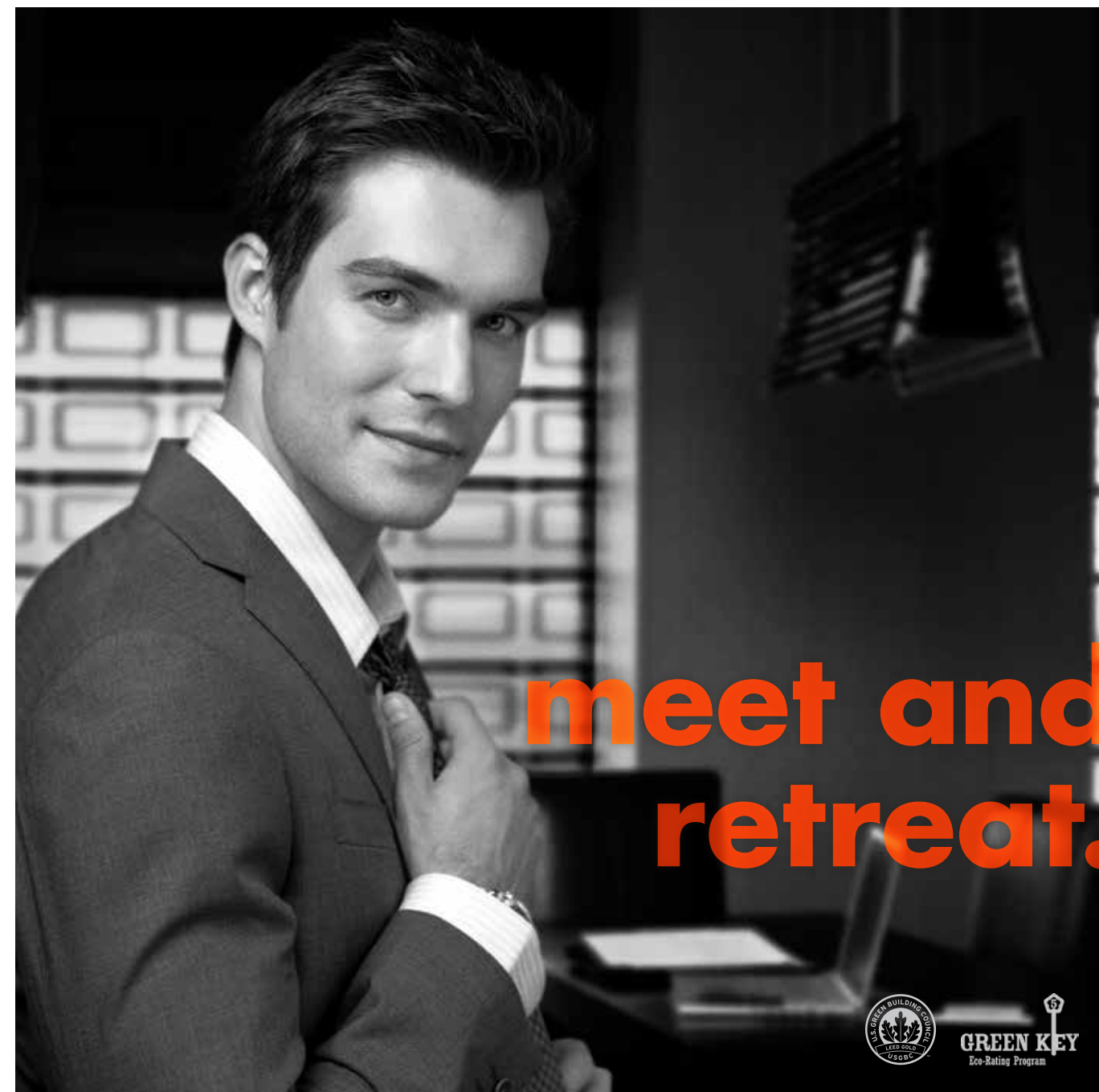
“The downturn really woke us up in Las Vegas and made us realize we had to invest in the wonderful product we had. I think that investment — and a lot of it by hotels and other facilities — has been one of the great things that has come out of the recession,” says Meyer. “Billions

of dollars have been spent renovating all of our major meeting hotels and creating new restaurants and other kinds of new facilities.”

Especially for large association meetings, that puts it in a league all its own, says Hope. “Nowhere else in the world



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"The value proposition that we get in Las Vegas is a big factor for us. We find we can get very high-quality hotels at reasonable prices."

*Sherri Lindenberg, Senior Vice President of Marketing
Crump Life Insurance Services, Roseland, NJ*

do you have such large hotels all located together," he says. "A lot of destinations have one or two big hotels. Vegas has many of them. That means you can take a convention that would require the use of a convention center and maybe three big hotels in another city and put the whole thing under one roof in Las Vegas. And that is a huge advantage for me as a convention planner."

A related advantage, Hope says, is that during the sourcing process, if a planner is looking at a particular convention property that turns out to not have availability on the dates he or she needs, there are 10 or 12 other options to choose from. "There is just nowhere else in the world where you will find that," he says.

NAB's Brown agrees that the city's huge hotel inventory, which stretches across a vast range of sizes and price points, is the factor that most distinguishes Las Vegas from other major meeting destinations. "There is not another city in the country that offers that many high-quality hotel rooms within a couple of miles of the convention center," he says.

Such broad inventory, Janove says, allows a planner the flexibility to go to various types of properties for various types of meetings, from a five-star hotel such as Wynn or Caesars Palace down to a budget chain brand. "And all of that hotel product is located with

a very compact stretch of real estate," he says, "so it's also a very convenient destination in terms of logistics. In that



Gondolas at The Venetian Resort Hotel Casino.

sense, it is a very functional destination. And that opens the door for many different kinds of opportunities for many different kinds of groups."

As a result, Janove says, he has multiple clients who use different kinds of hotel product, at a range of price points, for different kinds of meetings throughout the year — with all of them getting the benefit of a Las Vegas buzz.

Lanktree adds that Las Vegas provides more economical options for some of her attendees, such as government workers or others on a modest per diem who cannot afford rooms at Bellagio, where her annual IT service management conference and exhibition has taken place each February for the last six years.

While she also likes the range of choices, Lindenberg also cites the value she gets with Las Vegas hotels such as The Venetian, Wynn, Bellagio and Caesars Palace, all of which she has used over the last six years to host her national sales meeting. "The value proposition that we get in Las Vegas is a big factor for us," she says. "We find we can get very high-quality hotels at reasonable prices."

Initially, that surprised her. "But I learned very quickly that I could get five-star properties at prices that were less expensive than five-star hotels in other destinations," she says. "That is very appealing to us because of the types of meetings we do there and the types of attendees we host."

New and Renovated

Because its vaunted and vast array of hotel rooms is such an integral part of its identity, Las Vegas has never rested on its laurels. Over the last several years, as the dark storm clouds of the deep and enduring recession began to clear, hoteliers aggressively went through renovations to

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restore their luster. In fact, Meyer says, every major meeting property in town has now completed a renovation or addition of a new amenity such as a restaurant or nightclub — or soon will.

The completely renovated Tropicana Las Vegas - a DoubleTree by Hilton is one of the few remaining landmark properties from the 1950s golden age of Las Vegas. After a \$200 million transformation, The new Tropicana Las Vegas - a DoubleTree by Hilton recently announced plans to significantly expand its meeting and convention facilities to more than 100,000 sf.

Currently offering more than 60,000 sf of meeting and exhibition space, the conference center at Tropicana Las Vegas can accommodate large events for up to 3,000 delegates. The hotel will build five 650-sf breakout rooms on the second floor of the Club Tower, adding to its three ballrooms, which comprise 19 breakout rooms in the conference center. All of the new breakout rooms will have private restrooms and the warmth of natural light.



The Executive Board Room at MGM Mirage.

Additionally, the resort will expand the Tropicana Pavilion, which is a wing of Tropicana Las Vegas' conference center. When combined with existing space in the Tropicana Pavilion, the venue will offer more than 55,000 sf that can be used for large exhibits and general sessions.

The recent transformation of the resort includes a fresh redesign of every guest room and suite, the 50,000-sf casino, more than 100,000 sf of meeting and exhibition space, several new restaurants and bars, and the all-new Tropicana Theater.

Early next year, Gansevoort Hotel Group and developer



The new Seascape Ballroom at Mandalay Bay's Shark Reef Aquarium.

Victor Draï, in partnership with Caesars Entertainment, will open a completely renovated \$185 million hotel on the site of another old Las Vegas landmark, Bill's Gamblin' Hall and Saloon, at the heart of The Strip at the corner of Las Vegas Boulevard and Flamingo Road. The property will become the first standalone boutique hotel situated on the Las Vegas Strip. "It's a great location, and Gansevoort is transforming it into a very unique five-star property," says Stephanie Arone, president and general manager of Las Vegas destination management company Activity Planners Inc.

And in another recent newsmaking development on the hotel front, Malaysia-based Genting Group announced the acquisition of the partially completed Echelon project from Boyd Gaming. The once highly touted project, on the former site of the Stardust Hotel, fell apart during the recession after construction had begun. Genting, which operates casinos in Singapore and New York, bought the project for less than \$500 million and will invest an additional \$1.5 billion to develop an 87-acre, Asian-themed casino hotel complex under its Resorts World brand. The new property is expected to open in 2016.

Hotels Within Hotels

The first of two new hotels within hotels opened recently. The first-ever Nobu Hotel Restaurant and Lounge Caesars Palace opened earlier this year and was already named one of the "Hottest New Hotels of 2013" by CNN Travel.

A collaboration between Caesars Palace, Chef Nobu Matsuhisa and Nobu Hospitality primary shareholders — actor Robert De Niro and Hollywood film producer Meir Teper — the hotel now has available 18 distinctive Nobu Hotel suites that can accommodate groups of five up to 45, and range in size from 1,000 sf to 4,350 sf. Available in suites, the Nobu Hotel hospitality menu features bite-sized portions of the chef's signature dishes. For planners seeking unique and memorable experiences, the Nobu Hospitality team provides live food demonstrations such as a sushi bar with a master chef. Total Experiences, the

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Renderings of Caesars Entertainment's new Linq district and a High Roller cabin.



built in the desert oasis back in the 1950s. Lindenberg also gave high marks to a party she hosted at A-list nightclub Pure, located in Caesars Palace, where she did a buyout for an event drawing 600 attendees.

Caesars Entertainment is in the midst of completing the Linq — a \$550 million outdoor dining, entertainment and retail district that will be anchored by the High Roller — a 550-foot-high observation wheel fitted with

cost-free in-house concierge team for groups booking five or more hotel rooms, can plan a special event.

South Beach's iconic Delano is coming to Las Vegas. The 1,100 room all-suite property will be the newest addition to Mandalay Bay, taking the place of THEhotel. Mandalay Bay and Morgans Hotel Group will unveil the new Delano Las Vegas in early 2014.

With a separate entrance and accessed by private express elevators, the Four Seasons Hotel Las Vegas, located on floors 35–39 of the Mandalay Bay tower, completely renovated all 424 guest rooms and suites inspired in part by the vibrant Art Deco period. Also, Four Seasons debuted Press, a new indoor/outdoor lobby bar that creates an energetic social hub that evolves from espressos in the morning to draft beers and wine at night.

Unique Experiences and Venues

One peculiarity of Las Vegas that is largely dictated by the sprawling size and almost endless list of amenities and venues under one roof at its major meeting hotels is that planners do not use offsite venues as much as they do in other destinations. That's because there are so many options onsite.

But when planners do elect to go offsite for a party or special event, Las Vegas offers a phenomenal list of venue options.

For her meetings, Lindenberg typically goes offsite for one major evening event. She has taken smaller groups of attendees to the long-running, critically acclaimed Cirque du Soleil "O" show at Bellagio and to Jimmy Buffet's Margaritaville Las Vegas, located in another surviving landmark, the Flamingo Las Vegas famously developed by mobster Bugsy Siegel and the first major hotel

28 giant glass-enclosed cabins. Each cabin, which can accommodate up to 40 people, will take 30 minutes for one revolution all the while providing breathtaking views of The Strip.

Arone has great expectations for this sprawling new complex that will surround the new Quad Resort & Casino also being developed by Caesars Entertainment on the site of its former Imperial Palace. The district, which is set to open in December, "is aimed at a younger, hipper audience," Arone adds. "It will include some fantastic new restaurants and live music venues."

Yet another ultra-cool new venue cited by Arone is the Brooklyn Bowl, an example of the hybrid restaurant-bowling alley concept that is spreading across the country. The Las Vegas outpost, which is named for its innovative namesake located in Brooklyn, NY, is slated to open at the Linq in 2014.

Arone also likes the new Hakkasan venue located in the MGM Grand. "It's an amazing space," she says. "Very high end." Hakkasan Las Vegas is a five-level culinary and nightlife mecca, which opened to rave reviews. Featuring modern Cantonese cuisine, world-class mixology and exclusive collaborations with in-demand artists across numerous genres, Hakkasan Nightclub opened to the public in April, and the restaurant debuted in May. Hakkasan offers a variety of environments, including the restaurant, private dining room, Ling Ling level, main nightclub, pavilion and mezzanine.

Las Vegas' reputation for extraordinary experiences is well-deserved. Attendees will certainly remember the ultimate experience of networking or dining among 2,000 animals including Golden Crocodiles, sawfish, piranhas, shark rays and two rare male juvenile Komodo dragons at

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A rendering of MGM Resorts International's new plaza connecting New York-New York and Monte Carlo.

Mandalay Bay's 1.3-million-gallon Shark Reef Aquarium. The newly opened Seascape Ballroom was designed to highlight the 30 sharks and other aquatic creatures that make their home in the aquarium. An adjoining outdoor patio and lounge, with a pergola for ambience and privacy, allows for flexible use of the space. The 1,675-sf ballroom accommodates up to 125 guests for receptions and up to 80 guests for a seated event. Guided tours of the aquarium for groups also are available.

Imagine Exhibitions Gallery at The Venetian is captivating visitors as they stroll through the "50 Greatest Photographs of National Geographic" exhibition. The 6,800-sf gallery also serves as a versatile event space for private functions, dinners and cocktail receptions.

The exhibition, which ends in January 2014, presents the iconic magazine's celebrated photographs such as Steve McCurry's unforgettable "Afghan Girl," Nick Nichols' iconic image of Jane Goodall and chimpanzee and Thomas Abercrombie's incomparable view of Mecca. Additionally, documentary videos throughout the exhibition tell the stories behind these iconic photographs and the photographers who shot them.

MGM Resorts will develop a new plaza connecting New York-New York and Monte Carlo in early 2014. The plaza will connect with a new 20,000-seat indoor arena to be built in a joint venture between MGM Resorts International and AEG. The new arena is set to open in 2016. Jim Murren, chairman and CEO of MGM Resorts International, said in a statement, "All great cities offer vibrant pedestrian experiences, and Las Vegas is certainly no exception, as The Strip is one of the world's greatest boulevards. Our vision is to extend the excitement we traditionally create within our world-class resorts outside onto The Strip, and ultimately in an entertainment district leading to our new arena."

The front facades of New York-New York and Monte Carlo will be transformed into an outdoor plaza experience featuring a series of casual bars, eateries and retail destinations. Hershey's Chocolate World retail flagship will anchor the new experience. The company promises an engaging and interactive space for guests as they "taste new treats, personalize sweet gifts and create keepsake photos."

Partners in Success

Given the city's vast array of options in every category of meeting components, and its never-ending assortment of new attractions, the Las Vegas Convention & Visitors Authority (LVCVA) plays a critical role in the success of many meetings and conventions.

"We've always worked with them, since our company was founded in 1996," says Janove. "That's because since we are not based in Las Vegas, it's impossible for our people to know everything that is going on there, up to the minute. It is an ever-changing environment, with new hotels and restaurants and attractions coming along every year. So we rely on our relationship with LVCVA to stay up to date on what is new and exciting and how we can use those things for the benefit of our clients. In that sense, and in helping us and our clients with site visits, they have been an invaluable resource."

Abram shares that enthusiasm. "They have just done a great job over the years," he says. "They have a fabulous team of people, and they are always customer-service oriented. Anything we need, whether it's distributing RFPs or getting answers to a very specific question that a client wants addressed in terms of doing something different and unique, the LVCVA staff is amazing. They are like walking encyclopedias on what's available and going on in Las Vegas."

As for other planners, even those who took a break from

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"Everyone wants to go to Vegas. Now that the recession is over, we want to add some fun back into our meetings. That's what Las Vegas is all about. Las Vegas really does offer something for everyone."

*Kimberly Dahl, Conference Planner
Cetera Financial Group, St. Cloud, MN*

Las Vegas during the worst of the recession when their budgets were decimated are coming back.

Kimberly Dahl, conference planner at financial services company Cetera Financial Group in St. Cloud, MN, is returning to Bellagio for a major meeting after a five-year absence. The reason, she says, is simple.

"Everyone wants to go to Vegas," Dahl says. "And now that the recession is over, we want to add some fun back into our meetings. And that's what Las Vegas is all about. At our meetings, attendees have some free time to do whatever they want. And Las Vegas really does offer something for everyone. And because of that, a lot of our attendees either come in a day or two early or stay over an extra day or two after the meeting to be able to take advantage of that."

Another reason Dahl likes Las Vegas so much is her 11-year relationship with Arone and Activity Planners. It is their DMC expertise that has invariably added to the success of Cetera's meetings, Dahl says.

For her part, Arone is frank in her assessment of the future, as Las Vegas returns to its historical dominance as a meeting destination. "There are still companies that don't necessarily want to do a meeting in Las Vegas because they think it will compete with all of the things there are to do in the city, and they think they might lose people," Arone says. "But that is a myth. If you 'up' your program and make it more interesting or fun by using some of the unique things Las Vegas has to offer, you're not going to lose anyone. You're going to have a better meeting. It's really a matter of using Las Vegas creatively."

The Future Is Bright

And at the same time, adds LVCVA's Meyer, the city's \$2.5 billion development of the new Las Vegas Global Business District will add a new dimension to its identity — as the innovator and leader in delivering state-of-the-art 21st century infrastructure that reinforces the value and



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productivity of face-to-face meetings. "And that will take us to a whole new level once again," he says.

To be completed in three phases over the next decade, the project will first focus on the renovation and expansion of the Las Vegas Convention Center and the creation of a convention district campus. Additional exhibit space, meeting rooms and general session space; upgraded technology; new food and beverage outlets; a grand concourse connector with more lobby space; and outdoor public gathering spaces are on the agenda.

Designated in 2011 as an official World Trade Center site through an agreement between the LVCVA and the Consumer Electronics Association, the second phase is the creation of a dedicated World Trade Center facility to attract more meetings and conventions to the destination.

A centralized transportation hub designed to improve connectivity in the resort corridor and improve the overall customer experience is the third and final stage of the project.

"If you...make it more interesting or fun by using some of the unique things Las Vegas has to offer...you're going to have a better meeting."



*Stephanie Arone, President and General Manager
Activity Planners Inc., Las Vegas, NV*

"I truly believe this is a transformative project. Las Vegas is known for defining moments that change the hospitality industry, and this project will be the next defining moment," stated Ralenkotter in February when the project was first announced. "This is more than a project, this is a vision that will launch Las Vegas forward ahead of the competition for decades to come."

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Rendering of the Las Vegas Global Business District.

The Best of the Best

In less than a decade, Las Vegas has claimed the title of most important dining destination in the world by attracting a vast assortment of celebrity chef restaurants.

"Now you have just about every celebrity chef there is in the world with a Las Vegas restaurant," says Phelps Hope, CMP, vice president, meetings and expositions, Kellen Meetings. "Just pick a name. And some of them have more than one. That means that in all the world, Las Vegas is now at the top of the class when it comes to great restaurants. There are dozens and dozens. You can give your attend-

sushi bar and private dining area along with a large lounge and 327-seat bar.

At MGM Grand, Joël Robuchon, hailed as France's Chef of the Century by the Gault Millau restaurant guide, operates not one but two restaurants that bear his name: Joël Robuchon, his fine-dining masterpiece, and L'Atelier de Joël Robuchon featuring tapas, a tasting menu, select wines and unique counter service. Winner of Michelin's Three Star, Forbes Five Star, AAA Five Diamond awards and more, Robuchon has redefined Las Vegas fine din-



"Las Vegas is now at the top of the class when it comes to great restaurants. You can give your attendees a world-class dining experience."

*Phelps Hope, CMP, Vice President, Meetings and Expositions
Kellen Meetings, Atlanta, GA*

ees a world-class dining experience, either as an organized thing or on their own, that they can't get anywhere else. And in a lot of cases, you don't even have to leave your hotel to have multiple A-list options."

In fact, Hope says — and planners unanimously agree — you can do an extensive dine-around program that includes some of the most acclaimed restaurants in the U.S. and never leave your hotel.

The long list of celebrated eateries include Bobby Flay's Mesa Grill, located in Caesars Palace, and Hubert Keller's Fleur de Lys in Mandalay Bay. Also, superstar chef Mario Batali operates Carnevino Italian Steakhouse in The Palazzo, sister hotel to The Venetian and Sands Expo complex.

Nobu Matsuhisa, the king of sushi and progressive Japanese cuisine, operates Nobu Las Vegas in the Hard Rock Hotel & Casino and in April opened the world's largest Nobu Restaurant and Lounge in Caesars Palace. The 11,200-sf Nobu restaurant and lounge, located in the heart of the new Nobu Hotel, offers several teppanyaki tables,



Restaurant Joël Robuchon at MGM Grand.

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ing. Wolfgang Puck Bar & Grill and Emeril's New Orleans Fish House by renowned chef and TV personality Emeril Lagasse are two more celebrity chef standouts at MGM Grand. The landmark hotel also is home to Tom Colicchio's Craftsteak — a famed steak house that uses only the finest ingredients from small family farms.

Not all of the city's most critically acclaimed restaurants are attached to celebrity chefs. Two of the most popular are Le Cirque, located at Bellagio and a sister establishment to its long-running and critically hailed sister outpost in New York City, and Rao's, a shrine to Italian home cooking that has been located in a tiny location in New York's East Harlem for decades.

And just as Las Vegas never rests on its hotel laurels, it never assumes that its roster of hot restaurants is finalized for the future.

New dining establishments that are creating even more excitement include renowned chef Daniel Boulud's return to Las Vegas with his DBGB Kitchen and Bar. Described as "French Brasserie meets American Tavern," the restaurant will open later this year at The Venetian. Also, a new partnership between French champagne maker Krug and chef Guy Savoy, who operates the Michelin Two Star Restaurant Guy Savoy in Caesars Palace, which will offer a Krug Chef's Table at the restaurant. The rumors are true: Next year, Iron Chef Masaharu Morimoto will open Morimoto Las Vegas at The Mirage, another jewel in the MGM Resorts crown.

At Mandalay Bay, local restaurant operator The Light Group will debut the new Kumi Japanese restaurant this summer, where it will join the new Citizens Kitchen & Bar, a refreshed Red Square. Light Nightclub and Daylight Beach Club.

New steak houses Gordon Ramsay Steak at Paris Las Vegas and Center Cut Steakhouse at Flamingo Las Vegas join the popular Old Homestead Steakhouse at Caesars Palace.

Rio All-Suite Hotel & Casino is home to a new KJ Dim Sum & Seafood.

Meanwhile, another marquee name Ruth's Chris Steak House has debuted a new location at Harrah's Las Vegas, the brand's first store on The Strip.

And for more budget-conscious planners still looing for something new and name-driven, there is Gordon Ramsay's BurGR, which brings a master chef's touch to



"O" by Cirque du Soleil at Bellagio.

burgers, fries and shakes at Planet Hollywood Resort & Casino. A new Carlos 'n' Charlie's has made its debut at the Flamingo, and Caesars Palace has a new Bacchanal Buffet.

Restaurateur and TV host Guy Fieri has signed on to open his first Las Vegas restaurant in late 2013 at the entrance of The Quad Resort & Casino. Touted as a new restaurant concept from Fieri, the restaurant will feature a large outdoor patio and dining area adjacent to the Carnival Court and The Quad's main entrance.

Wynn Las Vegas has more Forbes Four Star restaurants than any other casino hotel in North America. One of the newest is Wing Lei voted Best Chinese Restaurant by *Las Vegas Life*. The only Asian restaurant in North America to earn a Michelin star, Wing Lei's offerings include a mix of Cantonese, Shanghai and Szechwan dishes.

New offerings at Aria Resort & Casino include FIVE50 Pizza Bar, the first casual concept by James Beard award-winning chef Shawn McClain, whose first venue at Aria is the popular Sage restaurant. The décor and menu offerings at Aria Buffet were recently updated as well. At Javier's, a favorite hot spot for Mexican fare that opened last fall, guests will delight in Javier's famous hand-shaken, made-to-order margaritas. Culinary entertainment is the order of the day at Tetsu, located inside chef Masa Takayama's famed Japanese restaurant barMASA. At chef Masa's first teppan restaurant, highly skilled chefs prep, cook and plate orders specific to each guest's request.

Entertainment and Shows

Matching Las Vegas' massive hotel inventory and ever-expanding roster of A-list restaurants is its entertainment scene, driven by superstar entertainers such as Celine

LAS VEGAS & Entertainment & Dining



Robert De Niro and Chef Nobu Matsuhisa.

Elton John at Caesars Palace.



Photo by Michael Caulfield

Dion, Shania Twain and Elton John, world-renowned theatrical presentations such as intoxicating Cirque du Soleil shows and the intriguing masterpieces from Blue Man Group, not to mention award-winning Broadway shows such as "Jersey Boys," now at Paris Las Vegas.

"Just as there are with restaurants, there are many different levels of options for planners in Las Vegas when it comes to entertainment," Hope says. "For example, you have more interactive entertainment such as a show like Blue Man Group. In other cases, it's just a show that you want to experience, like a Cirque du Soleil show. And in a broader sense, in Las Vegas you can also find many of the marquee names in the entertainment world that most people have never had a chance to see. But sometimes it's also an unknown name that is just fun. But again, there is something for every group size, budget and taste."

Because networking and entertaining are such key

ingredients in the success of a huge convention such as the annual National Association of Broadcasters Show, Chris Brown, NAB's vice president, conventions and business operations, notes that the astonishing list of extravagant entertainment opportunities in Las Vegas are another reason for NAB's 30-year loyalty to the destination.

And the choices keep on coming. Country superstar Shania Twain is the latest attraction at The Colosseum at Caesars Palace. Like Celine Dion and Elton John who have multi-year arrangements, Twain started a two-year stint last December. The first national tour of the Tony Award-winning Broadway musical hit "Priscilla Queen of the Desert" started an 11-week run at The Venetian in mid-June.

With the opening of his eponymous comedy club, Emmy Award-winning comedian and actor Brad Garrett brings his comedy to MGM Grand's entertainment lineup. Brad Garrett's Comedy Club, a 250-seat venue, provides



"Michael Jackson ONE" by Cirque du Soleil at Mandalay Bay Resort & Casino.



Photo by Isaac Brecken/Getty Images

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Cirque du Soleil performed at NAB's Fusion-io party.

Garrett, as well as legendary comedians and the next generation of comics, a place to call "home" in Las Vegas.

The 'Best' Cirque Spectacular Ever

One of the city's most anticipated new shows, Cirque du Soleil's "Michael Jackson ONE," premiered at Mandalay Bay on June 29. According to a statement, "ONE" is a "state-of-the-art visual and audio experience creating a theatrical evocation of Michael's creative genius. Guided and inspired by his music, four misfits set out on a transformative adventure. By journey's end, they will personify Michael's agility, courage, playfulness and love."

Robin Leach, reviewing the extravaganza in the *Las Vegas Sun*, says, "'One' is such a riveting and immersive experience, you'll want to return time and again to catch what you miss. The nonstop action is throughout the theater, up in the ceiling and in the aisles alongside the audience, as well as on the stage and sidewalls.

"The dancing is beyond superb," he continued. "The multi-colored costumes and illuminated wardrobe creations are beyond dazzling. The music compilation of Michael's No. 1 hits is a seamless audio montage beyond anything experienced before. The video imagery is beyond perfection. Without a shadow of doubt, this is Cirque's best spectacular in its nearly 30-year history. The pyrotechnics and fireworks onstage add to the explosive show."

Also by Cirque du Soleil, the awe-inspiring Zarkana is now at Aria. An acrobatic spectacle, the diverse cast of more than 75 international artists transports the audience into a fantastical and suspenseful world, blurring the boundaries between the real and imaginary.

Celebrations

Carnevale at The Venetian/The Palazzo is a three-month celebration of the summer festivals of Italy, May 27 through September 8, 2013. Celebrating art, food and culture, the festival features 300 experiences throughout the summer, with activities that revolve around entertainment, art, fashion, games, sports, music and wine such as Light of Venice – A 3D Light Projection Fantasy: The façade of The Venetian is the canvas for a 3D fantasy of light and music, featuring state-of-the-art digital mapping technology. Also, Veni, Vidi, Vino – The Carnevale Wine Walk; and The Neon Olympiad – Party Like it's 1988! Join in the fun at the Bourbon Room every night in an '80s-inspired party.

Hip-Hopping the Night Away

Located on the third floor of Hakkasan at MGM Grand, the 10,000-sf Ling Ling Club provides guests with live performances by the industry's top hip-hop disc jockeys. Lined with LED lights and complete with its own bars and VIP tables, look for the DJ booth on top of the dance floor.

In January, DJ Pauly D launched his latest residency at Haze Nightclub at Aria. The reality star, best known for appearing on MTV's "Jersey Shore," brings his Turnt Up party to the cutting-edge nightlife venue, providing guests with a fist-pumping good time.

Hyde Bellagio, the fountain-side lounge, transforms into one of the city's hottest spots after dark featuring established and up-and-coming DJs. **LV**



The North Terrace at Hyde Bellagio.



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Photo courtesy of Las Vegas News Bureau

DragonRidge Country Club, Henderson, NV.

Three Distinct Worlds

Another aspect of Las Vegas that maximizes its unique potential as a remarkably flexible destination — despite its compact geography — is the fact that, in effect, it consists of three distinct worlds. There is the world-famous, neon-bright Las Vegas Strip, with its landmark hotels and resorts, and a nearby option — the so-called “off-Strip” hotels, a portfolio of properties that offers a more peaceful alternative, often at lower prices, including the M Resort Spa Casino and the Golden Nugget, a centerpiece of the Fremont Street Experience in resurgent downtown Las Vegas. Then there are the outlying Lake Las Vegas, Henderson and Summerlin, which boast resort properties that rival any in the country and provide even more of a respite from the high-energy Strip.

The 390-room M Resort Spa Casino, located just south of The Strip, features more than 92,000 sf of meeting spaces including the new M Pavilion with a capacity of 2,300 people, a 7,200-sf special event space called Lux, and the 100,000-sf Villaggio Del Sole outdoor events plaza. Hugh Hunt, president of Hunt Conference Group Inc., a Grapevine, TX-based meetings, conferences and special events company, arranged a sales conference at the hotel early this year. His group wanted to stay off The Strip but remain close to it, and Hunt knew the resort’s customer service was exceptional. “The group has been a client for more than 15 years, so we pretty much knew the M Resort was the place to take them to get the service and attention they wanted,” says Hunt. “We were the only group in the hotel so we had all the attention. Even though we were just 300 people, we were a full house to the hotel.



“Being off The Strip allows a planner to do a meeting away from all of the action, so to speak. But the action is still close by.”

Jerry Janove, Vice President of Sales
Resort Meetings Consortium, Cherry Hill, NJ

That’s rare for Vegas properties.” Hunt also was impressed with the layout of the hotel. “A lot of times when you come into a hotel in Vegas, you come into a lobby that is a casino,” says Hunt. “With the M Resort, the casino is off to the right a good distance, and you don’t see what’s going on in there. You come into a beautiful lobby and check-in

“Between The Strip and off-Strip properties, and places like Lake Las Vegas and Henderson, you can always find a good fit for a meeting in Vegas.”



Dick Abram, Vice President, Corporate Relationships
EventLink International, Dallas, TX

area that makes it look like the hotel only does meetings. And the meeting space, ballrooms and breakouts are all in one area.”

“Every group has a different purpose,” says Jerry Janove, vice president of sales at Cherry Hill, NJ-based Resort Meetings Consortium, in explaining how clients typically make a decision on hotel location. “Being on The Strip creates a particular kind of excitement and opportunity. Being off The Strip allows a planner to do a meeting away from all of the action, so to speak. But the action is still close by. And staging a meeting in Lake Las Vegas or Henderson means that you can hold a meeting in a great destination, but without the distractions of The Strip, which some companies want to avoid for some kinds of meetings. But again, that range of options shows you the flexibility of Las Vegas as a destination.”

Based on his long and diverse experience in Las Vegas, Dick Abram, vice president, corporate relationships at Dallas-based EventLink International, stresses that in no way is the selection of an off-Strip property a step down from the famous Strip hotels.

“Some of the off-Strip properties are just exceptional, especially for smaller groups,” he says. “And you also have



Rendering of the new tournament bowling facility at South Point.



Hilton Lake Las Vegas Resort and Spa, Henderson, NV.

different options at a range of prices. So between The Strip and off-Strip properties, and places like Lake Las Vegas and Henderson, you can always find a good fit for a meeting in Vegas, no matter the size or budget."

Among the most coveted of the off-Strip properties that are still near the action of The Strip is South Point Hotel, Casino & Spa, located in the southwest Las Vegas valley, just minutes from The Strip. South Point features a host of unique amenities such as a 16-screen cineplex, a 64-lane bowling center an equestrian center, as well as a world-class spa and 400-seat showroom, which presents entertainment at night but can be used for meetings during the day.

Recently, South Point, the United States Bowling Congress (USBC), Las Vegas Events (LVE), and the LVCVA announced a 12-year deal to host several annual USBC events, both citywide and inside a new, \$30 million bowling tournament facility with more than 60 lanes at South Point, which is expected to be completed by fall 2015. The property's



Plaza Hotel & Casino, downtown Las Vegas.

current bowling center annually hosts top events such as the World Series of Bowling.

Hilton Hotels & Resorts recently made its Lake Las Vegas debut with the reflagging of Ravella at Lake Las Vegas as Hilton Lake Las Vegas Resort and Spa. This Mediterranean-inspired 349-room resort is 20 miles from The Strip and features a 30,000-sf spa, salon and fitness center as well as a resort-sized pool and access to a Jack Nicklaus golf course. Indoor and outdoor event spaces total nearly 100,000 sf and include a 11,813-sf ballroom, state-of-the-art audio-visual technology, lofted ceilings, soundproof air walls and high-speed Internet access.

The Up and Coming Downtown

Another off-Strip property that is a time-tested Las Vegas landmark famous the world over is the Golden Nugget Hotel & Casino, Las Vegas, the hotel that gave the legendary Steve Wynn his start in the hotel casino business. Open since 1946, the Golden Nugget is a cen-

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terpiece of the Fremont Street Experience — one of the most exciting places in Las Vegas. This downtown hot spot offers five blocks of shopping, dining and entertainment including live bands on three stages to zip-lining under the canopy and Viva Vision — the world's largest video screen with shows beginning at dusk.

The Plaza Hotel & Casino, an iconic hotel in downtown Las Vegas for the past 40 years, recently invested in a \$35 million top-to-bottom renovation project. The Plaza boasts the largest convention area in downtown Las Vegas, rooftop pool, self-serve business center, self-parking and valet.

Also on the downtown agenda is the renewal of the



The Golden Nugget, downtown Las Vegas.

city's first and oldest hotel — the Golden Gate. In 2012, Fitzgeralds Casino & Hotel was transformed into D Las Vegas, and features ballroom space for groups of up to 300. Later this year, the Downtown Grand, the former Lady Luck Hotel & Casino, will open two new towers housing 650 guest rooms.

The Fremont Street Experience draws some smaller meeting groups to the city's downtown, which has seen a resurgence in recent years as a business hub for major companies such as trendy online retailer Zappos.com. Zappos CEO Tony Hsieh committed \$350 million to a Downtown Project revitalization initiative that is well underway. In fact, one of Hsieh's first projects was the renovation of the former Las Vegas City Hall, which will become the company's new corporate headquarters for roughly 1,200 employees by the end of this year.

Among downtown's most unique new venues is the National Museum of Organized Crime and Law Enforcement, spearheaded as a project by former Mayor Oscar Goodman and popularly known as the Mob Museum. The facility presents an entertaining and highly authentic perspective on the history of organized crime figures in the development of Las Vegas as a gambling oasis in the desert. To add credibility, the museum's board is headed by President Ellen Knowlton, the former FBI agent in charge of the agency's Las Vegas division. Housed in the landmark federal building, the museum's event space includes a courtroom once used for the Kefauver hearings on organized crime.

Already receiving rave reviews, the new \$485 million Smith Center for the Performing Arts, which is home to



The pool at M Resort Spa Casino.

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the Las Vegas Philharmonic, is available for events, too. And the impressive Keep Memory Alive Event Center at the Frank Gehry-designed Cleveland Clinic Lou Ruvo Center for Brain Health is a popular event space for up to a 700-person reception.



Dream Racing at the Las Vegas Motor Speedway.



The Memorial Bridge overlooking Hoover Dam.

Adventuresome Activities

Because of its location as an urban oasis in the midst of a spectacular desert landscape, Las Vegas also offers a vast array of indoor and outdoor activities.

For adventure-minded planners and attendees, there is the Richard Petty Driving Experience at the Las Vegas Motor Speedway, located about 15 miles from The Strip. The facility features state-of-the-art spaces for receptions and events as well as teambuilding exercises including the new "Muscle Car Challenge," which puts attendees in the driver's seat of the fastest muscle cars.

For planners looking for something new and different, local DMC veteran Stephanie Arone, president and general manager of Activity Planners, recommends the Wet 'n' Wild water park complex, which opened in late May in Summerlin, about 20 minutes from The Strip. "The old Wet 'n' Wild, which closed years ago, was a Las Vegas landmark," Arone says. "The new one is a fantastic facility near the JW Marriott hotel. It is a state-of-the-art water park complex with great facilities for meetings and events, and it can accommodate up to 6,000 attendees."

Adrenalin junkies also can get a thrill at the new Voodoo Skyline, making its debut this summer at Rio All-Suite Hotel & Casino. The 70-second zip-line attraction will send attendees soaring 400 feet in the air from the roof of the hotel's 50-story Masquerade Tower at electrifying speeds, offering a bird's eye view of The Strip.

And there are always exciting options such as an excursion by helicopter or bus to the Grand Canyon or Hoover Dam — just the thing to make a meeting special and very memorable. **LV**

Photo courtesy of Las Vegas News Bureau

Photo courtesy of Las Vegas News Bureau

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ARIA Resort & Casino	866-718-2489	www.arialasvegas.com	4,004	300,000	Y	N	N	Y	N
Bally's Las Vegas	855-633-8238	www.cetmeetings.com	2,814	175,000	Y	N	N	Y	N
Bellagio	702-693-7171	www.bellagio.com	3,933	200,000	Y	N	N	Y	N
Caesars Palace Las Vegas	855-633-8238	www.cetmeetings.com	3,960	300,000	Y	N	N	Y	N
Encore	888-320-7117	www.wynnlasvegas.com	2,034	260K w/Wynn	Y	Y*	N	N	N
Excalibur Hotel & Casino	800-444-3430	www.excalibur.com	3,981	12,226	Y	N	N	Y	N
Flamingo Las Vegas	855-633-8238	www.cetmeetings.com	3,460	73,000	Y	N	N	Y	N
Gold Coast Hotel & Casino	800-331-5334	www.goldcoastcasino.com	711	30,000	N	N	N	Y	N
Golden Nugget Hotel & Casino, Las Vegas	800-828-6206	www.goldennugget.com	2,419	36,000	Y	N	N	N	N
Green Valley Ranch Resort, Spa & Casino	866-617-1777	www.greenvalleyranchresort.com	495	65,000	Y	Y*	N	Y	Y
Hard Rock Hotel & Casino	702-693-5000	www.hardrockhotel.com	1,498	80,000	Y	N	Y	Y	Y
Harrah's Las Vegas	855-633-8238	www.cetmeetings.com	2,526	25,000	Y	N	N	Y	N
Hilton Lake Las Vegas Resort and Spa	855-342-1764	www.lakelasvegasresortandspa.hilton.com	349	92,000	Y	Y	Y	Y	N
JW Marriott Las Vegas Resort & Spa	702-869-7031	www.jwmarriottlasvegasresort.com	545	109,679	Y	N	N	N	N
Luxor Hotel and Casino	702-262-4800	www.luxor.com	4,400	20,000	Y	N	N	Y	N
LVH - Las Vegas Hotel & Casino	800-367-7917	www.thelvh.com	2,956	200,000	Y	N	N	Y	N
M Resort Spa Casino	866-551-1540	www.themresort.com	390	90,000	Y	Varies	Varies	Y	Y
Mandalay Bay Resort and Casino	702-632-7900	www.mandalaybay.com/conventions	3,211	1.7M	Y	N	N	Y	N
Mandarin Oriental, Las Vegas	702-590-5330	www.mandarinoriental.com/lasvegas	392	13,000	Y	Y*	N	Y	N
MGM Grand Hotel & Casino	800-929-1112	www.mgmgrand.com	5,044	501,000	Y	N	N	N	N
The Mirage Hotel & Casino	800-456-8888	www.mirage.com	3,044	170,000	Y	N	N	Y	N
Monte Carlo Resort and Casino	702-730-7300	www.montecarlo.com	2,992	30,000	Y	N	N	N	N
New York-New York Hotel & Casino	702-740-6969	www.newyorknewyork.com	2,024	21,000	Y	N	N	N	N
Nobu Hotel	855-633-8238	www.cetmeetings.com	181	300K w/Caesars	Y	N	N	Y	N
The Orleans Hotel & Casino	702-365-7050	www.orleanscasino.com	1,885	40,000	Y	N	N	Y	N
The Palazzo Resort Hotel Casino	702-414-4020	www.palazzo.com	3,066 suites	2.25M	Y	Y*	Y	Y	N
Palms Casino Resort	702-942-7059	www.palms.com	712	60,000+	Y	Y*	N	N	N
Paris Las Vegas	855-633-8238	www.cetmeetings.com	2,916	140,000	Y	N	N	Y	N
Planet Hollywood Resort & Casino Las Vegas	855-633-8238	www.cetmeetings.com	3,696	88,000	Y	N	N	Y	N
Plaza Hotel & Casino	702-386-2320	www.plazahotelcasino.com	1,003	30,000	N	N	N	Y	N
The Quad Resort & Casino	855-633-8238	www.cetmeetings.com	2,640	40,000	Y	N	N	Y	N
Red Rock Casino, Resort & Spa	866-617-1777	www.redrocklasvegas.com	816	100,000	Y	Y*	N	Y	Y
Rio All-Suite Hotel & Casino	855-633-8238	www.cetmeetings.com	2,522	160,000	Y	N	N	Y	N
Riviera Hotel & Casino	702-794-9561	www.rivierahotel.com	2,075	160,000	N	Y	Y	Y	N
Sam's Town Hotel & Gambling Hall	702-454-8122	www.samstownlv.com	646	30,000	Y	N	N	Y	N
South Point Hotel & Spa	702-797-8050	www.southpointmeetings.com	1,263	170,000	Y	Y	N	Y	Y
Suncoast Hotel & Casino	877-677-7111	www.suncoastcasino.com	426	25,000	N	Y	N	Y	Y
Treasure Island - TI Hotel & Casino	800-944-7711	www.treasureisland.com	2,884	18,000	Y	Y*	N	Y	N
Tropicana Las Vegas, a DoubleTree by Hilton	702-739-2581	www.troplv.com	1,502	60,000	Y	N	N	Y	N
Vdara Hotel & Spa	866-760-2489	www.vdara.com	1,495	10,000	Y	N	N	Y	N
The Venetian Resort Hotel Casino	702-414-4020	www.venetian.com	4,027 suites	2.25M	Y	Y*	Y	Y	N
The Westin Las Vegas Hotel, Casino & Spa	702-836-5934	www.westinvegas.com	826	20,000	Y	N	N	Y	N
Wynn Las Vegas	888-320-7117	www.wynnlasvegas.com	2,716	260K w/Encore	Y	Y*	N	N	N

* with resort fee

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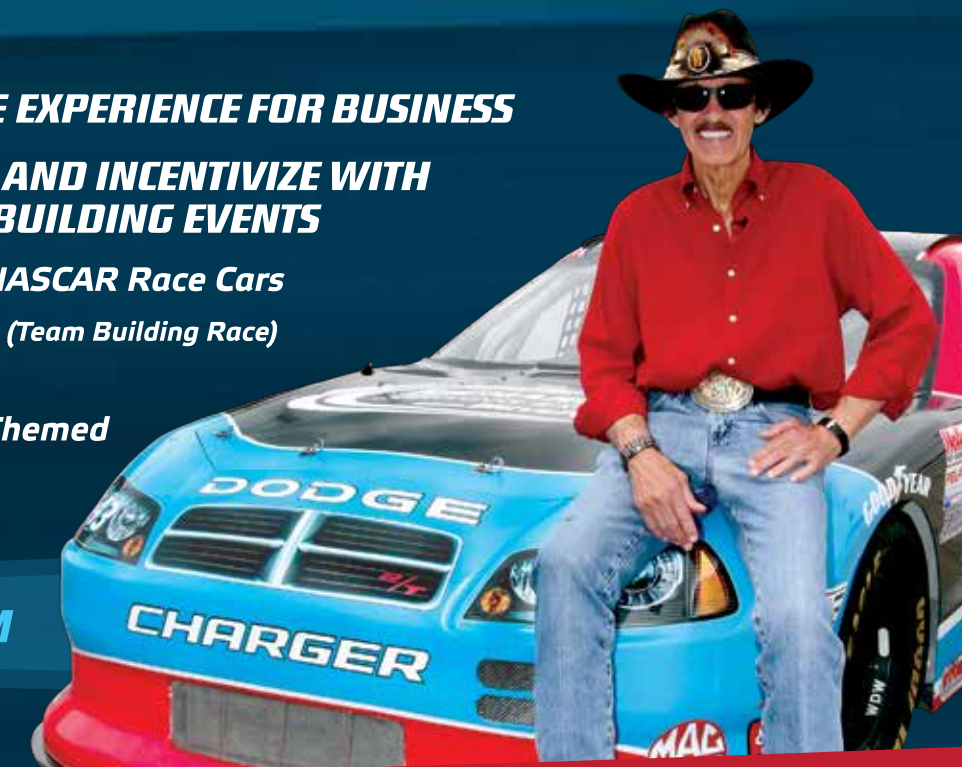
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