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CORPORATE & INCENTIVE TRAVEL

THE MAGAZINE FOR CORPORATE MEETING AND INCENTIVE TRAVEL PLANNERS



The Power of Themed Meetings

Not Just Window Dressing
PAGE 32

The Best of the Best

20th Annual Greens of Distinction Winners
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Senior Vice President of
Sales and Marketing
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ISSN 0739-1587

USPS 716-450

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AUGUST 2014

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Credit: Access Destination Services



Access Destination Services set up a CSR program for Dräger attendees, who built Discovery Park in five hours. **PAGE 18**

Credit: Paws Up



Over-the-top luxury tent accommodations fit the definition of "glamping" like a glove at Paws Up ranch in Montana. **PAGE 26**

Credit: The Producer's Lounge



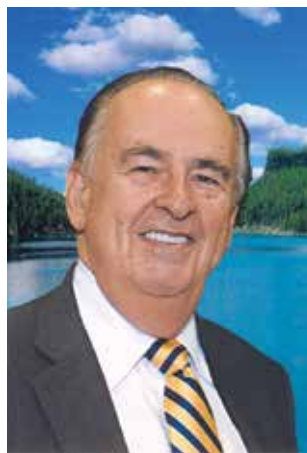
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Corporate & Incentive Travel (USPS 716-450) is published monthly by Coastal Communications Corporation, 2700 North Military Trail — Suite 120, Boca Raton, FL 33431-6394; 561-989-0600. Single copies \$12.00 U.S.A. only. Yearly subscription price is \$125.00 in the U.S.A.; Canada and foreign is \$165.00. Back copies \$14.00 U.S.A. only. Distributed without charge to qualified personnel. Periodicals Postage Paid at Boca Raton, FL, and additional mailing offices. POSTMASTER: Please send address changes to Corporate & Incentive Travel, 2700 North Military Trail — Suite 120, Boca Raton, FL 33431-6394. Nothing contained in this publication shall constitute an endorsement by Coastal Communications Corporation (Corporate & Incentive Travel), and the publication disclaims any liability with respect to the use of or reliance on any such information. The information contained in this publication is in no way to be construed as a recommendation by C&IT of any industry standard, or as a recommendation of any kind to be adopted, by or to be binding upon, any corporate/incentive travel planner or agent. Reproduction of any portion of this publication by any means is strictly forbidden. Editorial contributions must be accompanied by return postage and will be handled with reasonable care. However, the publisher assumes no responsibility for return of unsolicited photographs or manuscripts. Subscribers: Send subscription inquiries and address changes to: Circulation Department, Corporate & Incentive Travel, 2700 North Military Trail — Suite 120, Boca Raton, FL 33431-6394. Provide old and new addresses including zip codes. Enclose address label from most recent issue and please allow five weeks for the change to become effective. Printed in U.S.A. © 2014

Publisher's Message

Trying Harder

As hotels and resorts begin to enjoy the fruits of their labors as they recover from the financial crisis, and as the seller's market returns, not all brands are in the business of quickly recouping their losses. Just ask Cari "Cas" Strouse, CMP, CMM, meetings, events and tradeshow director at Englewood, Colorado-based global engineering firm CH2M Hill. Cas, a valuable member of the Destination Hotels & Resorts Advisory Council, has been using their unique properties for a decade. Cas



says Destination is one of the companies that doesn't forget about their relationships with their customers in a seller's market, and she really appreciates that Destination "doesn't poke the bear in the cage" as hard as some of the other chains do especially "when they say, 'We gave away the farm during the recession. Now you're going to pay for the farm — and then some.' Destination Hotels & Resorts never loses sight of the relationship," says Strouse.

André Fournier, who appears on our cover, is senior vice president of sales and marketing for Destination Hotels & Resorts. He is trying harder and committed to working with meeting planners to ensure they get what they need from Destination

and each of its 41 unique properties. He fully recognizes that Destination's credibility is built on a planner's past experiences with their properties and the brand. He notes, "Most planners today understand that when we take over a property, there are three things that happen: We build strong client relationships. We promise a capital investment with the ownership group that is going to meet or exceed clients' expectations. Then we get the right associates to deliver on our brand promise of operational excellence, for a distinctive meeting experience in a unique location.

For many more truly unique and memorable experiences, check out page 26 for "Turning Meetings Inside Out — Glamping in the Great Outdoors" and "The Power of Themed Meetings" on page 32. See how DMCs can partner with you to really make a difference at your next meeting on page 18. Two destinations that are trying harder to win your meeting and incentive business with new and unique options and venues are Asia-Pacific (page 38) and Orlando (page 44).

We're also proud to announce the Best of the Best: The 20th Annual Greens of Distinction Award Winners on page 23, 24 and 25.

Harvey Grotsky
Publisher

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Loews Royal Pacific Resort to Expand Its Meeting Space

ORLANDO, FL — Building on a year of epic growth, Universal Orlando Resort will embark on the largest meeting space expansion in its history. By fall 2015, Loews Royal Pacific Resort — the largest meeting hotel at Universal Orlando — will expand its meeting and event space from 85,000 sf to more than 140,000 sf. The new space will feature a nearly 36,000-sf ballroom, divisible by 12, along with four additional breakout rooms and prefunction space.

Upon completion of the expansion, Universal Orlando will feature more than 306,000 sf of customizable meetings and event space destination-wide. The expansion comes on the heels of a year of growth for Universal Orlando, with the opening of the destination's larg-



Loews Royal Pacific Resort.

est hotel, Universal's Cabana Bay Beach Resort, a historic expansion of Universal CityWalk and the opening of The Wizarding World of Harry Potter – Diagon Alley.

Loews Royal Pacific Resort

guests enjoy a lagoon-style swimming pool, private cabanas, complimentary Wi-Fi, and an exclusive package of theme park benefits including Early Park Admission.

www.umeetingsandevents.com

SITE to Debut New Incentive Travel Curriculum at Global Conference

CHICAGO, IL — The SITE Global Conference, the association's largest annual event, will bring together more than 300 global incentive travel professionals to Rotterdam, Netherlands, November 14–17. The conference will provide a dynamic experiential learning environment designed to enhance engagement and interaction with delegates. Sessions will be broken into four tracks and will provide all delegates, regardless of their discipline, practical and tangible take-aways that they can immediately put into practice to improve their business and enhance their professional careers.



MILLER

The core tracks include the business case for incentive travel, selling to the incentive market, managing incentive travel programs and experience management. In addition to the new curriculum, SITE will offer delegates the opportunity to enroll in the SITE Certified Incentive Specialist (CIS) certification course that will be held in conjunction with the conference.

"It has been several years since SITE held its annual conference in Europe, and I am excited to welcome members and incentive travel professionals from around the world to the cosmopolitan city of Rotterdam," said Paul Miller, SITE President 2014. "This year's conference will be like no other as we celebrate our new brand as the Society for Incentive Travel Excellence and introduce a new, comprehensive incentive travel education curriculum."

For more information about the SITE Global Conference and to register go to <http://SITEglobal.com/conference2014>.

Motivation Industry Back on Track

ST. LOUIS, MO — The latest Pulse survey from the Incentive Research Foundation (IRF) paints a clear picture of sustained recovery for the incentive industry. The IRF surveyed motivation industry professionals about trends in incentive travel programs, merchandise/noncash programs, budgeting and other key areas for 2014.

Findings indicate that things have stabilized. Overall, respondents feel positive — 63 percent — about the economy's effect on their ability to plan and implement incentive travel programs.

Also, 48 percent of respondents say the economy is having a positive influence on program planning and execution of merchandise/noncash programs as well. The percentage of those saying it will have no impact rose from 32 percent a year ago to 42 percent currently. www.theirf.org

Snapshots



Credits: 1,2,3,4 Christies Photographic Studios, 5 Grace Stufkosky, 6 Chuck Fazio, 7 GBTA

Global DMC Partners recently held its inaugural Connection Partners Meeting in Miami. Arranged by Florida Meeting Services, the program included workshops, seminars, teambuilding programs and more. Attendees included representatives of Global DMC Partners worldwide affiliates, meeting planners and others involved in the meetings industry. **1** (l to r) Harvey Grotsky, publisher of Corporate & Incentive Travel, visits with Jim Hensley, CEO of Global DMC Partners, and Stuart J. Gardner, president of Florida Meeting Services. **2, 3, 4** Attendees at the Connection Partners Meeting enjoy networking and teambuilding programs in sunny Miami. **5** The Advisory Council of Destination Hotels and Resorts met this spring at the Royal Palms Resort and Spa in Phoenix, one of the 41 unique resorts of the Destination Hotels & Resorts Brand. Pictured (l to r) at an al fresco reception at the resort are Stacia Gueriguian, CMP, manager of meetings at the Association of American Medical Colleges, Katie Giese and Karen Seabert of Royal Palms, Jackie King of King Management Group Inc. and Mark Lindsey of Royal Palms. **6** Energetic attendees at DMAI's 100th Annual Convention, which was held July 21–23 at the Aria Resort & Casino in Las Vegas. More than 1,300 fellow DMO professionals were on hand for the event designed specifically for destination marketing professionals. The 100th convention registered the largest attendance ever, the largest graduating class of CDMEs and the largest group of DMAP certifications in the history of DMAI. DMAI's 101st Annual Convention is set for July 15–17 in Austin, Texas. **7** Enthusiastic attendees arrive at the Global Business Travel Association (GBTA) Convention 2014, which was held July 26–30 in Los Angeles, California. Attendees numbered a record-breaking 6,679, making this one of the largest GBTA conventions in history and one of the largest gatherings of travel professionals in the world. The GBTA 2015 convention is set for Orlando, Florida, July 25–29.

By Eric Vidal

6 Videoconferencing Nightmares and How to Avoid Them

While in-person meetings are always preferred, unfortunately, they are not always an option. Video conferences, however, make an ideal alternative. They still allow for effective collaboration, especially when you need to spread information quickly and efficiently to an audience around the globe. They also benefit business operations. Sometimes, all participants are not available to meet at the same place and time, which may result in missed deadlines and projects ending up behind schedule. Videoconferencing eliminates certain obstacles and makes it easy for account management and the sales team to join a meeting no matter where they are located. This helps fast-track product launches, sales proposals and customer communications — just to name a few.

Today's videoconferencing solutions have advanced technological capabilities that allow presenters to keep the audience's attention better than the standard, lecture-style meeting. They also eliminate the need to buy plane tickets, hotel rooms, conference lunches or venues — providing exponential savings.

Because video conferences can be performed outside the office, people often forget they are still work-related communication events. This can lead to unprofessional and embarrassing mishaps that are easily avoidable. To prevent these common slip-ups from happening to you, and to refresh your videoconferencing skills, learn from these six videoconferencing horror stories:

1. Always remember to press mute.

You might have heard the story about the top executive who took a break from a video conference to use the bathroom and forgot to mute his microphone. It is an embarrassing mistake that is easy to avoid by taking extra caution.

If you need to take a break from a video conference, remember to go before the conference or simply mute your microphone when you step away from a call. Taking these extra steps will save you from a huge embarrassment.

2. Your pets weren't invited to the meeting.

Keep in mind that any disruption that occurs on or off camera is a distraction to everyone on the call. If you are considering having your dog or cat sit near you while you are on the call, please, reconsider your decision. I

remember moderating a webinar for an author whose dog was in the same room. Her dog started howling and would not stop. I told her I would take a question from the audience to give her time to take care of the situation. Unfortunately, before I had the chance to mute her microphone, she said a few colorful words to her dog. Needless to say, the audience heard every single word. Always choose a place for your video conference that is clear of barking dogs, noisy children and ringing phones. These distractions are unprofessional and disrespectful to everyone on the other end.

3. Don't let your ego get the best of you.

There is a story circulating about a woman who decided to have a video conference while she was driving. In the midst of her conference, a police officer pulled her over for illegally using a handheld device. As he walked up to her car window, she turned the camera toward him in an attempt to embarrass him. Instead, she mortified herself. Moral of the story? Aside from being mindful of your environment, do not let the power of videoconferencing go to your head.

4. Be thoughtful of what you say on and off camera.

Like the executive who did not mute his line during a bathroom break, there is a similar story of a host who incorrectly thought he muted his microphone and started to talk negatively about the attendees. This horror story can get you in some serious trouble. Not only is this mistake extremely unprofessional and embarrassing, but it can cost you clients, your reputation and perhaps even your job. If you would not do it in a face-to-face meeting, then do not even think about doing it during an online video event.

5. Dress in professional attire.

We are very fortunate to have the ability to video conference from our home or even while we are away on vacation. Please, do not take advantage of the situation by showing up in your pajamas. Dress appropriately for a video conference by wearing similar clothes to the ones you would wear to any regular in-office meeting. This means put the bathrobe away and put on a collared shirt. If you are sitting, perhaps you can get away with wearing a pair of slippers, but I do not recommend taking the risk.



Andrey Popov/www.Shutterstock.com

“If you would not do it in a **face-to-face meeting**, then do not even think about doing it during an online video event.”

With that in mind, choose a location to mirror your professional look. This means do not meet from your bed. Even if you think no one will notice, trust me, they will. Choose a setting that looks clean, neat and professional.

6. Test run all of the equipment beforehand.

There is nothing worse than attending a video conference where the equipment does not work for a good chunk of the time. Even in today's day and age where technology lies at the center of our every move, technical difficulties still pop up time and time again. The Internet goes out, one of the presenter's microphones doesn't work or one of the participants simply doesn't know how to use the platform. No matter the issue, every minute lost to technical difficulties creates an inconvenience

for your audience and undermines the credibility of your organization.

As with many of these mistakes, this one, too, is easily avoidable by taking extra caution. Test each microphone and video camera before the start of the event. Also, check the strength of the Internet connection. If there is a chance the connection could give out, find a location that has a stronger connection. Taking these extra steps ahead of time will save your organization from appearing inexperienced and amateur.

Video conferences present their own unique challenges, but that does not mean they are not possible to overcome. With advance planning and extra caution, your next video conference will be a great success — free of errors and embarrassment. **C&IT**

Eric Vidal

is a director of product marketing for event services for conferencing provider InterCall. He manages the strategy and initiatives for the virtual technologies that include virtual environments, streaming, event management services and operator assisted services. With more than 15 years in this field, Vidal previously managed the virtual classroom product, as well as brand advertising and new media for WebEx. Vidal also has held management positions at Cisco, IBM, BBDO Worldwide and Macromedia www.intercall.com

By Jeff Hurt

Too Many Meeting Professionals Are Bored With Work

Are you part of the 87 percent of workers who are bored at work?

According to Gallup, the bulk of employees, 63 percent, are not engaged at work. They lack motivation and are less likely to invest initiative in organizational goals or outcomes.

Nearly 25 percent of employees are actively disengaged. They are unhappy and unproductive at work. And their negative attitudes are contagious as they spread to their coworkers.

Avoid Automatic Pilot

A brain that is in automation is a bored, unengaged brain!

Meeting professionals often rely on memory or the way they've always done things during the planning process. We turn to automatic pilot when organizing conferences and events.

The brain is always looking for ways to conserve resources and energy. Whenever it can, it cuts corners. It automates some processes so that it can free energy for other things.

The challenge is that doing things the same way all the time actually bores us and decays the neuron connections in the brain. We must change in order to engage.

Rote Behavior Rots the Brain

Neuroscientist Sandra Bond Chapman, Ph.D., points out that when we perform tasks by automation, our brain's connections are not continually strengthened. In fact, just the opposite happens as rote behavior rots our brain's potential.

Relying on memory and automation to create conferences and events has two primary disadvantages:

1. It rots the brain...just ask the monkeys.

Because we are no longer using rote information thoughtfully and reshaping it to be creative thinkers, our brains' connections are no longer strengthened and begin to decay.

Michael Merzenich, Ph.D., of the University of California, San Francisco, studied monkeys and skill development. He put food pellets in large cups outside of their cages. The monkeys would reach through the bars to grasp the pellets and then eat them. They practiced this process several times for several days using four cups of decreasing sizes. Once they would master the wider cup, Merzenich would switch to the next smaller size. By the end of the experiment, the monkeys were extremely skilled at using their fingers.



“The challenge with doing things the same way in automation is that our **brain is neglected and can decay.**”

Here's the interesting twist. The area of the monkey's brain responsible for this activity grew in size and continued to grow. After the monkeys mastered the final cup, that brain area begun to shrink. The skill became more rote and automated. It was delegated to a lower portion of the brain



Jeff Hurt

is executive vice president, education and engagement, Velvet Chainsaw Consulting, and is based in Dallas, TX. Velvet Chainsaw Consulting exclusively services companies and associations with their annual meetings, conferences, education and events. They also help technology, service and membership organizations establish and execute plans and processes that result in improved business results. Hurt has worked in the events/nonprofit arena for more than 20 years including Keep America Beautiful as a consultant/trainer/writer; Keep Texas Beautiful as education coordinator; professional development manager for Meeting Professionals International; professional development manager for Promotional Products Association International; and director of education and events for the National Association of Dental Plans. Originally published by Jeff Hurt in "Velvet Chainsaw | Midcourse Corrections." Contact Hurt at 214-886-3174 or jhurt@velvetchainsaw.com. www.velvetchainsaw.com

and the frontal part of the brain, the cerebral cortex, was no longer needed.

According to neuroscientists at Harvard Medical School, Boston, and Hadassah University Hospital, Israel, the same thing happens to humans. New skill acquisition requires more neurons to master — thus growing the brain. Once the skill is acquired, it is moved to another area of the brain and becomes automated. The original part of the brain responsible for the skill begins to shrink and the neurons connected to that skill begin to rot. We don't think about doing that skill anymore or how to do it differently.

2. If we learned the skill shoddily, we automatically perform it defectively.

Our brains will want to continue to do this skill incorrectly and will fight change. Doing something wrong and doing it ineffectively and inefficiently can actually look better than doing the skill right effectively and efficiently. Undoing this bad habit takes tremendous conscious effort and work. We rarely see immediate results from changing the behavior. During the new process, the brain is performing the right task but inefficiently, at a slower pace and awkwardly. It feels all wrong. We have to trust that the new way will eventually become automatic as well.

Go Full Frontal to Avoid Boredom

The challenge with doing things the same way in automation is that our brain is neglected and can decay. And we miss opportunities to be innovative and creative.

We need to use high-level thinking skills — authentic thinking, decision-making, problem-solving, estimation, judgment, evaluation and analysis — to engage the brain. And that happens in the frontal lobe of the brain, which links information across other brain regions.

Memory works independently of the strategic thinking of the frontal lobe. It's your frontal lobe that is most adept at transforming information into bigger, original and more creative ideas. Trying to remember too many details counteracts with the frontal lobe thinking.

To be more innovative and creative, to be more engaged and avoid boredom, we need to go full frontal as Dr. Bond says! It's time to invest in your cognitive command center for ingenious thinking daily!

If there is no downside to thinking more strategically, why do we avoid it? What steps can we take to use ingenious thinking daily as we plan conferences and events? **C&IT**



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A Renewed Commitment to Planners

Terranea Resort, a 102-acre private peninsula paradise, is surrounded on three sides by the Pacific in Rancho Palos Verdes, California.

Credit: Destination Hotels & Resorts

How Destination Hotels & Resorts Is Trying Harder to Win Meetings Business — Even in a Seller's Market

By John Buchanan

Since the Great Recession and a return of the proverbial pendulum to a seller's market, the selection of hotel partners has become a critical element in the meeting planning process. While virtually every hotel company touts value and a commitment to relationships, the sad truth is that not all deliver.

One that does is Destination Hotels & Resorts, which is the largest operator of independent hotels and resorts in the country. The company operates

a unique portfolio of 40 properties, five of them IACC-certified conference centers such as The Inverness Hotel and Conference Center in Englewood, Colorado, and Lansdowne Resort in Leesburg, Virginia. The Destination Hotels & Resorts portfolio also includes landmark resort properties, such as the fabled Eden Roc Miami Beach, The Gant in Aspen, Colorado, and Vail Cascade in Vail, Colorado.

Across such a diverse range of brands and price points, Destination Hotels &

Resorts delivers a consistent standard of innovation and service that is drawing more and more attention — and loyalty — from planners.

Planners Speak from Experience

"When it comes to talking about the Destination brand, I'd say one thing is the fact that their properties are very unique," says Cari "Cas" Strouse, CMP, CMM, meetings, events and trade-shows director at Englewood, Colorado-

based global engineering firm CH2M Hill. Over last 10 years, Strouse has used several of the company's properties, including The Inverness Hotel and Conference Center and The Royal Palms Resort & Spa in Phoenix. She is also a current member of the company's advisory council.

"But what is consistent," Strouse says, "is the commitment from the national sales office, as well as the individual properties, to ensure that you're having a really good experience, regardless of the property you're at. They are very consistent in delivering the level of service you expect from them."

A.J. Hiester, corporate events planner at running shoe and athletic gear company Brooks Sports Inc. in Seattle, has used three Destination properties since 2009 — Motif Seattle (formerly Red Lion), Suncadia Resort outside Roslyn, Washington, and The Woodmark in Kirkland, Washington.

"They have a really great product," Hiester says. "For our meetings, and especially our sales meetings, we need premium hotel products and the kind of service that premium hotels provide. And Destination Hotels & Resorts delivers those things. Once you sign a contract as a planner, you're stuck with the hotel you selected. And doing business with Destination gives me the confidence going into the meeting that I've made a good choice. And when I'm onsite, I also have the confidence that I'm going to get the kind of service I need."

Rebecca Barbier, CMP, meeting and event specialist at Irvine, California-based cycling and accessory manufacturer Shimano American Corporation, has used two Destination properties — Vail Cascade and Paradise Point in San Diego — for national sales meetings over the last three years.

"Destination Hotels & Resorts hotels provide really good service," she says. "Compared to other hotel companies I've worked with, they are really on top of things. Their salespeople are very

well organized, and they get right back to me on things. If something changes or something comes up, their people are right there to help. They're also willing to work with you based on whatever your needs are."

Spirit of Cooperation

Strouse notes that the spirit of cooperation that she finds at Destination is of particular importance today.

"We're now very much

to spend as much time planning for the food and beverage arena, because it's laid out for you with a consistent feel and quality."

The same kind of relatively standardized execution and efficient planning process also applies to the use of meeting rooms and audio-visual capabilities, Strouse says.

For Ginny Snook Scott, vice president of sales and marketing at California Closets in Berkeley, California, the resort atmosphere at Des-



Ginny Snook Scott, Vice President of Sales and Marketing
California Closets, Berkeley, CA

"At Paradise Point, you feel like you're at an island retreat. It's an exquisite property. You feel like you're on a private island in Polynesia."

into a seller's market," she says. Strouse says Destination is one of the companies that doesn't forget about their relationships with their customers in a seller's market. She really appreciates that Destination "doesn't poke the bear in the cage" as hard as some of the other chains do especially "when they say, 'We gave away the farm during the recession. Now you're going to pay for the farm — and then some.' Destination Hotels & Resorts never loses sight of the relationship," says Strouse.

She adds that because a number of their premier properties are IACC-certified conference centers, planners can have a high level of confidence in creating serious business meetings and conferences. "For example, it's much easier for planners because of the complete meeting packages," Strouse says. "So you know there are a variety of breaks that are already designed and planned for the time you're there, as well as the lunches and buffets. So the process is easier on the planner in the sense that when you're working on a lot of different programs, you don't have

tinuation's Paradise Point property in San Diego was a key factor in why she selected it for the company's international sales meeting for 400 salespeople and franchisees.

"We know that many of our attendees don't take the time to enjoy a vacation during the year," Scott says. "So we



In Washington, Suncadia Resort features The Lodge and The Inn as well as homes and condos.

look for hotels that offer a conference-style environment that is very professional, but also provides a luxury resort-style atmosphere so they can enjoy some R&R time in a beautiful location that makes people feel like they're getting away from work a little bit.

And Paradise Point gave us that."



and Spa, which is located at the base of Camelback Mountain in Phoenix, Arizona, near the Phoenix Sky Harbor International Airport. Royal Palms, a historic

Destination Hotels & Resorts

The Destination Hotels & Resorts Advisory Council convened in spring 2014 at the (1) Royal Palms Resort

mansion with 119 casitas, estate rooms and villas, is one of the 41 unique resorts of the Destination Hotels & Resorts brand.

Destination relies on their Advisory Council for feedback on how to best serve the meeting planning community. In addition to educational programs and events showcasing the resort, council members bonded in a teambuilding activity, one of the creative and innovative ways in which Destination hotels customize the meeting experience for groups.



Advisory Council Builds Garden Wagons

In this teambuilding activity, teams worked together to build a wagon and assemble a care package for the charity. Teams took an experiential tour of the resort and collected a care package item at four stops. The care package items consisted of soil, seeds (peas, tomato, corn, basil), gardening gloves, gardening tools, garden hose and a book about gardening.

Team members (2) designed a card for the family while other members (3) installed nuts and bolts and checked tire pressure. (4) The council gathered

during a heartfelt moment as they prepared to donate the custom garden wagons filled with supplies to the House of Refuge, a non-profit organization that helps homeless families and individuals in crisis by providing transitional housing and supportive services that assist participants as they strive towards self-sufficiency and seek to obtain permanent housing.

Kuoni Destination Management USA handled the teambuilding exercise for Destination Hotels & Resorts.

— JB



Budget was also a factor, Scott says, as was driving distance from the airport. After a site visit that included assessments of five local hotels, she chose Paradise Point. "I really like the resort atmosphere," she says. "The property is very outdoorsy so you can get out of the meeting rooms during the conference and enjoy yourself. You can also have breakfast and lunch outdoors, which is very nice. At Paradise Point, you feel like you're at an island retreat. It's an exquisite property. You feel like you're on a private island in Polynesia." A good room rate and excellent F&B also helped cinch the deal, Scott says.

21st Century Benefits

Despite Destination Hotels & Resorts' long track record of excellence, there are several factors that make the company's properties especially popular in 2014.

One is its innovation in lighter, more healthful food and beverage fare. "People aren't eating or drinking

like they used to," says André Fournier, Destination Hotels & Resorts' senior vice president of sales and marketing. "There is much more interest in good nutrition now. It's about being active in the afternoon versus overeating at lunch and being comatose during the meeting in the afternoon. We believe it's now a form of social responsibility, a change of our culture for the good. People are more health conscious."

As a result, Destination Hotels & Resorts has made a clear commitment to more healthful food that enhances a meeting.

Strouse agrees that the effort is important and that, in fact, it is an iteration of corporate social responsibility. "We've been paying attention to that for more than 10 years," she says.

Hiester says that because Brooks Sports is an athletic company with active meeting attendees, Destination Hotels & Resorts' more healthful F&B options also have great value for her and her attendees. "It makes a big dif-

ference to our attendees to be able to enjoy healthier food and still be awake in the middle of the afternoon during a meeting," she says. "Everybody likes a cookie at a meeting. But you have to balance that with something that is healthy. And Destination does a great job of finding that balance."

Scott also finds more healthful F&B trends to be a brand differentiator. "That's something I've kept an eye on for some time now," she says. "And that was another thing about Paradise Point that really impressed me."

The Greening of Meetings

Yet another important issue is Destination Hotels & Resorts' commitment to greening as an element of its brand equity. It now boasts a formal Destination Earth sustainable meetings initiative.

"I think such a program is the minimum entry level standard in the meetings world today," Fournier says. "You have to have some type of sustainable

product to be able to deliver. It's our social responsibility. Our program is very well received, and over the past few years, we have received awards and recognition for sustainable green

company, we are extremely committed to the environment and taking care of the planet," Strouse says. "That's one of our core values as a company. So a

"What is consistent is the commitment from the national sales office, as well as the individual properties, to ensure that you're having a really good experience, regardless of the property you're at."

Cari "Cas" Strouse, CMP, CMM, Meetings, Events and Tradeshows Director, CH2M Hill, Englewood, CO



practices, including from *National Geographic Traveler* and *TripAdvisor's GreenLeaders*. Meeting planners definitely consider it important. The question is are you morally responsible? And do your company goals and guiding principles align with the companies you are doing business with?"

A clear commitment to greening is vitally important to CH2M. "As a

commitment to greening is something we expect when we look at a hotel. In fact, there are sustainability questions in our RFP."

The Focus on Customization

Another issue that Fournier thinks is important in the success of Destination Hotels & Resorts is its focus on what he calls customization, which means tai-

loring a meeting experience to address a client's specific needs.

"We do that in a couple of different areas," he says. "We try to bring in the local community. For example, the Wild Dunes Resort outside of Charleston, South Carolina, is built next to a reef that sits on the Outer Banks, and meeting planners have the opportunity to book a meeting package that includes a recreational event that is also a teambuilding event. They get to go to the reef and partner with a local conservatory to learn how they are rebuilding the reef to make it ecologically sound."

Vail Cascade offers mountain orienteering and navigating instruction. "So if you have a group meeting at Vail Cascade, we show them how to do mountain orienteering and navigation finding as part of a teambuilding program to work on better communica-

tion skills and things of that sort,” Fournier says.

New and Renovated Properties

Depending on what opportunities it identifies in the marketplace, Destination Hotels & Resorts also makes acquisitions or renovates its existing hotels based on demand and other market trends.

“We tend to expand our existing assets and take over existing properties and improve their current amenities,” Fournier says. “We recently acquired Town & Country in San Diego and have a project in the Phoenix market coming on board this summer. They are both repositions to the next level of class with extensive meeting space. As for new builds, we won’t see that for a little while. We have land, and we are working on a couple of new deals that are smaller in size and scope to complement the trend that leisure/corporate makes up 50 percent of our mix and group business represents 50 percent. That has changed in the last five years, and we will build to suit.”

Because of its close relationships with meeting clients and the role of its advisory council, Destination Hotels & Resorts also solicits input from planners.

“We are always asking for input from our advisory council,” Fournier says. “Terranea Resort in Rancho Palos Verdes, California, was designed by the advisory council and Estancia La Jolla in Southern California and Stowe Mountain Lodge in Vermont were also designed from the input of our meeting professional executive advisory council.”

When selling a recently acquired and renovated property, Destination Hotels & Resorts leverages its longstanding brand equity with planners who might otherwise be concerned about a hotel’s current or near-term status.

“Our credibility is built on a planner’s past experiences with our properties and the Destination brand,” Fournier says. “Most planners today understand



Resort at Squaw Creek, at the base of Squaw Valley, is just minutes from California’s North Lake Tahoe.

Credit: Destination Hotels & Resorts

And that kind of exemplary service, she says, is very rare. “I’ve been planning meetings for Brooks for more than 10 years, and there have only been a handful of times that I’ve gotten the kind of service I got at Suncadia. I was just flabbergasted. And as a company, I can say that Destination consistently goes above and beyond what you normally expect.”

Since the recession, every hotel touts its service, Hiester says. But only a relative few really walk the walk. And Destination is one of those that truly delivers.

For Barbier, the most important consideration is flexibility. “Things change constantly during a meeting,” she says. “So the most valuable thing from a hotel to me as a planner is flexibility. And Destination is very good that way, when it comes to things like attrition clauses.

that when we take over a property, there are three things that happen: We build strong client relationships. We promise a capital investment with the ownership group that is going to meet or exceed clients’ expectations. Then we get the right associates to deliver on our brand promise of operational excellence, for a distinctive meeting experience in a unique location. Terranea Resort is a perfect example of that kind of meeting excellence. Then we will offer incentives in



André Fournier, Senior Vice President of Sales and Marketing
Destination Hotels & Resorts, Englewood, CO

“We are always asking for input from our advisory council. Terranea Resort, Estancia La Jolla and Stowe Mountain Lodge were designed from the input of our meeting professional executive advisory council.”

pricing as well as in such areas as audio-visual or additional amenities such as F&B — wherever we can help them out financially to induce trial of those new assets.”

Consistent Service Is the Key

In the end, despite its impressive array of highly individual properties, the Destination Hotels & Resorts brand is built on consistently excellent service.

“The folks at Destination really care,” says Hiester. “The staff at Suncadia, in particular, was just amazing. They are top notch. All of the Destination hotels I’ve used give you that. But Suncadia really went above and beyond the call of duty many times, so much so that I would say to someone, ‘You won’t believe what just happened.’”

I don’t want to be hassled by things like that. I also don’t want to be penny pinched on every little thing. And in those kinds of ways, Destination is really an excellent company to work with.”

Strouse likes the fact that the company’s roster of distinctly different and one-of-a-kind hotels adds to the meeting experience for a particular kind of event. “With independent properties like the ones Destination offers, you have the creative, cultural flair of each property, in addition to knowing that you’re going to get consistency from the company. And you’re not going into the same kind of standard *box* that you often get with chain hotels. And that’s one of the beautiful things about a company like Destination Hotels & Resorts.” **C&IT**

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Destination Marketing Companies

The DMC Difference

By Derek Reveron



Credit: Access Destination Services



Sunshine Acres Children's Home in Phoenix received a new 20,000-sf park built during a five-hour CSR project by Drager attendees and their DMC partners at Access Destination Services.



Enlist Destination Pros to Help Design and Deliver Superior Programs

A Destination Management Company is like your favorite smartphone — a brilliant, trustworthy partner. DMC pros are a bunch of know-it-alls. And that's a good thing if there ever was one for a meeting professional. Because working with a DMC, especially when one is not familiar with the locale, is akin to having an army of like-minded event professionals whose only reason for being is to make your program the best ever.

What's more, without DMCs, planners who are already beset with doing more with less, would have to go it alone and handle every detail of large and complex meetings including searching for and vetting multiple venues and

vendors for numerous activities, entertainment, tours and dinners.

The Juggling Game

Catherine Chaulet, president of Global DMC Partners, a worldwide net-

work of independent DMCs, suggests that handling everything alone can be quite a load. "It could be too many elements to juggle at once," she says. "Lots of planners manage multiple events at the same time and sometimes in mul-

iple locations in the United States and internationally. Of course they can do it all by themselves, but if you have several programs to manage by yourself or you have a small team it's difficult to be on top of everything at all times."

That's where worldwide DMC networks such as Global DMC Partners can help. The organization, which is headquartered in Washington, DC, operates a worldwide network of DMCs in more than 100 destinations located in North America, the Caribbean, Central and South America, Africa, the Middle East, Eastern and Northern Europe, Asia and the South Pacific, and Southern and Western Europe.

Global DMC Partners, says Chaulet, are experts in easing the workload of planners. "The most important planner resource is time," she says. "If you work with Global, you have an account manager that supports you and knows all about your program. We also transfer information about the meeting, the company and planners from one DMC to another if you change destinations every year. We do the work for planners in a multitude of markets. That's a big time-saver for planners."

Most of all, Global DMC Partners guarantees quality. According to their website, the group shares "a unique global perspective, a passion for the industry, a deep commitment to your success, and an unparalleled level of creativity, knowledge and experience. Our promise is to always deliver one-of-a-kind programs and a singular standard of excellence wherever you choose to go in the world."

Furthermore, the company says their salespeople are available for "strategic advice, creative brainstorming, local intelligence and practical assistance — all at no cost to the planner."

Overseas meetings are a specialty of DMC networks such as Global DMC Partners. "We work with international meetings for companies coming to the U.S. because they don't have the knowledge of local destinations," says Chaulet. "We also work with U.S. companies that go to international markets. In both cases, we help companies with all kinds



Catherine Chaulet,
President
Global DMC Partners
Washington, DC

"The most important planner resource is time. ...We do the work for planners in a multitude of markets. That's a big time-saver for planners."

of rules, regulations, laws and taxes that they don't know about."

Earlier this year, Global DMC Partners held its inaugural Connection Partners Meeting in Miami, which was orchestrated by its partner, Florida Meeting Services. Attendees included representatives of Global DMC Partners worldwide affiliates, meeting planners and others in the meeting industry. The program included workshops, seminars, teambuilding exercises and more.

DMCs Are Experts in CSR

Global DMC Partners is among the worldwide and domestic DMC organizations that are receiving a growing number of requests for Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) programs. In fact, about 81 percent of planners consider DMCs as a major source of CSR experiences, compared to 60 per-

cent in 2011, according to the SITE International Foundation's 2013 SITE Index study, "Focus on Destination Management Companies."

Carrie Allemang, North America region project manager for Drager, a global medical and safety technology corporation based in Germany, earlier this year used Access Destination Services to arrange a CSR program for their three-day meeting in Phoenix. Allemang was impressed with Access' approach as they demonstrated true interest in her objectives by asking questions instead of simply pitching their company. "With Access, it was never about them pitching to me but about them asking me questions," she says. The questions included, "What do you want to see come out of your program?" "What will make you shine?" "What makes your group have the most fun?"

The successful CSR project was the highlight of the annual meeting for Drager's 500 North America sales, service and marketing employees.

It was the second time the meeting included a CSR program after the favorable results of the initial program last year. "I located last year's CSR myself and Access Destination Services assisted with the deliverables for it," explains Allemang. "Based on the success of that event, we decided to continue with a CSR this year. Access came back to us with options that would have an impact on the community in Phoenix."

Drager did a CSR with Sunshine Acres Children's Home, a non-profit organization in Phoenix for children separated from their parents. During the five-hour CSR program, Drager employees transformed a dirt lot into a 20,000-sf park. Attendees installed 18,000 sf of grass; created a walking path topped with crushed gravel; built and painted park benches; and planted trees and bushes.

The CSR undertaking was a perfect fit for Drager. "The proposal came to us as something Sunshine Acres desired for many years and that struck a chord with us," says Allemang. "It was also a perfect fit because it is family operated and so is Drager. We were celebrating our 125th anniversary, and Sunshine Acres was



President Catherine Chaulet addresses attendees at Global DMC Partners' inaugural Connection Partners Meeting in Miami.

experiencing its 60th anniversary. That was a great tie-in."

Such a large-scale CSR program requires detailed organization and that certainly was the case with the Sunshine Acres project. Prior to the CSR, Access did a site survey and sent Allemang renderings of how the finished project would look. She also received a list of attendees' work assignments and work groups. "Access managed the details and got everything ready for us to walk on property from the bus and go right to work," says Allemang. "They arranged for experts in various areas to instruct our groups on using equipment and doing things like rolling out sod and laying gravel."

Allemang scheduled the CSR project for the morning after attendees arrived, and for good reason. "It's very motivating that way," she says. "You can do it on the second day, but it's after sitting in meetings for a day and it breaks up your program's flow. This way, people can talk about (the CSR) for days afterwards among themselves. We drew on it as part of our theme on the impact we can have when all of our departments work as a team."

The park building exercise was very popular, according to Drager's post-

meeting survey. About 45 percent of attendees said it was their favorite part of the program. The spectacular feat also won the Shining Star Award at Pharma Forum 2014 for achievement in the life sciences meeting management industry, which includes CSR programs.

The Total Package

Some companies prefer to develop long-term relationships with DMCs to help with their meetings and events. For example, a division of a large corporation has used the Southern California offices of 360 Destination Group (360 DG) for about 100 meetings and incentives over the last 10 years. "They provide local expertise," says the division's executive director of corporate events. "They help with everything from ground transportation to activities, décor and staffing needs. They know which restaurants are best for board meetings, dine-arounds and dinners; which activities are popular; and which vendors are the best and most reputable. All of that is an added plus, especially when dealing with larger groups."

Last year, 360 DG helped the division with a successful incentive for 400 employees in Palm Springs, California. The

DMC provided a total package. "They did ground transportation, airport pickups and provided activity options," says the executive director of corporate events. "Attendees enjoyed the aerial tramway, a canyon hiking tour, a tour of celebrity homes, a jeep tour, horseback riding and a desert tour. They provided onsite support for registration and assisted with décor needs for evening events."

The highlight activity took place at the Empire Polo Club. "We hadn't been doing events there, but 360 DG was using it as a venue before it became popular and recommended it," says the spokesperson. "We did a large dinner and cocktail event under a tent with Cirque du Soleil-type performers. During a polo match, attendees got to walk on the field at halftime and stomp on the horse divots to flatten the field. They've helped us plan creative, fun things like that."

Meeting in Unfamiliar Places

Assistance from DMCs is especially important when planning meetings and incentives in unfamiliar locales far from home. According to Jennifer Kleinfelter, CMP, event manager communications for Siemens Medical Solutions Group, which held a four-day incentive/educational meeting earlier this year at the Caribe Hilton San Juan for 80 product sales executives.

Kleinfelter arranged for a San Juan DMC to plan activities including a CSR scavenger hunt through Old San Juan. Participants searched for suitable items to fill school backpacks, which were donated to a Big Brothers/Big Sisters organization in Puerto Rico. "The DMC also helped with an employee recognition dinner at the hotel," says Kleinfelter. "They brought in an acoustic band and the décor. Everything was a lime green color — from the linen and lounge furniture to the lighting — based on the shade of a new product. They also did executive transfers to and from the airport for our speakers."

Kleinfelter wants to work with a DMC that excels in three areas: CSR, teambuilding and recognition. "I look for DMCs that are good at recognition events for our senior managers who

want to do something special for their group," she says. "I also look for DMCs that have a strong teambuilding capability. That's a huge request that we have internally. We also do tons of CSRs and look for expertise in that area. It's hard to find because it involves presenting unique and not overly complicated ideas that can be completed in a relatively short time."

Pointers From People in the Know

Considering hiring a DMC? Meeting planners and DMC professionals offer these suggestions.

- **Expertise and background.** Look for a DMC that has a good track record and expertise in the desired program. That's what Allemang did for her CSR program. "If I had tried to do it myself, I wouldn't have the knowledge they have," says Allemang. "They know the different scopes of those projects. They had a project lead who has worked specifically on this type of CSR. I wouldn't know who to hire to show people what to do onsite."
- **Size matters.** Match the DMC to the size and type of meeting. "It's not always determined by budget. I also determine it based on the size of my program," says Allemang. "I do many small meetings and those generally don't need a DMC because they aren't complex. I do them myself in-house. Part of that is because there is a cost in working with a DMC and, with a small group, I generally have a smaller budget."
- **Cost-cutting.** Find a DMC that is a good negotiator. A DMCs that can arrange upgrades, services and add-ons with hotels, venues, caterers and transportation companies. "They use their resources to help me stretch my budget by not using a lot of internal resources to plan and execute a meeting," says Allemang. "They help me get better rates by, say, finding one entertainment group to contract with instead of using separate sources. If I don't use a DMC I might have to hire another employee temporarily."

The executive director of meetings

for a division of a major corporation agrees. "You don't have to bring in as many temporary staff if you hire a DMC," he says. "I find them to be pretty much necessary for everything short of doing a 10-person event, which we do on our own. They have access to certain venues that you might not think of, and they have creative thinking. They might have done something with another client that may lend itself to your event."

- **References.** "You need to check their reputation, and there are two ways to do that," says Chaulet. "Ask for client and vendor references. You want to make sure they work with people that like to work with them. If they have good relationships with their vendors, then you are likely to have good service. Also check their website to get a feel for the quality of service. Hopefully they will have customer testimonials online." References are especially important with foreign DMCs. Ask for references from United States-based clients. "You want a company that is accessible and that understands your U.S. audience," says Allemang. "I would suggest reaching out to colleagues to see who they have used. Get examples of successful events in the past. Also ask hotels who they recommend."
- **Payment requirements.** Inquire about all payment policies. How do you handle payments? Do you require full or partial pre-payment? Do you accept wire transfers or credit cards? Such questions are especially important with foreign DMCs.
- **Multiyear agreement.** "If you find a DMC that works well with you, find out if they will give you a long-term contract so that you can get services locked in at a certain rate for several years," advises Allemang.
- **Good value.** "A good DMC will have strong buying power because they will be one of the strongest in the market and have certain relationships with vendors," says Chaulet. "It's the relationships they build that will allow them to provide more for the same money."

Kleinfelter, who uses DMCs in the U.S. and abroad, offers the following advice on obtaining value: "I compare one DMC against the other in costs and services," she says. "I work with our financial team. When I create the budget, it includes costs and the results of negotiations for procurement. My stakeholders have to be convinced that in order to meet their goals for successful programs, a DMC partner is needed. It's usually a pretty easy partnership on that."

- **Speedy service.** Look for DMCs that can turn their services around quickly because more meetings are now being planned in a shorter turnaround time. During the first quarter of 2014, more than 60 percent of DMCs said that the time between receiving an RFP and the date of the event is decreasing, according to a survey by the Association of Destination Management Executives International (ADMEI).

Should I or Shouldn't I?

How do planners know when to partner with a DMC? Determining if the DMC is a member of ADMEI is a good place to start.

ADMEI — the global voice of the destination management industry — is a resource for education, standards and practices. In addition, ADMEI is the trusted partner in the certification of destination management professionals and the accreditation of destination management companies.

Chaulet says the complexity of the program definitely will impact whether you decide to use a DMC, such as a large meeting with lots of moving parts, or a VIP-focused small meeting. "Also, it can be an international meeting coming to the United States, or a U.S. company going abroad," she adds.

Just as it is hard to imagine doing business nowadays without smartphones and the many incredible meeting apps, it also would be hard for planners to think of planning effective and valuable meetings, incentives and events without the expert help of an exceptional DMC.

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FIFTEEN-TIME WINNER

Framed by graceful palms and rolling dunes, the oceanfront Ponte Vedra Inn & Club is nestled in the tony seaside village of Ponte Vedra Beach, just 20 miles southeast of Jacksonville, Florida. Since its celebrated opening in 1928, this AAA Five Diamond-honored resort has served as host to some of the nation's most influential meetings and conferences. Ponte Vedra's stunning coastline is the dramatic backdrop for 250 luxurious rooms and suites, most with breathtaking ocean views. The resort's two picturesque golf courses offer a distinct seaside links flavor and feature a dazzling array of water hazards, bunkers, undulating fair-

ways and elevated Bermuda greens. Other recreational pleasures include the Atlantic surf, beach, pools, tennis, gym, biking, fishing, sailing, horseback riding and the region's largest pampering spa.

Ponte Vedra features more than 25,000 sf of function space (17 meeting rooms), ideal for groups of up to 450 participants. Ponte Vedra's three restaurants cater to a variety of tastes and moods in a variety of distinctive and imaginative locations. For more than 80 years, guests have come to appreciate the Ponte Vedra Inn & Club's complete spectrum of amenities, great golf and its uncompromising level of personal service. *C&IT*

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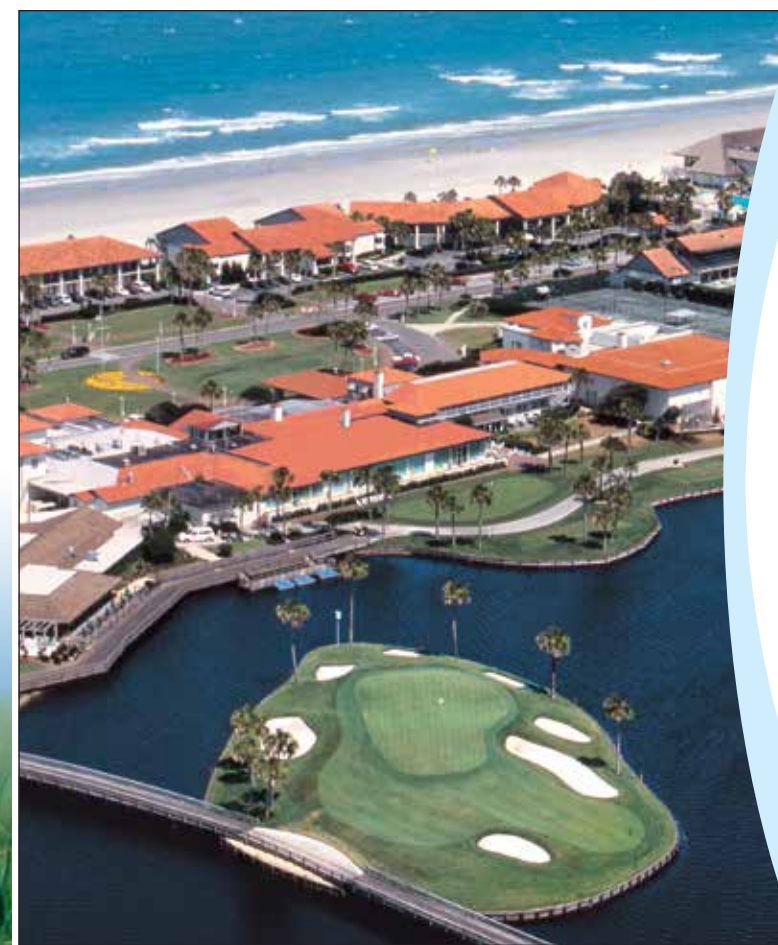
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Turning Meetings Inside Out

‘Glamping’ in the Great Outdoors Gives Attendees a Fresh New Mindset Without Leaving Their Comfort Zone

By Gabi Logan

Paws Up ranch resort in Montana showcases over-the-top luxury tent accommodations, each of which come with their own pavilion and even a butler to stoke the fires. This penultimate “glamping” experience was enjoyed by Toyota Motor Sales USA incentive program attendees (top).



With CSR, green meetings, local food and healthful group activities becoming more a must than a maybe in corporate meetings every year, the next logical step is to take meetings out into the countryside.

Scenic locations have always been a consideration for planners, but today more and more meetings are not just taking place with an inside-out window's view of mountain peaks, sparkling blue lakes and grasslands that roll uninterrupted for dozens of miles. Planners are increasingly taking their meetings to the mountain peaks, lunching around a campfire and teambuilding on the trail.

Glamour + Camping = Glamping

Even as a leisure travel trend, glamping, as a semi-codified area, is relatively new on the global travel scene. It harkens back to African safaris in Victorian times, when enormous yurt-like tents would be set up with wooden furniture, stoves and wash basins for well-heeled clientele who wanted to hunt the “big five” game animals without roughing it.

While many people have nostalgic childhood memories of family or scout camping trips, pitching tents, finding firewood and cooking around a fire, it's easy to forget all the things those bucolic memories don't include: a lack of clean hot water, food that takes four hours to prepare and tents getting blown over when you try to put them up in a driving rainstorm.

Glamping is often called luxury camping, but another way to look at it is as grownup camping. You've paid your dues. You want to enjoy the perks of camping without the inevitable downsides of a rustic experience. You need a more comfortable place to sit than the ground. And, while you may be in the great outdoors, you have things you want to do besides attend to your campsite.

“You get so much more out of those trips because you’re touching the ground, feeling it and really living it. It’s something people remember more.”

Rommel Momen, Marketing Talent Development Manager
Toyota Motor Sales USA Inc., Torrance, CA



While glamping venues, particularly those available for meetings, vary widely in how rustic the setting is, don’t expect outhouses here. Hot water may come from solar-powered heaters, but your shower is more likely princely and decked out with hand-tiled mosaics compared to the rough-hewn wooden stall you may remember from childhood camping trips.

Among glamping locations available for corporate events, the basics can vary widely. Some locations, such as the Hyatt Regency Lake Tahoe, offer glamping meetings and activities, but with



traditional accommodations. In addition to daytime outdoor teambuilding activities, such as scavenger hunts on the lake shore and geocaching, Destination Services recently organized a glow-in-the-dark beach party for a group of young professionals from a major technology company. Festivities included a glow-in-the-dark kayak relay with each participant decked out in glow-in-the-dark face paint and a light-up kayak and glow-in-the-dark volleyball on the beach.

Many glamping locations go whole hog, with guest rooms, dining and meeting spaces all in tented or open sky outdoor spaces. An hour outside Orlando,

Westgate River Ranch, the largest dude ranch east of the Mississippi, hosts guests in glamping tents that might be more appropriately called canvas cabins. Set on raised wooden platforms, the tents include air conditioning, mini fridges, private bathrooms, screened-in porches and a private picnic area with a personal table and gas propane grill.

Inside a Luxury Tent: ‘It’s Almost Surreal’

Paws Up, a ranch resort in Greenough, Montana, that was one of the pioneers of glamping vacations, has expanded into corporate meetings, particularly incentives, at its river camp on the Blackfoot River. Calling their lodging “tents” doesn’t seem to do it justice, according to planners who have had the pleasure. When



The Westgate River Ranch near Orlando offers cowboy-themed teambuilding, plus air-conditioned tents with mini fridges, private bathrooms, screened-in porches and private picnic areas.

Rommel Momen, marketing talent development manager for Torrance, California-based Toyota Motor Sales USA Inc. was planning an incentive at Paws Up last September, he says “I told people that were going on the trip luxury tents, and they were thinking, ‘How am I going to sleep in a teepee?’ but the feedback was amazing. People were tak-

en aback by the fact that the rooms are amazing.

“When you walk inside one of these tents, it’s almost surreal,” he explains. “You undo the zipper and you walk in, and you’ve got a huge bed, a solid heated floor, a luxury bathroom, art on the walls and a heated blanket and mattress. The bed at Paws up is the best I’ve ever slept in. Because the mattress and blankets are heated, it feels like a bear is giving you a big hug every night while you fall asleep. Then there is a pavilion at each campsite, and each campsite has its own butler. He gets up at six to get the fire going, and the chef makes breakfast.”

As glamping locations have evolved from places to get away from it all on a leisure trip to viable options for incentives, executive retreats or meetings, activities on offer have become a central draw.

Both Westgate River Ranch and Blue Sky Ranch near Park City, Utah, have developed cowboy-themed programs that allow visitors to get into a bit of role-playing to challenge what they know about themselves in a fun environment. For a recent corporate retreat, Westgate arranged an extended program in their glamping site for 40 people, revolving around campfire breakout sessions, ropes courses, cowboy-themed teambuilding exercises such as the corporate cityslicker cattle drive, in which groups of four or more saddle up and help drive cattle around the ranch, and an evening pig roast and moonshine bar.

“We are very strong proponents of training and continuous learning. We want people to push themselves and challenge themselves,” says Vicki Dalzelle, meeting planner for Cincinnati, Ohio-based Phillips Edison, a developer of Blue Sky Ranch. “We use the different activities there at the ranch to help with teambuilding and soft skills. When you can put people



System Pavers meeting attendees exult in the outdoors during their meeting at Evergreen Lodge on the northern edge of Yosemite.

in settings like working with horses, it’s an environment that is a little foreign, and some people are a little uncomfortable with that, and they have to learn more about themselves. When you put someone outside their comfort zone, they have to really think about things differently.

“We divide people into teams and do events that allow them to compete,” she explains. “But some are naturally athletic and others struggle with it, either because their knees are bad or they aren’t used to the altitude. They feel like they are a handicap to the team, and they feel like they aren’t contributing, but others say, ‘No, we’re in this together. We’ll drag you along, and you’ll be fine.’ It creates a bond. They find that they learn something about themselves, like they never thought they could go for a hike and make it to the top, but the others encouraged them, or they thought they were afraid of horses, and they can’t believe they did the trail ride. We find it really helps with communication skills. You’re out of the office and usual roles, so it’s the perfect environment for it.”

Booking Intangible Benefits

Like many up-and-coming destinations, many planners are hearing about glamping destinations through simple word of mouth, but what brings them to book are the intangible benefits of a glamping experience. “Someone else at Lexus had done something similar in Montana for an incentive or something for their dealers, and someone floated the name my way,” says Momen. “In my role, I’m responsible for department sales for Toyota certified used cars. I’ve put together other incentive trips in the past, and I’m always looking to

do things someone ordinarily wouldn’t do themselves.

“Whether the destination or the type of trip, it’s important to me it’s something they wouldn’t do on their own,” he continues. “I’ve done the USVI, a race school at Laguna Seca, deep sea fishing in British Columbia. I look to create a bonding experience between the dealers through situations that allow you to realize there’s so much more than sitting on a beach. I’m not much of a beach person. I’d rather get in a car and go



“The secluded location made people’s heads clear...and we got a lot of work done. It’s way better than the usual corporate structure to a year-end meeting. The company gets more, and the employees are happier.”

Peter Smith, Sales Manager
System Pavers, Union City, CA

around and discover things. You get so much more out of those trips because you’re touching the ground, feeling it and really living it. It’s something people remember more.”

Momen continues, “To me a trip is made by the people you’re with or that you’re interacting with, and the people at Paws Up did everything in their power to make life easy and make sure we had a great time. They’re the type of people who care about people more than catching a train, and I think that adds to the entire experience. From the moment you land, they take care of you. ...You’re with great people in these exceptional tents roasting marshmallows, listening to the river, sitting with the butler and the great chefs, who have great attitudes and personalities. It’s the type of resort you want to be stuck at.”

For planners like Peter Smith, sales manager for Union City, California-based System Pavers, who tried glamp-

ing while looking for something different, it often turns out that the experience hit exactly the intangible needs of the event. “Every year we do a year-end planning meeting where we talk about the new year. We’ve done Reno and Tahoe, and this year we thought, ‘Let’s do something different,’” recalls Smith, so he took his team to Evergreen Lodge on the northern edge of Yosemite National Park with the help of group manager Tara Stetz.

“We had a three-day event with one

structured day of meetings,” Smith explains. “For our structured day, we started with a hike in Yosemite, then we went back to the meeting room, which has a great view of the pool and a couple of trees, for six hours of meetings. On the other days, everyone could just sort of do as they liked — hike, play bocce ball. They had pretty much everything you would want to do. There’s so much to do up there, but not very many things are planned. We had some hikes, during the day and at night, because you work with these people all the time and it’s nice to get outside.”

A Chance to Clear Your Head

Smith continues, “The loose structure allowed everyone to be super relaxed and excited, even though there was a lot of work activity to do, since it was the year-end meeting. Most people were there with their families. There were only eight people on our managerial



Credit: Blue Sky Ranch

The Antelope Meadows Yurt at Blue Sky Ranch in Utah can be set up for a corporate event or for a luxury overnight for a V.I.P. retreat combined with outdoor adventures.

team, and people would get up on their own and decide over breakfast what to do. In the main cabin, there's a fireplace, and sometimes people would just sit around the fireplace, but they have these miniature cabins that allowed us to have a little community.

"It's the kind of thing we thought we were missing," he says. "Before it was just about getting everyone's families together, and this was dead on. The secluded location made people's heads clear. People relaxed, and we got a lot of work done. It's way better than the usual corporate structure to a year-end meeting. The company gets more, and the employees are happier."

Dalzelle couldn't agree more about the time her employees spent at Blue Sky. "Blue Sky is perfect because it gets everyone out of the office and puts us somewhere with great scenery. It's so refreshing, you can really clear your head," she says. "It's just indescribable, this sensation you get when you're standing on top of the mountain. You're able to get caught up. It's not next thing, next thing, next thing. You're able to enjoy the moment, and that makes you much more receptive to the training going on, because there are no distractions. Even though you're allowed time to check email, most of the time no one wants to."

Blue Sky Ranch, which specializes in a wide variety of mountain adventures and teambuilding, has an 8,000-sf arena that can accommodate up to 500 banquet style. A mountaintop yurt also can be used for small gatherings or "luxury

overnights" for six. Dalzelle has been going to Blue Sky for meetings and retreats for seven years. "When we found out that they were going to do it and the idea of what it was going to be, we had our annual meeting there in 2007, and there was nothing out there," she says. "They dropped us off on the side of a dirt road, and we had to hike in by GPS to find 200 trees and plant them. Now, each year each department takes a few days to go offsite to do some training



"It's just indescribable, this sensation you get when you're standing on top of the mountain. ...You're able to enjoy the moment and that makes you much more receptive to the training going on, because there are no distractions."

Vicki Dalzelle, Assistant Director of Learning Services
Phillips Edison & Company, Cincinnati, OH

and teambuilding activities. They love it. That's one of the things that never get old in this company.

"When I have new people coming in and we talk during new hire orientation about going for department retreats and the annual meeting, they're like, 'Wow! We get to go out there? For work?' They find it really fascinating that the company would do this. I think it's part of our culture. It's just something that we do now. Employees know when retreats are coming up and they look forward to them."

Dalzelle continues, "When I schedule a department retreat, there's a structured part, and once teambuilding activities wrap up, we do the debriefing on that. Then we have lunch on the patio, and some people just want to sit and

enjoy the view, the peace and quiet, the non-demand on time. Others will rally a group for a walk. People who have been there before say, 'Oh, let's walk up to the yurt or to the tavern.' You've got people who are new to the company and are overwhelmed because there's just so much to do and to look at and others that are wanting to share their experiences they've had there before."

Don't Knock It Till You've Tried It

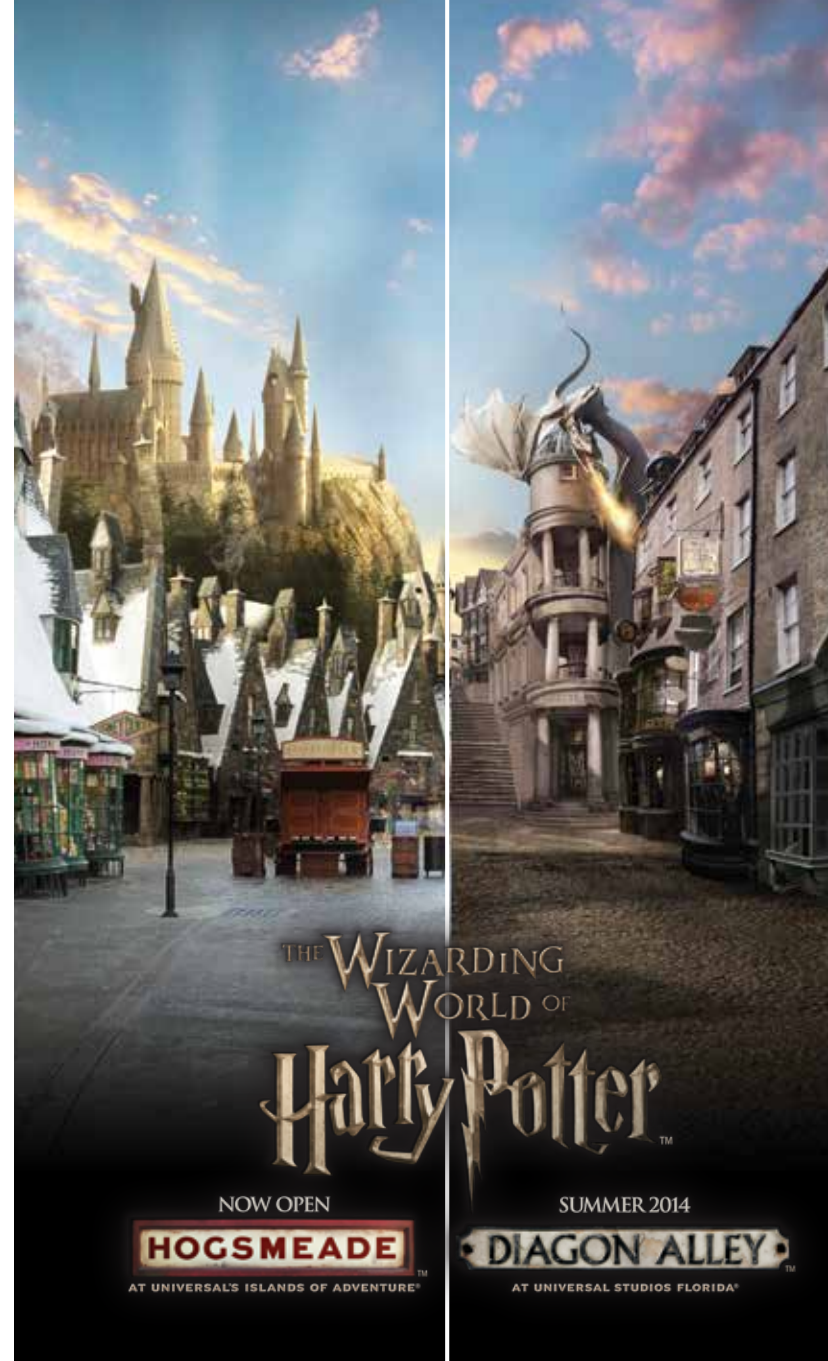
While attendees have a chance to unwind and rejuvenate with both stunning scenery and luxurious treatment, whether from an onsite spa or butler, exposing them to something so out of the ordinary also creates a lasting positive impression of your company.

"I think the great thing is that you sometimes don't know what you don't know that you like," explains Momen. "When you think about it, if you've lived only in urban, developed areas,

going cattle-herding on horseback is something you can never envision on your own without having done it. Trying to explain it to someone else just doesn't translate."

From planners who have taken the plunge, the resounding response on glamping meetings is: just do it. The locations not only offer attendees something unique that they're not likely to experience on their own, but the evolving settings and activities also make them ideal locations to return to year after year and create a unique corporate culture around.

Says Dalzelle, "You have to go there and experience it to understand — just the view and being able to stand there on a mountain top and take a deep breath. I've had a lot of events, and every time I just can't wait to go back." **C&IT**



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The Power of Themed Meetings

By Patrick Simms



Not Just Window Dressing, an Artfully Conceived Theme Brings the Corporate Message to Life

In the history of corporate meetings, many an attendee has walked into an annual meeting, executive retreat or sales kickoff with only a vague idea of what the company intends to achieve via the event. Perhaps they are to get a sense of the current state of business, discuss strategy for the coming year or get motivated for the next sales cycle. When a theme is identified, however, attendees walk into it with a clearer sense of the

thinking behind the program. And they get that message immediately, without needing to read and analyze an entire agenda. While incentive travel programs have long featured themes and branding, it is arguable that many other types of meetings benefit from carrying a theme.

Setting Expectations

Lynne Esparo, senior director, face to face expe-

Lennox Industries interpreted their sales slogan "Turn It Up" musically with the Lennoxpalooza theme, complete with live concerts and souvenir marketing elements. (Above) A lifelike model of Lennox founder Dave Lennox leads the Village People.

riences, with Burlington, Massachusetts-based Nuance Communications Inc., is one planner who makes that argument. Esparo and her team plan more than 300 events a year for the speech-recognition software company, the largest being the annual sales kickoff. This year, the company is even deliberating on whether to call the event a sales kickoff in addition to the moniker that expresses its theme, Esparo notes, since the generic title has relatively little meaning. "To me, the significance of a theme, whether it's an internal or an external audience, is that it gives attendees an expectation of what the emphasis of the meeting is. It says where the company is right now, and what's going to be the focus of the meeting," she explains. "For example, if the theme of a sales kickoff were to be 'Command Your Destiny,' then as an attendee I would think, 'OK, so that's where the company is right now: They're wanting me to take command of my own destiny as a salesperson.'"

Core Message

The same point applies with an external audience. "We do a big user group for our health care attendees every year that we call Conversations, and the theme there says something very important about where we think their heads should be at and what the focus of the meeting is," Esparo continues. "And that's really important, because immediately a customer is going to make a judgment call based on your theme: 'I see where they think the business is, and that relates to me. I think I should attend this conference.' So the theme really influences people and helps them get their head around the core message of the event."

Choosing a Theme

While a theme is typically expressed in a slogan or catchphrase, brainstorming that expression isn't the starting point to determining a theme. Rather, the process begins with a discussion of the business climate and goals among the meeting's stakeholders. "If it's a sales meeting for example, (one should consider) what's

the rallying cry for my salespeople for this year? From there you can come up with a couple of words (to express the message)," Esparo explains. "But that's secondary; first, where is the business at? And so we spend a lot of time with our senior leaders asking, where are we at this year and



Cecilia Daddio, CMP, Senior Manager, Events and Incentives
Lennox Industries Inc., Richardson, TX

"Customers left placing orders at the dealer meeting roadshow, and became highly motivated and enthusiastic, asking if they could have the Lennoxpalooza song to play in their shop when customers come in."

what is the main core message? The idea should also be vetted by our sales leaders, because they're out there every day with our clients. We shouldn't be sitting back at corporate and saying, 'Here's the theme.' We should ask the sales leaders, 'Is this spot on? Does this resonate with you?'"

The theme follows from that interaction, and then the slogan or catchphrase. But it's seldom that one discussion will bear that fruit, Esparo adds. "Rarely it happens that everybody agrees right away, because it's a very personal thing; different words mean different things to different people. The CMO may disagree with the head of sales, who may disagree with the CEO, and so on. So we cull it down, get a top five, and then send that around to our sales leaders. The process might take two weeks to a month due to people's schedules."

Executing the Theme

The next step is determining how to execute the theme, how to express it via the program's marketing materials, destination, choice of speakers and other elements. "The theme should drive everything you do," says Esparo. For example, if our theme was 'Command Your Destiny,' every touchpoint of the event should play off of that theme. My motivational speaker should be someone who is the epitome of commanding his or her destiny. I might do a special event such as a sailing expe-

dition where attendees are commanding their destiny on the seas."

The challenge is to make an abstract message concrete. "The more you bring it to realism the more it makes sense to people," says Esparo, who played upon the theme of "Amplified" for last year's

sales kickoff. "We were at a place where we felt as though the salespeople had the tools that they needed, but they needed to amplify their efforts. We have a great company, we have wonderful solutions, we have the people to support the sales organization. It's now time for the sales organization to use all of these things and amp up their efforts to make their quota," says Esparo, adding, "That's very different than saying 'band together' or 'born to perform.'" The "Amplified" theme was expressed, in part, by staging the event at the Hard Rock Hotel & Casino Las Vegas.

Lennoxpalooza

Richardson, Texas-based Lennox Industries Inc. expressed a similar theme (and utilized the same hotel) for its latest national sales meeting, bearing the slogan "Turn It Up." Cecilia Daddio, CMP, senior manager, events and incentives, explains the thinking behind the tagline: "'Turn It Up' as far as sales, as far as heat (Lennox provides HVAC products), as far as customer service. And when we took it on the road to implement it for our dealer customer base, it was 'turn it up' with their internal sales. So for a year when we really didn't have a lot of new product to release, (we focused on) utilizing what we already have and kicking it up a notch."

And like Esparo, Daddio interpreted the tagline musically, branding the sales meeting as "Lennoxpalooza." Embracing

Working With a Third Party



Many corporations rely on special event companies to bring a theme to life, and the key trait in such a partner is a dedication to tailoring the event to the group. Seldom will a client want a replication of a portfolio event, no matter how successful it was. When Jen Chauvin, CMP, senior director, marketing strategy and event management with Interstate Hotels & Resorts, was looking to create an Atlanta-themed event for the company's leadership conference, she selected WM Events, led by Principal and Founder William Fogler, to take on the project. She had not partnered with the company before, but it quickly became apparent that WM was up to the task. To drive home the meeting's theme, "The Power of One," showing hoteliers how to leverage a destination's uniqueness, Folger selected (and secured the permit to use) the Georgia Railroad Freight Depot, a building dating from 1869 and one of the oldest in the downtown area.

Rising to the Theme Challenge

"We challenged WM Events to come up with an event that is unique and specific to our group, and that celebrates Atlanta. In our initial RFP we looked for three different concepts and three different venues from William. After spending some time with him, I realized that not only did he have ideas, but ideas he could implement," says Chauvin. "We wanted a venue that was historic while also giving us a blank template to build something very modern. We literally had a chart of pros and cons for different venues. We chose the right one. The Freight Depot isn't a very well known venue among the suppliers; it's a gold mine that not many are aware of. I really appreciated how William led his team in getting the feel of the space and worked to make every detail support the overall experience."

A Multisensory Event

That experience was a multisensory tribute to both old and new Atlanta.

Visual elements included:

- A 90-foot porch with rocking chairs and cigar rollers
- Romantic sheer drapery and mason jar candle-lined railings.
- A living moss wall in the venue's front lobby.
- A chic photo booth made with wood pallets and magnolia vines and blossoms.
- A cherry laurel tree in the lobby complete with swinging trapeze artists.
- Disc jockey booths that featured the Atlanta skyline.
- An area with sleek white and chrome furniture to represent modern Atlanta décor.

Gustatory elements included:

- Mint juleps, pimento flavored popcorn, individualized pecan pops.
- A barbecue taste-off.
- A whole pig on the pit.
- Contemporary versions of Southern classics such as Shrimp and Grits, Lobster Mac 'n' Cheese and Salmon Succotash.

Auditory elements included:

- A jazz club.
- A hip hop dance party.
- The band Love Cannon played pop hits from the 1980s in bluegrass style.
- Performance by iconic blues singer Francine Reed.
- Famed Atlanta disc jockeys.

The event's climax was the arrival of a 25-person flash mob followed by desserts descending from the ceiling on two 20-foot trusses.

— PS



Credits: WM Events

the popular music of many genres and generations, the program featured everything from marketing elements such as concert-style posters and USBs shaped like guitars, to interactive elements such as post-breakout musical trivia quizzes, teambuilding exercises where participants had to come up with band names, and onstage performances by Lennox staff. The program even had its own original song. Daddio says Lennox used their official production company partner, Dallas-based The Producer's Lounge, to execute the event.

The results were "off the charts," Daddio says. And the proof lay in how sales "skyrocketed" afterward. "Customers left placing orders at the dealer meeting roadshow, and became highly motivated and enthusiastic, asking if they could have the Lennoxpalooza song to play in their shop when customers come in." Lennox created a stage for live performances at all stops on the road show, with the most memorable installment taking place at the Hard Rock Hotel & Casino Las Vegas.

While Lollapalooza was originally an alternative music festival, Lennoxpalooza was conceived as much broader in musical focus, covering styles from the 1950s to today. Daddio's team even brought in hip-hop dancers from local schools. This approach was essential in order to ensure that participants of all ages and musical tastes could relate to the program. In addition, those who were not musically talented had plenty of activities they could participate in, such as the trivia games and creating band names.

Nextel Club NII

Ensuring that a theme is not exclusionary can be a bit tricky with a diverse multicultural audience. When Reston, Virginia-based Nextel International was staging its incentive program for 600-700 participants that included both North and South Americans, a disco theme was found to be something all English-, Spanish- and Portuguese-speaking participants could relate to, although in slightly different ways.

"We realized that disco didn't necessari-



"The theme really influences people and helps them get their head around the core message of the event."

Lynne Esparo

Senior Director, Face to Face Experiences
Nuance Communications Inc.
Burlington, MA

ly mean the same for all of them: for some it meant a record or a nightclub," relates Ivan Montalvo, Nextel's senior director of sales and distribution. "But once they were there, they realized the theme was reliving the '70s era and its music." Called Club NII, the program was held at the JW Marriott Cancun Resort & Spa, sourced by Florham Park, New Jersey-based Impact Incentives & Meetings Inc. Impact's president Ira Almeas managed the local DMCs in Mexico and brought in KC and the Sunshine Band for the Studio 54-themed final night.

But the theme of Club NII also found its way into the details of the group's experience: communications pamphlets that looked like vinyl albums, disco music playing in the background during check in, best-of-disco CDs as gifts, "beachside" cardboard cutouts with head holes stationed around the hotel, '70s-style wigs for qualifiers to wear at the final night party, and so on.

The biggest impact came during that evening when Nextel senior executives came out on stage in full disco gear. Their initial reaction to the idea was "Oh you're kidding me, you're going to make me do this?" Montalvo recalls. "But the fact that they did it was culturally impacting to the participants. Typically Latin Americans see North Americans as very formal, kind of Germanic in that they really don't dance. So when they saw these two executives actually come out and do this (they thought), 'They are making this extra effort to better relate to us and our culture. This additional detail by these executives created better camaraderie and developed stronger, long-lasting working



Nextel International gave its incentive program a “Club NII” disco theme, including an appearance by KC and the Sunshine Band.

relationships with these international participants,” states Montalvo.

Sans the cultural impact, Lennox regional managers made a similar splash when they concluded Lennoxpalooza by performing as KISS in full makeup, Daddio relates.

The Power of One

Some themes are designed to motivate attendees themselves to make an impact, such as Arlington, Virginia-based

keting strategy and event management. That included “modeling our unique creative event management and F&B trends with our partners.”

Toward that end, Interstate hosted a special event at the Georgia Railroad Freight Depot that showcased the cultural elements of new and old Atlanta (see sidebar). “The Freight Depot is one of the most historic buildings in Atlanta; the city was kind of built around it,” says Chauvin. “So it was the power of one building around

“The Freight Depot is one of the most historic buildings in Atlanta; the city was kind of built around it. So it was the ‘Power of One’ building around which a city was developed, and that matched our theme.”



Jen Chauvin, CMP, Senior Director, Marketing Strategy & Event Management
Interstate Hotels & Resorts, Arlington, VA

Interstate Hotels & Resorts’ “The Power of One: Ignite, Inspire, Impact.” The week-long leadership conference in downtown Atlanta convened about 1,200 Interstate attendees from across the globe, representing upper management, sales, finance, HR and other areas of the company.

The goal was to “inspire our hoteliers about what can be done when they go back to work with our clients,” explains Jen Chauvin, CMP, senior director, mar-

which a city was developed, and that matched our theme.”

Chauvin collaborated with Atlanta-based WM Events to create an atmosphere within the Freight Depot that would immerse attendees in the city’s history, cuisine, music, art and craftsmanship. “We try to train our leaders on driving that local destination, and they could take pieces of what they experienced to replicate in their own local markets,” she

notes. The ROI for the event became especially clear when “over 850 folks gave us a positive post-event survey response. Some of them said there were so many learnings that they could apply to (events such as) weddings at their hotels.”

The Importance of a Theme

Given that a theme is such a powerful vehicle for transferring a message, “it shouldn’t be taken lightly,” Esparo advises. Some companies may leave the creation of a theme to a single marketing rep or meeting planner, without any input from other departments or serious brainstorming. And the result might well be a theme that is not as relevant to the company’s goals as it could be. “That’s an opportunity loss,” says Esparo. “You squander an opportunity to improve your meeting (with a resonant theme) if you don’t think it through.”

For Daddio, the purpose of theming is not only to communicate a message in a memorable way, but also to get attendees emotionally engaged with that message. During Lennoxpalooza, “as we went from one roadshow to another, it got more electrified. They began dressing like they were going to a concert; the word spread, and they couldn’t wait to be there,” she relates. And while the company tries not to repeat a theme, she notes that the success of Lennoxpalooza may justify a Turn It Up II. Some themes don’t deserve to be one-hit wonders. **C&IT**



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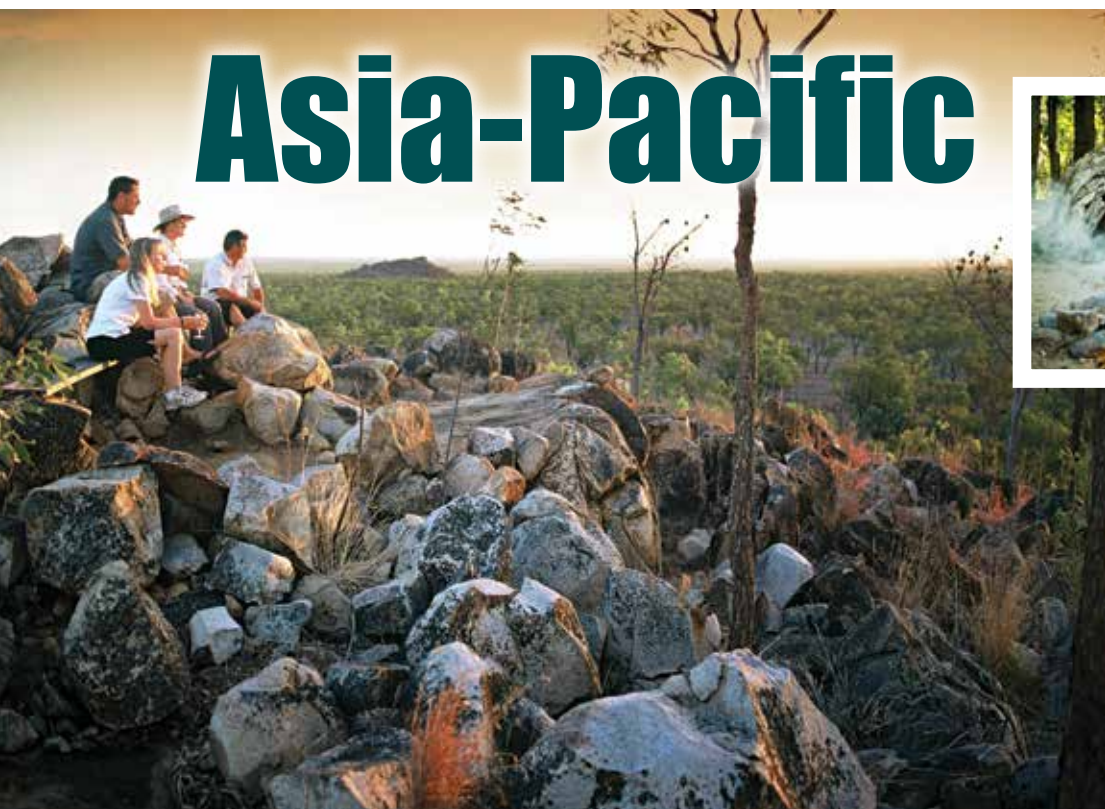
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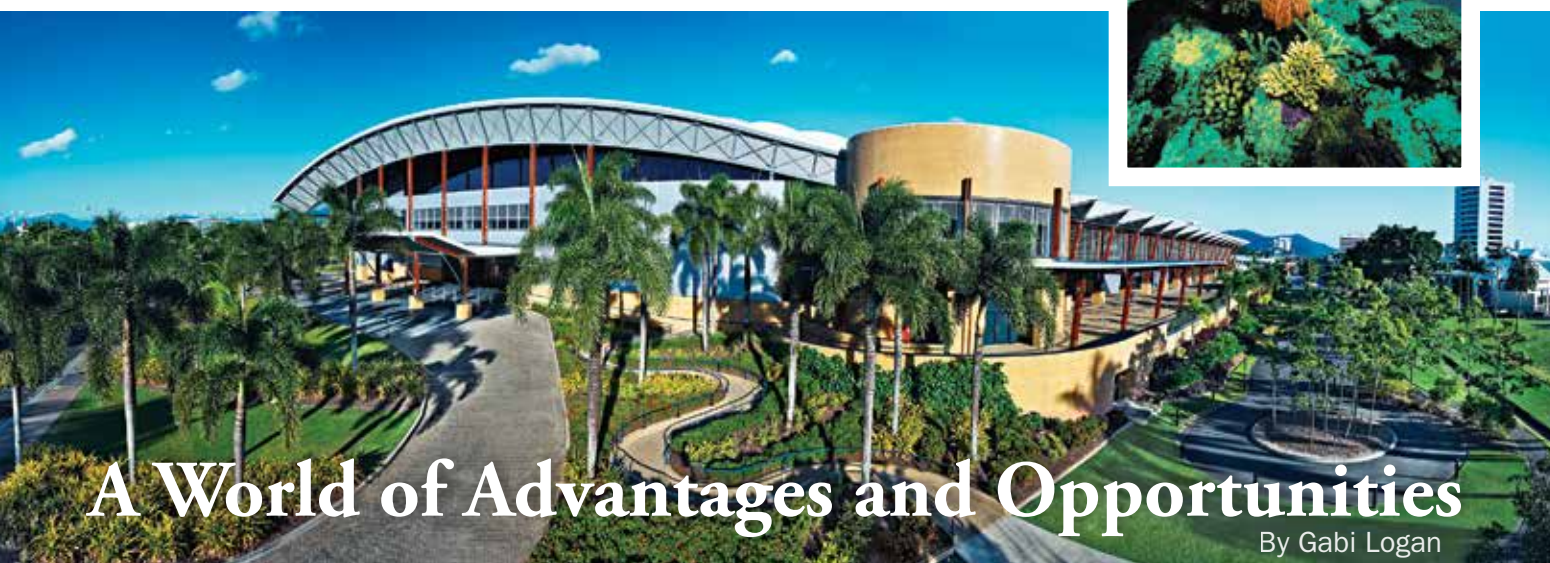


Destination

Asia-Pacific



Credit: Cairns Convention Centre



A World of Advantages and Opportunities

By Gabi Logan

Over the last several decades, prime locations for meetings and incentives have naturally shifted as old favorites skyrocket in price, new destinations smooth their rough edges and open luxury resorts, and new markets beckon with huge client opportunities.

Starting at the Cairns Convention Centre, a trek through the Outback to the Rainforest to a Tjapukai Cultural Village to an underwater dive, meetings and events are least of all tame when your group gathers in Australia.

While Europe has become a less frequent incentive destination due to ever-rising fares, and a meeting destination only when necessary for similar reasons, more and more planners are looking far, far east. Increased ease getting around in English, ever strengthening MICE and tourism infrastructure and an appetite for something new are the lure, and the benefits that come with the change of scenery do much to offset the travel cost.

A Region of Opportunity

Though the world's largest continent and the lands dotting its largest ocean offer endless destinations to explore, some are more welcome to outside planners than others, namely major cities in China, India, Australia and Japan, and islands such as Macau, Singapore and Hawaii, due to a number of factors, ranging from language to physical accessibility.

In recognition of the changing tide, ITB, the world's largest travel trade show, created a new ITB Asia installment of its packed European program, which welcomes hundreds of thousands of visitors each year to a convention area larger than many small European towns.

"Seven years ago, we decided for numerous reasons to locate our event in Singapore, within which we were spoiled for choice of venue, with three major conference venues," explains executive director of the Asia edition of Berlin, Germany-based ITB, Nino Grüttke. "Why? The advantages. The opportunities. More than half the people of the world live inside the circle you can draw around greater Asia," he explains. "It's hard to generalize, but I primarily think of the opportunity, the growth that is there. If you're a young start-up coffee joint, you can do that in L.A. But once you've cornered the market, it's time to think about Asia. The hunger and thirst there is enormous."

"The general thing we looked for was political stability and tech requirements," Grüttke explains. "We internally looked for a place with good MICE facilities and good local partners. A place where DMCs were reliable. It was also important for target groups to have easy accessibility. We wanted a location with no visa restrictions, good infrastructure onsite, lots of connections with airlines, and an easy commute between the MICE venue and hotels."

While the potential rewards of moving certain meetings, particularly those of a sales nature, to Asia do exude a certain siren's call, the language, travel and cultural barriers can raise quick red flags for many planners, but choosing a cosmopolitan city can help bridge the gap.

"Singapore, I daresay, is the most international country in the world," Grüttke continues. "You have all ethnicities and religions living next to each other, and it's a very guest friendly country. You have such an international team to work with. As Europeans, we have a different culture, and so do the Asians, but if you find a peer from your part of the world that helps a lot. 'Culture eats strategy for breakfast,' they say, and it's so true."

Immersing themselves in such diverse and different cultures can in fact be one of the biggest draws for attendees

"If you come to Asia for an event from the Western world with a successful product or blue chip, you...need to approach it with the mindset of an entrepreneur."

Nino Grüttke
Executive Director
ITB Asia Edition
Berlin, Germany



of events in the Asia Pacific region. "During my Hong Kong meeting, my favorite part was having the rare opportunity to tour the city," explains Anita Nazario, CMP, director of meetings management for Mountainside, New Jersey-based L&M Healthcare Communications. "Hong Kong offers so many distractions to your attendees, so try to build 'free time' into your agenda. It's a shame to bring people all that way and not let them see the location."

"If you plan offsite events, build time into your agenda and a guide into your budget that can provide information on the local area while in transit," she continues. "In Hong Kong — and any and all foreign cities — take as many of the hop-on-hop-off double decker bus tours as time will allow. They give a great overview of the city, allow you to spend relaxing time outdoors if you sit up top and you get out of the hotel."

People Who Go the Extra Mile

Some comforting cultural differences in the Asia Pacific region work out very much in a planner's favor. "I've planned meetings in China, Taipei, Hong Kong, Japan, Shanghai, Beijing, Guangzhou, India and Hawaii," says Stephanie Infantino, CMP, experiential marketing and event manager at San Francisco-based Dolby Laboratories. "Quite honestly, in all the destinations, I've loved going there because of the service. It's honestly unprecedented in the world. Taipei is unbelievable. The aim of service is to really provide that extra level of amenity. Hotel buffets are huge, like they're almost trying to outdo each other. You can get anything you want: Indian, American, European, etc. You end up gaining five pounds on every trip."

"It was the same in Hong Kong," she says. "I've done some executive incentive type of events there, and they're all about thinking about all the different touch points when you have special events or incentives there. I don't know what it is about



A huge pyrotechnics display at The Hong Kong Convention and Exhibition Centre showcased Hong Kong's Victoria Harbour and city skyline at the New Year.

Credit: The Hong Kong Convention and Exhibition Centre

Asia, but I think sometimes people get nervous, because it's not a Roman alphabet. I mean, these are foreign travelers I've been to cities around the globe with, but I knew this would be the case, so I worked with the hotel on this. For one event, from the second that people landed, they were there. They had guides that greeted us when we got off the plane — literally at the gate, because they somehow have access — they provided plane-to-hotel back and forth service.

"In the rooms, they actually had five-inch diameter chocolates with the meeting name and logo propped up like a frame, and each person had a personalized frame and gift with chocolates and truffles all around, along with these little boxes with drawers that had snacks," she continues. "That's what people got when they arrived in their rooms, and they were just blown away. They learned our names and knew who everyone was, so when we went down to meals — where they had menus with our logo — they would greet you and walk you over to your seat, which had your name.

"We had a similar experience in Beijing," Infantino explains. "When we arrived, we didn't go to a check-in desk. Someone came to meet each guest and walk them to an individual desk for personal check-in. Then, even though these are grown adults, when people walked in their rooms, they were jumping up and down like they had won the lottery. In India, it's extremely high tech, white glove. They radio in when they pick you up. By the time you arrive at the hotel, your personal assistants and escorts are all assembled. When I got sick, they had a doctor onsite who came to my room and treated me!

"The country that ranks the highest for superior service is Japan," she says. "When I was planning executive level events there from 2008–2011, you could get five-star hotels for four-star pricing, but now people have caught on. You're paying much steeper prices. In Europe, it's a different reception, and especially in the U.S., it depends on the property. There can be a magic feeling from traveling internationally, but people can

be a bit more critical. I think everyone was really pleased with our Asia Pacific events and happy to be there. We had people who were picky and wanted things a certain way. The right hotels appreciate having that information in advance, so if so and so has a wife, they'll upgrade them and greet them with roses and a card and champagne."

While Australia often gets overlooked by planners as, on the surface, it doesn't seem like a different enough destination than North American locations to justify the travel cost, planners are finding the service lines up with high Asian standards, and the food and cultural opportunities are worth the trip. "Australia really delivers a wow factor," says Scott Siewart, divisional vice president of sales for USMotivation.

"We had an incentive event in Australia that was primarily for USA top performers," he continues. "The top performers



Credit: IBTM India

The first IBTM India placed more than 80 Hosted Buyers with 72 exhibitors over the course of the three-day event at the Grand Hyatt in Mumbai in September 2013,

were sent to Sydney, Australia, to stay at the Four Seasons Sydney for five nights. They had a great time in the beautiful city of Sydney — who wouldn't! We offered extensions to whoever was interested in the group since people that have made the trip to the Southern Hemisphere really wanted to see more of Australia than just Sydney."

"The fact that the average performer had not been to Australia drove revenue and interest in the incentive program," Siewart explains. "Our company is always looking for experiences that the average performer would not be able to afford or could not plan what we offered. The flights are longer than going to most destinations, but when you think that you are flying non-stop out of Los Angeles, it is not really as far as you think. Eat a meal, go to sleep, watch a movie or two, and tahdah, you are in Australia.

"Australia has a great service culture," he says. "Top performers felt welcomed and very well taken care of. The food and beverage options in Australia are unmatched. It's a great place for foodies to go. I love Australia and would recommend it to any group looking for a wow. It is a unique destination worthy of any top performer or high-level meeting group."

Handling Language and Cultural Gaps

To navigate cultural and language barriers, involving local help is often more of a necessity in the Asia Pacific region than in most destinations. "In general, if you come to Asia for an event from the Western world with a successful product or blue chip, you have to start over," Grüttke explains. "It's not about what you have, but about how it fits here. You need to approach it with the mindset of an entrepreneur. You have to build up, give yourself more time than it would take on your own ground and be willing to tweak your product or procedures.

"Generally, it is easier and faster to build relationships in the Western world, and I say this as a Caucasian, but they're way more business-driven and opportunistic. Buy or don't buy," explains Grüttke. "In Asia, it takes longer, but it's a lot more personal. You get to know a person, their family, background, values, experience and history, and then you start talking about business. It has its advantages: Local partners are very important, because they have knowledge and culture, and can open doors and give you tips on things you can adjust."

Planners also have found that there may be a language problem even in the most modern Asia-Pacific cities. "Though Hong Kong was once held by the British, language is as big an issue here as in the rest of China," explains Nazario. "We used Hong Kong for an internal global meeting for a specific division of pharma consumer health that was expanding to the Asian market, and found that ground transportation greeters, local onsite staff and offsite locations rarely have truly fluent English speakers.

"If you're looking for onsite assistance at your meeting be sure to tell the DMC that you do not want a hostess," she continues. "Tell them you want a meeting planner that is fluent in English, and tell your DMC that you expect your airport greet-

ers to be fluent in English and/or any other languages that will be represented at your meeting. In general, you need to be very specific about what you want and need from the hotel and all vendors. Have the AV vendor provide you with a CAD drawing and if possible, use a U.S. vendor for your AV. Food is also an issue when you have Westerners attending the meeting."

Infantino concurs that AV is one of the more difficult parts of setting up Asian meetings. "As an international event manager you need to understand that there are differences in voltage, lighting and AV equipment, starting with the metric system," she says. "You need a completely different set of requirements for cord length. You need to change your mindset and really know and understand what you're doing there, and don't try to fit what they have into your model. You might simply not be able to find gooseneck microphones that you always use.



Credit: © Timothy Hursley

An outdoor terrace at the Sands Expo and Convention Centre, Singapore's largest and most flexible exhibition and meeting venue, including the island's largest hotel — Marina Bay Sands.

"A lot of times Internet is separate, and they charge a lot for that. While this is something that meeting planners always complain about, before even signing a contract, I would ask for the prices upfront," Infantino continues. "A lot of times people would provide broad strokes in terms of pricing. Say, 'This is the type of Internet they need. We'll be running video. Who else will be on the same bandwidth for the hotel?' Ask very specific questions."

While planning your bandwidth requirements, it's also important to keep in mind that people will be consuming a fair amount of data on their phones during the event that you wouldn't see during U.S. meetings, because attendees will use hotel Wi-Fi rather than their own data plans, as they would at home.

New and Noteworthy

This spring, Singapore's Marina Bay Sands, which opened



Credit: Wynn Macau

The Golden Flower VIP dining room is just one of the many charms of The Wynn Macau.

in April 2010 with a 600-table casino, 2,600 guest rooms and 1.3 million sf of meeting space spread over two exhibition levels and two conference levels, and its sister property The Venetian Macao, part of the Cotai Strip Resorts Macao, will be the first properties in Asia to receive the ISO 20121 Event Sustainability Management System certification.

The certification recognizes organizations with policies and procedures in place to ensure sustainability, whether environmental or social, throughout the event cycle. Sands hotels produce a custom sustainability report after each event documenting the event's footprint and savings achievements. "We



Credit: Sands Cotai Macao

The Venetian Macao boasts 3,000 suites and 1.2 million sf of meeting space

hope more and more meeting planners will be encouraged to hold eco-friendly events, and that they will see The Venetian Macao as a ready, willing and competent partner in fulfilling their sustainability goals," Gunther Hatt, executive vice president of operations for Sands China Ltd. said in a statement. The Venetian Macao features 3,000 suites and 1.2 million sf of meeting space.

Marina Bay Sands also has recently become the only hotel in Singapore to be recognized by Aimia as one of the Passion for Excellence-award winners.



Credit: International Convention Centre Sydney

When completed in 2016, the new International Convention Centre Sydney at Darling Harbour, Australia, will boast a 54,000-sf event deck.

On Marina Bay and adjacent to the resort, The Westin Singapore Marina Bay also opened in 2013, adding 301 guest rooms and suites and three restaurants to the area.

Set to open in late 2016, the new International Convention Centre Sydney at Darling Harbour is fast filling with bookings, including seven major international events. Including the convention center, hotel and adjacent residential neighborhood, which is already open with vibrant cafés and shops available to visitors, the harbor is undergoing a \$2.5 billion overall revitalization. The final space will feature 430,000 sf of event space, including a 54,000-sf event deck with views of both the city and harbor.

While the new center is under construction, events are being held at the interim center on Glebe Island. The Dockside Pavilion Darling Harbour, a pontoon floating in the harbor, is currently open and can accommodate 1,440 guests seated or 2,000 standing.

Elsewhere in Australia, two other major event spaces are set to open in 2015: the Sea World Resort conference center on the Gold Coast and the 21,650-sf conference center at the Crowne Plaza Hunter Valley. At the Sea World Resort, the new conference center will add 8,000 sf to the currently available 17,000 sf. Two hours north of Sydney, the new Hunter Valley center offers groups a flexible ballroom space that can accommodate up to 1,000 people in the midst of one of Australia's oldest wine regions.

In the fall, the Aulani Disney Resort and Spa in Ko Olina, Oahu opened Ka Maka Landing, an extension of its Waikolohe Valley water park. While leisure guests may be drawn to the infinity pool, poolside and beachside restaurants and grotto, the lure for planners is the new 16,000-sf Halawai Lawn, an outdoor landscaped meeting space, adding to the resort's previous 20,000 sf of meeting space, including a 14,000-sf conference center. It's also become even easier to get to Hawaii, as Hawaiian Airlines launches new service, including daily year-round service between LAX and Maui.

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Destination

The Orlando Incentive

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The visibility of association meetings and trade shows held at the Orange County Convention Center (OCCC) can overshadow the corporate side to Orlando's meetings industry. But Visit Orlando, the city's destination marketing organization, certainly keeps

By Patrick Simms

ful resort settings," stresses George Aguel, president and CEO of Visit Orlando. "We have so many recreational amenities, such as golf and watersports, and of course you have all the dining and entertainment. So it's an opportunity to reward a distributor, a salesperson or any employee: 'My company has offered me the opportunity to go to a place I love.' Not many convention destinations can rank as highly as us from an incentive standpoint."

According to Aguel, advocacy for the city can be seen throughout Visit Orlando's organization, including the registration support staff they provide. "One thing that we do a little differently is that when we provide registration help we don't let someone else do it for us. Those are all our employees," he says. "I feel it provides a (better quality of service) because they have a vested interest in what we are, they believe in the mission of Visit Orlando and feel part of the organization. That makes them incredible ambassadors."

A Wholesale Success

Apparently, these staff members also have strong feelings about their work. "Our partnership with the CVB continues to fulfill our temporary staffing needs, and we constantly have requests from temps to work future shows," says Judy Smith, CEM, director of Dealer Market with Memphis, Tennessee-

based Orgill Inc., the world's largest inde-

pendently owned wholesale distributor. The Orgill Spring Dealer Market was held this past February at the OCCC, in the South building and a portion of the North building. "The Orgill Dealer Market has become the industry leader in wholesale and hardware distribution shows and takes pride in choosing Orlando as a destination city. We focus on providing our dealers the best possible experience whether they are on the show floor or enjoying what the city has to offer. The show is one of our most successful and continues to grow each year," says Smith. "We started out with 200,000 gsf and we're now going over 800,000."

Smith praises the city's variety of hotels, featuring "every price point and every room type. As a way to increase our Dealer Experience, we offer a restaurant reservation desk, on our show floor, that gets a lot of traffic. Our dealers love the opportunity to make reservations onsite for new and existing restaurants and are excited about what Orlando has to offer. There's something for everyone, which makes Orlando one of our top market cities."

The Dealer Market fills 13 hotels in Orlando and has 22-25 shuttles running at all times. Yet Orgill also finds Orlando convenient for its much smaller district meetings, which it holds at the 445-room Hyatt Regency Orlando International Airport (42,000 sf of function space).

Small Meeting Options, too

Indeed, Orlando's airlift is a boon to meetings of all sizes with an international attendance, such as the senior management program held by Ann Arbor, Michigan-based Amcor Rigid Plastics at Arnold Palmer's Bay Hill Club & Lodge. "Orlando was centrally located for us, since we were bringing people out of Brazil, Peru, Venezuela, Colombia, Mexico and North America," says Michael Hodges, director, communications and public relations, for the global packaging company. The property offers a 70-room lodge and 9,000 sf of meeting space, and Amcor rented some houses to fully accommodate the 95 managers in its group. "We wanted to have it as 'our' property for the week," Hodges adds. "Our president wanted the Bay Hill location. He loved the idea of golf, and for anyone who wanted to come in prior to the meeting or stay after the meeting, it was fine to play. But during the course of the meeting, he elected that we were not going to play golf. He challenged me to do something different (*see sidebar on page 48*)."

Bay Hill is home to one of the most popular 18-hole courses on the PGA Tour, as well as to the Arnold Palmer Golf Academy. Much more expansive Orlando properties also can provide dedicated service to relatively small corporate groups. A case in point is the 1,641-room Hyatt Regency Orlando, which offers 315,000 sf of meeting space, including five pillar-free ballrooms and 105 breakout rooms.



Though the Hyatt Regency Orlando is a large meetings hotel, it provides dedicated service to small corporate groups as well.

In April and December of last year, the Hyatt hosted a sales training meeting for Eagan, Minnesota-based Harland Clarke, a provider of integrated payment solutions and marketing services. Karen Inman, senior sales support specialist, planned the conferences, which each brought in about 275 sales representatives. When Inman did a site inspection at the hotel, she observed that "even though it is a very large hotel it didn't feel large. We have about 30 breakouts, and that's one of the reasons we can't go to a much smaller hotel." And while there were other meeting groups in-house, the general

session, F&B and breakout spaces were "dedicated to us," she says. "There wasn't any comingling" with the other groups.

Harland Clarke conducted the site inspection and signed the contract with the hotel while it was still The Peabody Orlando. "By the time we got there it was the Hyatt. I was a little concerned (about staff quality), but it was seamless as far as switching over: no changes in staff or (anything pertinent to) our agreement," says Inman. She was especially pleased with the hotel's services in the AV area. "For our general sessions, without us ever talking about it, they made all sorts of suggestions of things that we could do, and they fit it within our budget. In fact, there were some things we were doing on our own that they could have done for us: For example, at the end we threw together a photo montage of the week; if we had given that to them it would have been much more professional."



Group dining options at Pointe Orlando include Tommy Bahama Restaurant & Bar (above) and Cuba Libre Restaurant & Rum Bar (right).



An opening event for a corporate conference at Disney's Contemporary Resort.

Credit: Walt Disney World Resort

Credit: Hyatt Regency Orlando

Credit: Pointe Orlando

"Not many convention destinations can rank as highly as us from an incentive standpoint."

George Aguel, President and CEO
Visit Orlando



a close eye on that segment, and the convention sales team recently reported an uptick in RFPs from the technology, manufacturing, franchise and financial verticals. And given that corporations so often talk about engaging their employees with the company, Orlando can be a desirable meeting destination from a reward perspective, whether or not the program is an incentive.

"We are a big convention town but our hotels are in wonder-



Credit: Walt Disney World Resort

Disney's Contemporary Resort recently renovated its 15th floor California Grill, which has two private dining rooms with views.

Group Dining

Another virtue of the Hyatt Orlando is its proximity to Pointe Orlando, a dining and shopping district across the street from the Orange County Convention Center. "It's a long day for (our attendees) so we like to be in a location where either they can go to the bar in the hotel or step out, and the location was perfect for our people to do that," Inman relates. "We have a dine-around where people break out into their different teams. We had a team that went to Cuba Libre (Restaurant & Rum Bar) and they were dancing on the tables." Showcased at the recent IBTM America in the city, Pointe Orlando is home to several other restaurants that cater to groups, such as B.B. King's Blues Club, Tommy Bahama Restaurant & Bar and the Oceanaire Seafood Room. There are also outdoor areas available for private group functions.

Walt Disney World Resort's newly renovated California Grill also should be on planners' radars. Set on the 15th floor Disney's Contemporary Resort, the restaurant now features décor that captures the spirit of California and a menu fea-



Credit: Walt Disney World Swan and Dolphin Hotel

The Causeway Party at the Walt Disney World Swan and Dolphin Hotel is a customized food festival for groups.

turing fresh, seasonal ingredients. The Grill offers two private dining rooms with panoramic views: The Napa Room accommodates up to 70 attendees, while the Sonoma Room seats as many as 40. The 655-room Contemporary Resort houses 115,000 sf of function space.

A less formal dining experience for groups can be arranged at the Walt Disney World Swan and Dolphin Hotel, which recently introduced the Causeway Party, a customized food festival for groups. Modeled after the hotel's own annual Swan and Dolphin Food & Wine Classic event, the festival is held along the causeway between the property's two buildings. The hotel's F&B experts (including a world champion pastry chef and more than 70 certified wine sommeliers) can guide planners in designing the food stations. Live entertainment and customizable lighting enhance the atmosphere. The resort also has begun offering nontraditional event spaces, such as



Credit: Rosen Hotels & Resorts

Rosen Shingle Creek offers championship golf at the Shingle Creek Golf Club, home to the Brad Brewer Golf Academy.

its giant freezers (which can accommodate 60 attendees for receptions featuring carved ice bars) and banquet kitchens that can be remodeled for a speakeasy theme. To round out the new F&B-related offerings for groups, coffee breaks at the Swan and Dolphin now feature coffees from around the world, including South America, Italy and France. The hotels comprise 2,265 guest rooms and more than 329,000 sf of meeting space, including 84 meeting rooms and 110,500 sf of contiguous convention/exhibit space.

New & Notable

The 2.1-million-sf **Orange County Convention Center** will undergo a five-year, \$187 million renovation — the center's biggest ever — that includes upgrades to everything from signs to roofing to cooling units. Plans call for turning 50,000 sf of exhibition space into a ballroom. Kathleen Canning, the convention center's executive director, told the *Orlando Sentinel* that officials are responding to the demand from meeting planners for upscale interiors and smaller, executive-style meeting rooms.

Planners now have a new and very upscale lodging option within Walt Disney World Resort: the **Four Seasons Resort Orlando**. Welcoming guests this month, the 444-room prop-

Credit: Universal Orlando Resort



Take a walk down memory lane at Universal's Cabana Bay Beach Resort, where everything's delightfully retro.

erty offers 37,750 sf of function space, including a 14,000-sf ballroom, a Tom Fazio-designed golf course, spa and a rooftop steak house. The resort is well-suited to the incentive market, as it is "positioned in one of the most recognizable destinations internationally, and they're a recognizable luxury brand, so it's going to be a powerful combination," Aguel comments. In view of the Four Seasons' Disney location, he adds that "We're very strong in the family incentive market. Especially as times have gotten better, there's a feeling that we really need to acknowledge the importance of letting our incentive winners being able to enjoy time with their families, because they may have become incentive winners by working very hard and not spending enough time with their families."

On the subject of new properties, Aguel cites the 394-room **B Resort & Spa**, a "modern resort that will appeal to a younger demographic." Located in Lake Buena Vista, the former Royal Plaza underwent extensive renovations before debuting as part of the B Hotels & Resorts family in July. The B Resort is situated within walking distance to Downtown Disney (transforming into Disney Springs by 2016), and offers more than 25,000 sf of indoor and outdoor flexible function space.

Aguel adds that **Universal Orlando Resort** has recently opened the colorfully retro, moderately priced 1,800-room **Cabana Bay Beach Resort**, which would really be a "pure incentive" property as it lacks meeting space. The resort is delightfully detailed with blasts from the past, including classic cars at the entrance and vintage footage from '50s and '60s-era commercials running on screens in the Bayliner Diner, where the menu includes tuna casserole and Swedish meatballs along with ginger soy glazed salmon.

Of course, Universal Orlando Resort has several properties well stocked in meeting space. Among them, the 1,000-room

Loews Royal Pacific Resort just announced the largest meeting space expansion in Universal Orlando's history. By fall 2015, the hotel, which is already the largest meeting hotel at Universal Orlando, will expand its meeting and event space from 85,000 sf to more than 140,000 sf including a 36,000-sf ballroom. The other properties are the 750-room **Loews Portofino Bay Hotel** (42,000 sf) and the 650-room **Hard Rock Hotel** (more than 6,000 sf). Groups staying at one of these resorts will enjoy easy access to Universal's latest themed experience: the just-opened **Wizards World of Harry Potter – Diagon Alley**, located in the Universal Studios Florida theme park. Complementing Hogsmeade at Universal's Islands of Adventure, Diagon Alley features a "next generation" thrill ride, Harry Potter and the Escape from Gringotts; eateries like the Leaky Cauldron (a British style pub); a variety of eclectic shopping; and of course, uniquely themed group event options. The Hogwarts Express train, which runs between the two parks, treats



"Our dealers...are excited about what Orlando has to offer. There's something for everyone, which makes Orlando one of our top market cities."

Judy Smith, CEM, Director of Dealer Market Orgill Inc., Memphis, TN

passengers to scenes from Harry Potter tales as they look out the windows.

Walt Disney World Resort opened The Seven Dwarfs Mine Train ride in May in the newly expanded Fantasyland. And the Disney Institute, the external business and professional development arm of The Walt Disney Company, has reimaged all of the institute's courses for 2014–2015 "to help professionals navigate the continuously changing landscape of today's business climate," said Jeff James, vice president and general manager, Disney Institute, in a statement.

Offering a shuttle to Walt Disney World is the **Omni Orlando at ChampionsGate**, which debuted a conference center last year, adding more than 46,000 sf to the hotel, resulting in more than 128,000 sf in total. The new facility includes a 28,800-sf ballroom that can break out into eight flexible meeting rooms. Features include advanced communications and computer technology, open pre-function area, an event lawn

and a large loading dock for easy setup. The 720-room Omni is home to the Leadbetter Golf Academy World Headquarters, 36 holes of championship golf and the Mokara Spa.



Credit: IBTM America

A reception at the Orange County Convention Center during IBTM America in June.

The Biggest Reward of All

When Amcor Rigid Plastics' president entrusted Michael Hodges, director, communications and public relations, with finding an extracurricular activity (besides golf) for the company's senior management meeting in Orlando, Hodges found a "home" for the 120 participants at the Ronald McDonald House located on the campus of the Florida Hospital for Children. There, the attendees would engage in something far more meaningful than another day on the fairway. The Ronald McDonald House provides a home away from home for families of children being treated at local hospitals.

"At first, (the House representative) was unsure it would work with that number of people. But they put together a fabulous program for me, and we all ended up going to the same Ronald McDonald House (the other branch in Orlando is at the Arnold Palmer Medical Center). It's a beautiful two-story property," Hodges relates.

Intangible Rewards

"Our team members did several jobs at the house, such as cleaning, prepping meals and cooking dinner, stripping wallpaper, painting furniture and outdoor railings, and stuffing 200–300 gift bags with items for those who arrive at the house, including personal notes. So we had 95 managers working for the day in the hot July weather." But the intangible rewards justified the effort. "The beautiful part of it was that they got a chance to interface with the parents of some children who are in life-threatening situations, or



Credit: Amcor Rigid Plastics/Ronald McDonald House

undergoing traumas or long-term illnesses. You learn very quickly how blessed you are. And when we got back on the bus after five hours of working and sweating, I did not hear one complaint from any of the managers that they didn't get to play golf."

A Grande Outreach

Next year Orlando will see CSR on a much larger scale, when Starbucks' 2015 Leadership Conference takes place at the Orange County Convention Center. Starbucks managers and executives will engage in thousands of hours of community service in the city. According to Visit Orlando, the CSR opportunities were one factor that motivated the site choice.

"Starbucks has a long history of investing in opportunities to develop our partners to be future leaders — on the job and in our communities," said Craig Russell, Starbucks EVP of global coffee and executive sponsor of the conference. "We look forward to bringing more than 10,000 store managers and global business leaders to Orlando next fall for a meaningful experience and to give back to the community."

— PS

"Even though (Hyatt Regency Orlando) is a very large hotel it didn't feel large. We have about 30 breakouts, and that's one of the reasons we can't go to a much smaller hotel."

Karen Inman, Senior Sales Support Specialist
Harland Clarke, Eagan, MN

The 315-room **Westin Orlando Universal Boulevard**, located across from the OCCC, introduced its own new meeting facility this year, the 5,575-sf Lotus Ballroom, which increases the hotel's total function and prefunction space to 13,685 sf. Accommodating up to 300 guests for a banquet setting or meeting and up to 500 guests for a reception, the ballroom can be divided into two 2,312-sf rooms and features floor-to-ceiling windows.

Speaking of great views, attendees staying at the **Rosen Plaza Hotel** and meeting at the OCCC have enjoyed a weatherproof walk across the Gary Sain Memorial Skybridge since its debut last fall. Rosen Hotels & Resorts, which also owns **Rosen Centre Hotel** and **Rosen Shingle Creek**, fully funded the construction of the \$2.5 million, 745-foot skybridge. In a press statement, Victoria Hall, director of sales and marketing, Rosen Plaza, called the bridge's completion an "important milestone in the Orlando meetings community now that all four major convention hotels and are connected to the convention campus."

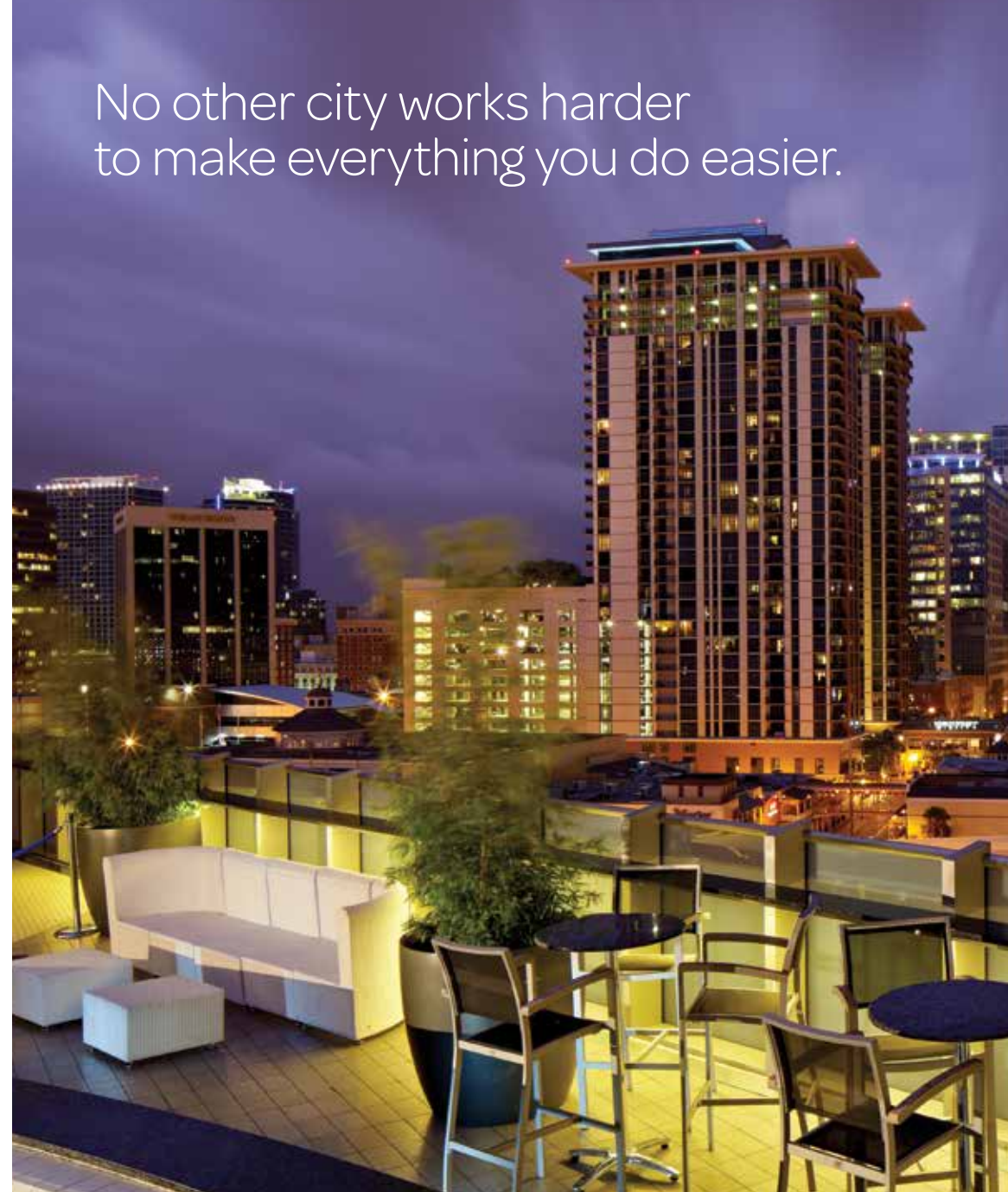
The 1,001-room **Hilton Orlando Bonnet Creek** had its own milestone in March when it won the Connie Award, Hilton Worldwide's highest achievement for an individual property. The hotel had the highest scores in the three key categories: cleanliness, condition and brand standards; customer ratings of staff service; and customer ratings of the quality of the hotel's physical accommodations. The Hilton Orlando Bonnet Creek houses 132,000 sf of function space, including the 35,925-sf Bonnet Creek Ballroom and new 10,000-sf Bonnet Creek Pavilion overlooking the golf course and waterways.

Certifiably world-class hotels like the Hilton Orlando Bonnet Creek help to raise the city's profile in the international meetings market. "On the corporate side we are trying to foster more of our international appeal, particularly Europe," says Aguel. "But also important is the Latin/South America side of the ledger. We have offices in Germany and the UK, as well as in all those key South American and Latin American countries."

The growth in upscale hotels, from the relatively new Wyndham Grand Orlando Resort, Bonnet Creek, to the newly opened Four Seasons, will certainly fuel Visit Orlando's international marketing efforts.

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ON THE MOVE



MONTESANO



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ROSA



FASY



HAYS

Terranea, by Destination Hotels & Resorts, Rancho Palos Verdes, California, has named **Sandra Montesano** as director, national accounts for the Midwest and **Maria Trabucco** as director of national accounts for the Northeast. Montesano formerly served as director of Midwest and incentive sales for La Quinta Resort & Club, a Waldorf Astoria Resort, La Quinta, California. Trabucco most recently was director of national accounts, Northeast, for the Walt Disney World Swan and Dolphin Hotel in Orlando, Florida.

Kevin James Rosa was named director of sales and marketing for Loews Don CeSar Hotel in St. Pete Beach, Florida. He was director of sales and marketing at Turnberry Isle Miami.

Shelborne Wyndham Grand South Beach, Miami, Florida has named **Michael Choiniere** as director of sales and marketing. With more than 30 years of experience as an international hotelier, he formerly served as vice president of sales and marketing for The Abaco Beach Resort at Boat Harbour in The Bahamas.

Meg Fasy, CMP, was named vice president of sales for Bellagio, Las Vegas, Nevada. She most recently served as the vice president of industry relations at PSAV, a leading supplier of audio-visual and event technology.

Hilton Sandestin Beach Golf Resort & Spa, Destin, Florida, has named **Richard Hays** as regional sales manager for the mid-Atlantic and Northeast markets. A 30-year veteran of the hospitality industry, he most recently was senior sales manager at Hyatt Regency La Jolla in San Diego. **C&IT**

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