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CORPORATE & INCENTIVES TRAVEL

THE MAGAZINE FOR CORPORATE MEETINGS AND TRAVEL PLANNERS



The New Face of Incentives

Creating a More Personalized Experience

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Kurt Paben
President, Channel and Employee Loyalty, U.S. Aimia Inc.
President, SITE Foundation

F&B Trends

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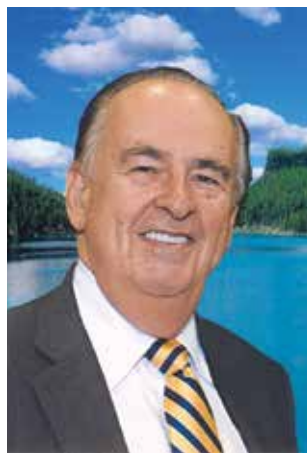
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Publisher's Message

Making Business Personal

We have been reading about customized, personalized experiences for quite some time now, and it appears they have taken hold in the incentive travel business for the benefit of participants and planners. The Society for Incentive Travel Excellence (SITE) Foundation's most recent study reports that incentive travel is on a roll and will continue to grow into 2016 and beyond.



Kurt Paben, who graces our cover this month, is president, channel and employee loyalty, U.S., for Aimia Inc. and also serves as president of the SITE Foundation. "We're seeing the use of incentives as a business tool just continuing to rise," he says in our cover story on page 10. Paben says that customers "have gotten really good at understanding what the business value is and how to structure incentive programs so that by running them, they drive business results for the company."

Furthermore, the makeup of the work force nowadays, which may include up to four generations, is so diverse that an effort must be made to give every incentive winner a memorable experience, albeit a personal experience. Paben explains this notion: "I think what we see is a huge trend toward making

business personal and how, although you're doing group incentive travel, you create experiences that are meaningful on a personal basis that connect with individuals."

Developing a personalized program is a multifaceted process, says Paben. "It's how you create every touch point to be a more personal one, so it's not just about activities. I think it can go all the way down to the kinds of gifting that you do on incentive programs as opposed to giving everyone the same room amenity or the same room gift. It's trying to understand what they are interested in; what would be meaningful to them. The more we can learn about people and the more they're willing to share gives us the ability to construct a whole experience — not just activities — in a way that is much more meaningful."

Food can be and should be a meaningful and personalized experience, too, say the experts in the F&B Trends feature on page 24. From brain food to a special dinner at a celebrity chef restaurant or a wine vs. beer pairing event, planning pros are discovering new ways to build relationships and create interactive, learning experiences that are healthful and delicious to boot.

Harvey Grotzky
Publisher

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News & Notes

Golden Nugget Las Vegas Completes \$6.5 Million Convention Center Renovation

LAS VEGAS, NV — Golden Nugget Las Vegas invested \$6.5 million to transform their 20,000-sf convention center. The project included a complete overhaul of the existing convention center footprint. Renovations included new flooring, enhanced lighting, new wall coverings, upgraded technology and a state-of-the-art digital signage system throughout the existing space.

The convention center houses 13 breakout rooms, which are customizable, and the 5,000-sf Bel Air Room, which includes a prefunction foyer.

"This area provides what meeting planners are looking for...easy access, flexibility and meeting space that is easy to navigate. You can walk from one end of our conference center level to the other in less than a minute — which is a rarity in

Las Vegas," said Michael Toney, vice president of sales.

Additional convention space at the Golden Nugget Las Vegas includes the 12,000-sf Grand Event Center, which is located on the casino floor.

The renovation also involved a makeover of the Golden Nugget's building entrance located at the intersection of Carson Street and First Street. The entrance is steps away from a new cascading staircase that leads directly to the convention center. Anchoring the staircase is a beautiful 12,000-pound chandelier made up of 209 glass tubes and designed exclusively for the Golden Nugget Las Vegas by the Landry's Inc. development team.

Additional 2015 projects will be announced soon. www.goldennugget.com

Mohegan Sun Is Expanding, Unveils Plans for a Second Hotel

UNCASVILLE, CT — At a recent press conference, Mohegan Sun executives shared details on a second hotel being added to the flagship property in Uncasville, Connecticut. The seven-floor, 400-room Earth Hotel will allow for an opportunity to recapture the almost 500,000 room nights turned away in 2014.

At the event, Kevin "Red Eagle" Brown, chairman of the Mohegan Tribe remarked on the Tribe's commitment to the state, "Many of you here today, I'm sure, can remember when the Mohegan Tribal Nation first entertained the notion of developing a casino and entertainment complex in Uncasville. Since that time, we have invested well over a billion dollars that has made the tourism industry sit up and take notice. We take very seri-

ously our role in Connecticut's tourism industry and economic welfare."

Mitchell Etes, CEO for the Mohegan Tribal Gaming Authority (MTGA) added, "The Earth Hotel could not come at a better time as we position ourselves for the increased regional competition and ensure that we continue to be the premier entertainment and gaming destination on the East Coast. Many team members here have been working tirelessly on this project for a long time. It's exciting to see their efforts come to fruition."

Modeled after the existing Sky Hotel design, the Earth Hotel reflects the Tribe's sensitivity to the natural landscape in that it pays homage to the geological and natural forms present on the property's riverfront site. www.mohegansun.com

Atlantis, Paradise Island Reveals First-Ever All-Inclusive Experience for Groups

PARADISE ISLAND, THE BAHAMAS — Atlantis, Paradise Island debuted an all-inclusive experience for groups at Atlantis, bookable immediately for stays fall 2015 through 2017. The all-inclusive plan allows groups to bundle a host of Atlantis activities, varied dining opportunities from the Bahamian Club to Virgil's Real BBQ, and daily amenities such as Wi-Fi all under one comprehensive pricing structure.

"We are thrilled to now offer our valued meeting planners this all-inclusive option for the first time in Atlantis' 20-year history," says John Washko, V.P. of group marketing and sales for Atlantis, Paradise Island. "We've made it a priority to develop a plan that combines savings and convenience while maintaining our high level of service and the one-of-a-kind Atlantis guest experience."

The plan is available for fall group bookings of 10+ rooms and 3+ nights starting August 24, 2015 through 2017 (blackout dates apply). The plan includes:

- Accommodations in Coral Towers and Royal Towers, including all resort fees, surcharges, gratuities and taxes.
- Meals: breakfast, lunch and dinner daily, including both alcoholic and non-alcoholic drinks.
- Wi-Fi in room, lobby and conference facilities for up to four devices per room.
- Activities: Aquaventure water park, The Dig marine exhibit, fitness center, tennis courts and more.
- Event setup: Linens, basic staging.
- Group menus: Set menus for buffet and plated options for breakfast, lunch and dinner at no additional charge.
- Value offers: 20 percent off dolphin interactions and spa treatments, 50 percent off Ocean Club Golf Course green fee.

www.meetingsatatlantis.com

Snapshots



Credits: 1-4 ADMEI; 5 HSMAI; 6 SITE; 7 Jason Thomson

1 Participants enjoying the ADME International Conference, held February 12-14, 2015, at the Fiesta Americana Grand Los Cabos in Los Cabos, Mexico, include (l to r) Kevin Brewer, DMCP; Airika Gigas, DMCP; Jessica Cutler and Cindy Brewer, DMCP, all of LEO Events, Memphis, Charleston, Myrtle Beach along with **2** Joshua Jones, DMCP, Hosts Las Vegas; Hilary Patriquin, Hosts DC; and Daniel Ecklund, DMCP, Hosts Chicago. **3** Also, Nicole Marsh, DMCP, CMP, AXS Group, celebrates two Excellence Awards at the ADMEI Awards Gala and **4** Anna Nava and Giulia Brochetto, +39 events, Italy, flank Bent Hadler, DMCP, CIS, the new ADMEI president from Hadler DMC Scandinavia. **5** Dave Berkoski, Choctaw Casino Resort; Victoria Hoehn, Questex and Larry Flannery with ARTA Travel at HSMAI's MEET MidAmerica event, produced by Questex Hospitality + Travel. The February event was held in Texas for the first time. **6** SITE board members and SITE Foundation trustees at the SITE Executive Summit, an opportunity to educate a destination about the incentive travel market and the importance of connecting incentives to business results. This year's summit was held on February 11 at the JW Marriott Marquis, Dubai, United Arab Emirates. **7** Ashla Lane, Ramona Jones and Denise Hassenstab of Wells Fargo enjoy the "Viva Las Vegas" event at the 2015 Recognition Professionals International Annual Conference in Las Vegas.

By Scott Steinberg

An Insider's Guide to Getting More From Professional Speakers

Thinking about hiring a professional speaker for your next business meeting, conference or event? It may help to understand where expert presenters best fit into keynote schedules, breakout tracks or larger overarching programs, and how these individuals can maximize audience awareness and empathy. Several factors are involved in choosing and retaining the services of leading authorities, and best leveraging these practitioners, all of which can weigh into the decision of whether or not to utilize their services. Following, you'll find several hints, tips and strategies for deciding whether to retain a pro keynote speaker for your occasion, how to select the best fit and ensure that the process runs smoothly from end to end.

What Do Professional Speakers Do?

Professional speakers appear at events with the specific goal of reinforcing key program themes (i.e. providing "keynote" speeches that cement the tone and topic for the event) and driving positive change and growth in attendees. Common goals they're tasked with include engendering support and enthusiasm for specific topics or initiatives, ensuring that teams are on the same page, and showing organizations and individuals how to overcome challenges and achieve peak performance. Presenters essentially aim to provide fresh insight and perspective, and provide both a shift in mindset and actionable tools that enable viewers to embrace professional transformations and personal growth.

Equipped to deliver inspiring messages in the form of keynote speeches, breakouts, seminars and workshop sessions, speakers are available in every field. Programs typically touch on a variety of professional topics from change management to leadership, sales, teamwork, marketing and more. Often, speakers are subject-matter experts, thought leaders or best-selling authors — credibility is key when establishing audience trust. However, leaving egos at the door is essential when delivering presentations. Ultimately, it is their goal to help both organizations and individuals by delivering thought-provoking solutions that can help all overcome adversity and improve business practices. Common types of motivational speakers include:

- Industry or community thought leaders
- Best-selling authors and TV presenters

- Brand-name authorities or celebrities
- Training and development professionals
- Futurists and trend experts

Many offer a preset range of presentations to choose from. But to maximize impact, you'll wish to request a customized program that's tailored to incorporate both personalized business insights and the event's corresponding theme. Crafting programs to match your organization and audience allows presentations and messages to better resonate with attendees, provide better context and make it possible to provide actionable steps for audience members.

When weighing the decision to hire an event speaker, take into account your objectives, the role that presenters will help play in meeting them and the shape of presentations. As an example, a program designed to provide positive skills transfer for managers should differ greatly from one meant to inspire awareness for brand repositionings or new organizational initiatives.

Maximizing Speaking Programs

All speakers possess their own presentation style, from informative to comical to arresting. In all cases, grabbing and maintaining an audience's attention is crucial during a 60- to 90-minute speech, seminar or lengthier workshop program.

However, successful motivational speakers will always listen before they speak, getting to know organizations and key stakeholders, listening to their concerns and challenges, and understanding their marketplace and corporate culture. By doing so, they can format their speech around these specifics and include stakeholder or audience feedback, thereby heightening viewer empathy and interest. A truly exceptional speaker is also a great researcher and consultant, and will not deliver a generic speech at each event they attend. Such experts will always customize their message to the needs of their client — i.e. you, the meeting planner — in order to provide maximum value.

While presentation styles differ among speakers, an effective presenter will look to connect with their audience by pairing substance with storytelling. In addition to everyday anecdotes, it's vital to incorporate case studies or industry trends into speeches to paint a compelling business picture. But care must be taken not to bombard listeners with facts

and figures as well — introducing everyday real-life examples that underscore featured points allows presenters to connect with a wider cross-section of individuals and allows these viewers to better comprehend the material.

Speakers also should offer key next steps and strategies for improvement that audience members can act upon immediately. By explaining to viewers where to turn for further research and insight when pursuing topics, a speaker can help attendees effect ongoing change and circumvent perceived limitations.

Ways to Best Utilize Speakers

As a major part of the decision to retain a professional speaker's services, consider the role you wish presenters to play at your special event. Many potential options are available. Looking to achieve myriad objectives, planners will often opt for a combination of presentation methods (i.e. keynote and breakout, half-day workshop and master class, lunch speech and panel discussion).

Common goals that speakers can facilitate:

- Setting a positive tone for new programs or ventures; reinforcing event themes in ways that prove empowering.
- Providing authoritative insight into new markets, trends and topics.
- Inspiring teams to heightened levels of performance, and driving ongoing growth and development.
- Engaging and inspiring attendees, helping engender enthusiasm, provide fresh perspective and insight.
- Raising awareness and support for topics, trends and ventures of interest throughout the organization.
- Educating and delivering learning and skills transfer.

Possible program options you might retain speakers to assist with include, but are not limited to: keynote speeches,

breakout sessions, workshops, seminars, question and answer sessions, after-meal presentations, training programs, master classes, panels, meet and greets, case studies and book signings.

Why Choose a Motivational Speaker?

Are you rolling out new programs, initiatives or business ventures, or looking to promote heightened awareness for specific topics? A keynote presenter can help solidify and secure organization-wide support for these efforts through inspirational stories and expert advice, or provide crucial insights that allow teams to overcome challenges like never before. Therefore the choice of professional speaker you add to your itinerary can be a decision that's every bit as vital as the theme, venue and setup for the occasion.

Wondering where to find a pro keynote presenter and how to select the best fit for the program? Start by clearly defining a purpose, topic and vision for your event, then ask professional colleagues for speaking references and recommendations. Consider audience demographics and the type of speaker most likely to connect with them.

It's also important to align speakers and topics with stakeholders' overall expectations for the program up front. In many cases, a speaker's bureau can aid with selection and help you manage the process from beginning to end.

Once you've chosen the right motivational speaker for your meeting or event, embrace their words of wisdom and advice, and encourage your employees to do the same. Think of the speaker's services as an investment in your organization's future. By adopting new ideas and advice from these thought leaders, your organization can reach new heights and potential — a partnership made possible through your direct support and effort.

C&IT

“Think of the speaker's services as an investment in your organization's future.”



Scott Steinberg

is an award-winning professional speaker. A best-selling expert on leadership and innovation, Steinberg is the author of *Make Change Work for You: 10 Ways to Future-Proof Yourself, Fearlessly Innovate, and Succeed Despite Uncertainty*. Steinberg is among today's leading providers of keynote speeches, workshops and seminars for Fortune 500 firms. His website is www.AKeynoteSpeaker.com.



The New Face of Incentives

Topping the Trends for 2015 Are Individualized, Personalized Experiences



By Karen Brost

The future looks bright for incentive travel. Each year, the Society for Incentive Travel Excellence (SITE) Foundation conducts an analysis of the motivational events industry and releases its projections for the future. In its most recent study results, the foundation reported that incentive travel continues to be on an upswing and is predicted to grow into 2016.

Kurt Paben is president, channel and employee loyalty, U.S., for the loyalty program company Aimia Inc. and also serves as president of the SITE Foundation. His company works with clients in a variety of vertical markets, including automotive, high-tech, pharmaceutical and health care. “We’re seeing the use of incentives as a business tool just continuing to rise,” he says. “We see more and more of them. I think our customers, along with our help, have gotten really good at understanding what the business value is and how to structure incentive programs so that by running them, they drive business results for the company.” He says that those results might be related to sales, service, employee retention or another company goal.

Paben noted a few trends that he’s seeing in incentive programs. “International travel continues to be popular and on the rise. That said, the length of programs typically has shortened by a little bit to anywhere from four to six nights on average.” He says the challenge is to figure out the best way to construct an incentive program when a shorter time frame is involved.

The Personal Touch

“The notion of a trip where everyone does the same thing has gone away,” Paben explains. “It’s now much more customized to the individual, and I think that’s a very big change. You have multiple generations in the work force, so how do you construct things in a way that really makes sense for the participant? I think what we see is a huge trend

toward making business personal and how, although you’re doing group incentive travel, you create experiences that are meaningful on a personal basis that connect with individuals.”

Paben says that creating a personalized program is a multifaceted process. “It’s how you create every touch point to be a more personal one, so it’s not just about activities. There’s a lot more work done on really understanding what the demographics of the group look like, so we look a lot at the different personas and types of folks we have on client programs and plan experiences so they can really connect in a very personal way. I think it can go all the way down to the kinds of gifting that you do on incentive



“The notion of a trip where everyone does the same thing has gone away. It’s now much more customized to the individual, and I think that’s a very big change.”

Kurt Paben, President, Channel & Employee Loyalty U.S. Aimia Inc., Plymouth, MN

programs as opposed to giving everyone the same room amenity or the same room gift. It’s trying to understand what they are interested in; what would be meaningful to them. The more we can learn about people and the more they’re willing to share gives us the ability to construct a whole experience — not just activities — in a way that I think is much more meaningful.”

Generational Differences

The SITE survey also found that generational diversity needs to be considered in program design. According to the report, “There is no significant difference in beliefs about the effectiveness of motivational tools based on generation. However, it is apparent that it takes different rewards to motivate different generations. Boomers continue to be most

motivated by extrinsic rewards. There is strong agreement that millennials are less motivated than other generations although traditionalists come close.”

Changing Communications

The way in which incentive trip sponsors communicate with their attendees is also changing. “Most of that has moved to the handset,” Paben says. “Mobile technology allows you to have very individualized, personalized communication. It’s where you can drive personalized itineraries, drive personalized communications, right on their handset, about information that they specifically need to know versus what everybody needs to know. It can also be a place to have

contained social media within the group. If you look at the way that consumers, in general, interact with brands, you can bring that similar mobile experience to events.”

Kristin Twombly, global event manager for Zynx Health, plans an annual sales incentive trip that ranges in size from 25 to 75 couples. She also is seeing technology playing a bigger and bigger role in her programs. “We’ve always done event registration, but we’re really into mobile apps right now. We have been doing those for different events to generate excitement before (the event) and to make the information and agendas easily accessible to people while they’re onsite. It’s great for incentives, because they kind of want us to be hands off and be able to do their own thing when they’re on these trips. It’s a way to keep in touch

“We offer golf, spa and local tours. We always seem to max out the things like the ATV tours, and the paddleboarding and ocean or river kayaking.”

Laura Miller, CMP, Firmwide Events & Sustainability Manager, McKenna Long & Aldridge, Atlanta, GA



with everyone and provide them with updated information, but also not be calling or emailing them all the time.”

She says that her company has always created personalized itineraries, but that in the past, creating them manually was a very tedious process. “Using some of these technological tools that are available now makes it really easy from the planner’s point of view,” she describes. In the SITE study, 86 percent of those surveyed indicated that the use of smart/mobile technology is either important or very important in their program operations.

Finding Inspiration

Laura Miller, CMP, holds the position of firmwide events and sustainability manager for McKenna Long & Aldridge LLP, a law firm headquartered in Atlanta. Her company has offices in 15 cities, and it is her responsibility to plan an annual retreat attended by 300 partners. “It’s the only time each year that most of these people see each other face-to-face. While we do have business meetings during the event, the main focus really is bringing these people together to network.” While this is not an incentive trip (attendance is expected), Miller is tasked with planning a compelling annual event that the partners can get excited about attending.

In order to accomplish this goal, Miller took a novel approach. On the advice of several of her suppliers, she joined SITE so that she could learn how to take elements from successful incentive programs and use them to make her own programs more successful and appealing. “I’m able to borrow the ideas and compare my meeting with the incentive meetings more than I am to some of

the other corporate meetings that really should be apples to apples but aren’t,” she explains. The strategy worked, so much so that her meeting planning peers from other law firms have asked her how she achieves such high attendance at her retreats.

“A lot of law firms have their meetings in the same location three and four years in a row,” she states. “I would have a very hard time generating excitement for people to go if we went to the same place over and over again.” So, similar to many incentive programs, Miller uses only four- and five-star properties and moves the event to a new destination each year to keep the interest level high.

In addition to the partner meetings that are part of the retreat, Miller makes sure she builds time into the agenda for recreation. “We offer golf, spa and local tours,” she says, adding that her group is usually more interested in high adventure than golf. “We always seem to max out the things like the ATV tours, and the paddleboarding and ocean or river kayaking.”

Another page she borrows from the incentive trip playbook is to present each attendee with a special welcome gift such as Maui Jim sunglasses when the group met at Terranea Resort in Southern California or a squall jacket when the retreat was held at the Hyatt Regency Chesapeake Bay Golf Resort, Spa and Marina in Maryland.

Making a Difference

The SITE survey also reported that Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) is here to stay. “We certainly see a lot of corporate social responsibility being integrated into incentive programs,” Paben notes. “We see more and more of that.”

Miller also incorporates a CSR element into her programs. For example, her firm has brought the Clean the World program into hotels that weren’t already donating their leftover toiletries to the nonprofit organization, and her attendees have packed hygiene kits to be donated to those in need. Another year, the firm brought in a group of service dogs in training who needed to gain experience being socialized around different types of people in a hotel setting. “We had puppy petting, and people interacted with the puppies,” Miller explains. “People loved it.” She purchased a supply of large dog beds for the event and then donated them to a local shelter afterwards.

This year, when their group met at the Hyatt Regency Gainey Ranch in Scottsdale, Arizona, McKenna Long brought in the team from Rock ‘n’ Roll Fantasy Camp. Partners who wanted to participate in the camp were divided into four bands that practiced together and then performed on the last evening of the retreat. The audience voted in this battle of the bands, and the winning band got to choose a charity to which the McKenna Long Foundation would donate. They chose Legal Aid of Washington, DC. The event generated funds for a worthy cause and provided entertainment for the group at the same time.

Desirable Destinations

From a destination standpoint, traditional favorites continue to be selected, while new choices are being added to the mix. “From an international standpoint, certainly the major European capitals are always popular,” Paben notes, listing London, Paris and Rome as examples. “Italy continues to be very popular. We’re also seeing people going to more off-the-beaten-path places in those countries to explore them in a more intimate kind of way. The other thing that we see are destinations like Dubai coming on very strong. People have a very big interest in that. Cruising also continues to be popular. It’s a great way to travel internationally and see multiple destinations without unpacking.”

Wining and Dining

Food and beverage choices also are being given greater attention. “I think food and beverage has really changed,” Paben comments. “(It) has become much more an integrated part of programs now. There are so many different food trends that are out there. How you string all of that together is much different than it used to be. Destinations, whether it be through hotels or caterers, are able to make food and beverage an experience within itself. That’s the trend that we see more and more.”

Since Twombly’s company is in the health care business, wellness is an important focus when she plans her programs. “It’s something we’ve been doing increasingly throughout my time here, having programs and food and beverage that support that. When I’m looking for a destination or hotels to partner with, that’s definitely something that I think about.”

Breathing Room

Another challenge that’s involved in designing a successful incentive program is finding the right balance between scheduling group events and giving attendees some much appreciated free time. Paben believes that the days of jam-packing a program full of content are a thing of the past. “There’s definitely a blowback from that. They want to have that balance of being together with the group and interacting with fellow winners and the executives, but they also want to experience the destination in the way they want to do it.

“In the past,” he continues, “you might have scheduled every single night and every single day. It’s not unusual now for them to have a night on their own, a day on their own. You want people to be able to experience the destination in the way a leisure traveler might. It’s also about balancing that out. One of the great things about incentive programs is that you can quite often create experiences that a normal traveler couldn’t, so how you put the two together in a meaningful way is the trick.”

Twombly explains, “We have a couple of organized events for them, but we do

try to give them a lot of downtime, too, because it’s supposed to be a vacation. We want to try to keep their commitment to a minimum so they can enjoy time with their spouse or their guest. There’s a little bit of an awards component, so we’ll do a dinner one night. We also have some optional things that they can participate in. For example, we’ll do a networking breakfast one morning.”

More Ways to Motivate

Incentive trips also can be used to motivate employees who aren’t part of the salesforce. “Certainly, sales continues to be the No. 1 reason people do incentive programs,” Paben states, “but it’s not the only one. We definitely have clients who reward other employees. They may be the



“We want to try to keep their commitment to a minimum so they can enjoy time with their spouse or their guest.”

Kristin Twombly, Global Event Manager, Zynx Health, Los Angeles, CA

types of employees that are in call centers. They’re the voice of the brand, so they’re the ones that make sure that customers have a good experience. There is definitely more of this notion of not just rewarding sales but also rewarding those that can provide excellent service to customers and that’s a really good thing.

“It brings a huge return,” he continues. “Quite often, those types of employees have not been the recipients of these types of opportunities, so it goes a long way. There are good results, but there is also good will that comes out of offering incentives to employees beyond the sales organization.”

Twombly also has had experience planning these types of programs. “In 2014, in addition to our sales (incentive), we also did a client service kind of award so people who were nominated by executive leadership could go on a similar incentive trip, as well.” She also shared a similar experience she had with a former employer. “We had a really large client that

did an incentive every year for their on-the-ground teams. It was really outstanding, because a lot of them don’t travel as much as sales teams. For some of them, it was their first time ever going on a trip like this, so it’s really rewarding to plan. A lot of sales teams are used to traveling to all of these lavish places, but with the service teams, it’s really great to see their reactions to some of the prizes and excursions and things like that that they don’t normally get to experience.”

Measuring Success

According to the SITE report, the requirement for companies to measure return on investment (ROI) or return on opportunity (ROO) will continue. “One of the biggest changes in incentive pro-

grams is making sure you have a clear way to measure the success and the business value of it,” Paben elaborates. “I think that’s really important. We work with customers to do that so that they can confidently articulate the business value of the investment in incentive travel.

“If the program was structured properly, you can normally tell whether it worked or not,” he continues. “I think when the incentive industry was probably unfairly attacked several years ago, companies weren’t in a position to clearly articulate the business value of what they were doing. Now, I think clients are in a much better position to say ‘we spent this amount of money on an incentive program and for that amount of money, we got X amount of incremental sales, or we grew our customer satisfaction scores by X or we’ve been able to retain a higher percentage of our top performers.’ I think if you can measure that and articulate what the business results of incentive travel are, that’s a really good thing.” **C&IT**



Gaming Resorts

Las Vegas Strip

A Go-to Resource for Planners

By John Buchanan

Gaming resorts, once shunned by some corporate meeting hosts and planners as taboo because of their negative association with gambling, have evolved as a go-to resource for many planners over the last few years, primarily because of the extraordinary value they offer and the simple fact that they offer an exceptional range of dining and entertainment options under one roof.

It's no secret that gaming has, for decades, helped Las Vegas secure and keep top-dog status as a meeting destination. And the city's hotel product continues to reinforce its formidable status.

Top Las Vegas options include the 2,716-room Wynn Las Vegas and the 2,034-suite Encore. Between them, the two hotels hold more Forbes Five Star restaurant awards than any other resort in North America. Wynn features 14 restaurants, including a trio of steak

houses, three acclaimed Asian restaurants, seafood emporium Bartolotta and Italian restaurant Sinatra. Wynn also features a Forbes Five Star spa and the No. 1 golf course in Las Vegas. Wynn and Encore offer a combined 260,000 sf of meeting space.

Rivaling Wynn for status as the most lavish property in town is The Venetian, a 4,027-unit, all-suite mega-resort property whose sprawling convention complex, with a 2.25 million sf of meeting and exhibition space, includes The Sands Expo Center and sister property Palazzo. The Venetian offers an array of celebrity chef restaurants, including Delmonico Steakhouse, Table 10 and Lagasse's Stadium from Emeril Lagasse; modern American cuisine outpost Postrio and Cut steak house from Wolfgang Puck, and Bouchon from Thomas Keller — current consensus holder of the "America's Best Chef" title. Like its key competitors,

The Venetian also offers a world-class spa for pampering attendees.

MGM Resorts operates the city's signature portfolio of gaming resorts, including a globally acclaimed trio of spectacular properties: Bellagio, MGM Grand and Mandalay Bay, which virtually define "the best of Las Vegas." The company's long list of other properties, each of which offers a distinctive theme at a particular price point, include Aria and Vdara at the MGM Resorts-owned hotel-dining-entertainment-shopping complex City Center; Monte Carlo, New York, New York, Luxor, Excalibur and Circus-Circus. The most recent addition to the MGM Resorts collection is the Delano Las Vegas, sister property to the landmark Miami Beach hotel that helped create the South Beach phenomenon in the mid-1990s.

Rounding out the list of properties that help define the current hotel inventory in Las Vegas is the Forbes Four Star, 390-room M Resort Spa Casino, which features eight restaurants, including the flagship Anthony's Prime Steak

& Seafood; seven bars and lounges; a 23,000-sf spa; 92,000-sf casino; and more than 90,000 sf of meeting space. For budget-conscious planners and attendees, its Studio Buffet has been twice named the best buffet in Las Vegas over the last few years by the *Las Vegas Review-Journal*.

Golden Nugget Las Vegas transformed their 20,000-sf Convention Center into a modern business space. The project included new flooring, enhanced lighting, new wall coverings, upgraded technology and a state-of-the-art digital signage system throughout the existing space. The center now houses 13 breakout rooms, which can then be customized for individual group needs, as well as the 5,000-sf Bel Air Room that includes a pre-function foyer.

Additional convention space at the Golden Nugget Las Vegas includes the 12,000-sf Grand Event Center located on the casino floor.

The Golden Nugget Las Vegas, the most luxurious resort on the Fremont Street Experience, offers more than 2,400 deluxe guest rooms and suites; a casino, world-class restaurants such as Grotto Italian Ristorante and Vic & Anthony's Steakhouse; a luxury spa and salon; and The Tank, a year-round outdoor swimming pool complete with a live shark aquarium and the new H2O poolside lounge.

A Planner's Perspective

When Jim Emme, president of Bloomington, Illinois-based Now Foods, a manufacturer and wholesale distributor of natural foods and nutritional supplements, was looking for a venue for the company's August 2014 Western Retailer Conference, for the first time ever, he chose a gaming resort — the AAA Four Diamond Peppermill Resort Spa Casino in Reno, Nevada.

Why did he choose a gaming resort for one of the company's most important meetings?

"Since we had never used one before, we just wanted a facility that would allow our attendees to experience that type of venue," Emme says.

Gaming itself was simply one of the many options such a property would of-

fer attendees in their free time. "If people wanted to participate in that kind of activity, they could, Emme says. "And if they didn't, there were many other things at the resort they could do."

Given the many options he had, Emme says that he selected the 1,623-room Peppermill — named the No. 1 hotel in Reno in January by *U.S. News & World Report* — for three key reasons:

"The first was its proximity to the airport," he says. "Logistically, it was easy. The second was that it's also convenient to the manufacturing facility we have there. And a tour of that facility was an important part of the meeting. The third reason was the price. It offered us good value. It wasn't the lowest-cost venue we looked at. But for the price, they were

"If people wanted to participate in... (gaming), they could. And if they didn't, there were many other things at the resort they could do."

Jim Emme
President
Now Foods
Bloomington, Illinois

able to accommodate us and also offer special meal choices, whether that meant vegetarian or vegan or what have you. And for everyone else, they also offered wonderful food choices so that everyone could have a first-class experience."

Such broad dining options are especially important to Now Foods, since a disproportionately large percentage of their attendees are either vegetarians, vegans or simply very health-conscious.

"And on that count, Peppermill did a great job," Emme says. "The staff at the resort also noted that they had really never had such an eclectic group as ours when it comes to food and beverage dietary preferences and options. But they were able to accommodate all of our people with first-class meals that satisfied everybody."

Value Proposition

Like many meeting hosts and planners before him, one of the things that most surprised Emme about using a gaming resort was the bang for the buck it delivered.

Planners are often surprised to find that dollar for dollar, gaming resorts offer more bottom-line value than any other kind of property. Emme agrees with that perception.

"We were pleasantly surprised with the feedback we got about the value that a gaming resort in general — and Peppermill in particular — had to offer for the price," he says. "We do a survey after the meeting, and 100 percent of our attendees said they were pleased with Peppermill. And to me, that's really how you measure value."

By the same token, Emme was very satisfied with the meeting infrastructure and support services Peppermill delivered.

"On a scale of one to 10, I definitely give them a 10 for their meeting facilities, including the meeting space, the technology and the support services," Emme says. "When you have a meeting today, everybody brings their own smartphones and laptops. And outside speakers bring their own devices, content and files. So getting all of that hardware configured to the internal audio-visual network at the facility is often clunky. And that was a seamless process at Peppermill. They were outstanding in their technical support of us. There was always someone available in the room to help us."

He also rates the overall level of service at Peppermill very highly. "The service we got, across the board, was top-notch," he says. "Again, on a scale of one to 10, it was a 10. And from researching Peppermill, we expected that high level of service. But it was actually even better than we expected. We didn't have any kind of problem. Everything went very smoothly from start to finish."

And that was very important to the success of his meeting, primarily because its retailer attendees are the backbone of his growing business.

Many of Now Foods' retailers are small mom-and-pop operations. "They are the mainstay of our business," Emme says. "So one of the things we do with our meet-

ing is try to help them add value to their businesses. And our Western Retailer Conference is where we do that for our retail customers from that part of the country. And we want them to have an enjoyable experience. So one of the things that was important to us in the selection of a gaming resort like Peppermill was that they could pick and choose whatever they wanted to do.”

Not all of his attendees actually gambled. But all of them found the range of entertainment and leisure options, such as a world-class spa, to be an important element of the meeting.

“And that makes it easier for us in terms of planning the meeting,” Emme says. “It also makes it easier and more convenient for our attendees. The feedback we got from many attendees was that they liked the fact that everything they wanted was under one roof. They liked the fact they had so many other choices, like the bars and lounges and entertainment. There was something for everybody.”

In fact, attendees liked Peppermill so much — and Emme felt he got such practical value for his money — that Now Foods will likely go back next year.

Peppermill Resort Spa Casino features 10 restaurants, 16 bars and lounges, Spa Toscana, casino, a 4,000-sf boardroom, and 106,000 sf of meeting and convention space in the resort’s Tuscany Tower.

East Coast Options

Although Las Vegas rules the roost as the top U.S. gaming destination, Atlantic City offers a convenient choice for planners looking for an East Coast option that delivers sizzle.

The 2,000-room Borgata Hotel Casino & Spa features 11 restaurants, multiple bars and lounges, a full-service spa and 70,000 sf of meeting space. Within the complex is an 800-room The Water Club hotel that is even more upscale and exclusive. Borgata will add two new entertainment venues later this year.

The 1,140-room Caesars Atlantic City Hotel & Casino features 15 restaurants, including the flagship Morton’s The Steakhouse and Nero’s Italian Steakhouse, as well as the more casual Gordon Ramsay Pub & Grill; a full-service

spa, one of the largest casinos in town and 28,000 sf of meeting space.

The 2,079-room Tropicana Atlantic City features a total of 20 restaurants, including seven fine dining establishments and 13 casual dining options. Flagship restaurants include The Palm for steaks and seafood, P.F. Chang’s for Chinese cuisine and Cuba Libre. The Tropicana, now undergoing a \$35 renovation, also features a Bluemercury Spa and 122,000 sf of meeting space.

Native American Properties

Although Las Vegas and Atlantic City have been widely appreciated as gaming destinations for more than a half-century, casinos owned and operated by Native American tribes have become a popular new niche for meeting planners over the past decade.

The AAA Four Diamond Talking Stick Resort in Scottsdale, Arizona, features 497 guest rooms and suites, upscale and casual dining options that include the flagship Orange Sky Restaurant for aged beef and fresh seafood and Blue Coyote Cafe for distinctive American cuisine, the Spa at Talking Stick, and more than 50,000 sf of meeting and event space that includes a 25,000-sf Salt River Grand Ballroom and 22 individual meeting rooms. The resort also features 50,000 sf of outdoor meeting space that takes advantage of the sensational Southwestern landscape. Also located in the Talking Stick Cultural and Entertainment Destination on the Salt River-Pima Maricopa Indian Reservation is Casino Arizona.

Located in the Pacific Northwest, in Marysville, Washington, the 370-room Tulalip Resort Casino ranks as one of the most popular Native American gaming resorts in the U.S. for meetings and events. It offers five restaurants, including the signature Tulalip Bay; a full-service spa; and 30,000 sf of meeting space.

Connecticut features two state-of-the-art Native American casino resorts, Mohegan Sun and Foxwoods.

Mohegan Sun, which currently has 1,200 guest rooms, will open a second, 400-room hotel, called Earth Hotel, in fall 2016. Mohegan Sun features 40 res-

taurants, bars and lounges; a 20,000-sf Elemis spa; three entertainment and event venues, including a 10,000-seat arena, a 400-seat cabaret theatre and 350-seat Wolf Den; three casinos; and more than 100,000 sf of meeting space. The resort also includes a 17,500-sf outdoor terrace and a 130,000-sf retail shopping complex.

Located in Mescalero, New Mexico, the 273-room Inn of the Mountain Gods Resort & Casino, owned by the Mescalero Apache Tribe, features five restaurants, including the flagship Wendell’s Steak & Seafood Restaurant; a championship 18-hole golf course; and 40,000 sf of meeting and banquet space. Activities in the scenic outdoor setting include hiking, mountain biking and bird watching.

Located in Mashantucket, Connecticut, the Foxwoods Resort Casino features four individual hotels, including the AAA Four Diamond Grand Pequot Tower, Great Cedar Hotel, Two Trees Inn and Fix Tower, as well as the intimate 23-suite The Villas. Signature restaurants include the AAA Four Diamond Paragon for fresh seasonal fare, as well as Italian eateries Al Dente and Alta Strada, David Burke Prime steak house and Cedars for beef and poultry. The Foxwoods complex includes 150,000 sf of meeting space.

The Southeast

The 100-acre, 481-room Seminole Hard Rock Hotel & Casino in South Florida, is another of the country’s top-ranked Native American gaming resorts. It features 17 restaurants, including the flagship Council Oak Steaks & Seafood, 11 nightclubs, a 22,000-sf European spa and 20,000 sf of meeting space.

Also in the Southeast, the AAA Four Diamond, 1,740-room Beau Rivage, located in Biloxi, Mississippi, and operated by MGM Resorts, ranks among the most unique and popular gaming resorts outside Las Vegas and Atlantic City. It features five restaurants, including the flagship BR Prime steak house and Jia for innovative pan-Asian cuisine. The resort also features The Spa at Beau Rivage, the Fallen Oak Golf Course and 50,000 sf of meeting space. **C&IT**



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Risk Management

The threat of terrorism reaches beyond the Middle East with attacks like the one on the offices of the French satirical magazine Charlie Hebdo and a Jewish deli in Paris.



Traveler Beware

Safety and Security Concerns Have Never Been Greater

The U.S. Department of State's Office of American Citizens Services and Crisis Management continuously updates travel warnings and alerts for countries across the globe. As of January 2015, the top alert listed was a "Worldwide Caution" regarding "the continuing threat of terrorist actions and violence against U.S. citizens and interests throughout the world." The world today can indeed be a

By Patrick Simms

scary place. For meeting and incentive program planners, the first step to risk assessment is risk awareness. Two of the most feared, terrorism and disease outbreaks, have dominated the news of late:

The atrocities perpetrated by ISIS, an offshoot of al-Qaida formed in 2006, continue to make headlines as the group seeks to create an Islamic state across Sunni areas of Iraq and in Syria. The group's activity shows that risk of a terrorist attack, founded in Islamic extremism, is still very much a factor that group travel planners must reckon with.

The Ebola Crisis

And in West Africa, the Ebola outbreak has had a documented impact on the meetings industry, with SITE board member Daryl Keywood, managing director of Walthers, a South Africa DMC, reporting that several incentive and meeting groups have cancelled their programs.

SITE member Adam Lawhorne, CITE, CIS, who serves as CEO of Oakbrook Terrace, Illinois-based Meeting Incentive Experts, notes that "Kenya right now is really hurting as far as trying to draw groups because it is close to some of (the affected) countries. In addition, Cape Town is losing some of its airlift from Europe because there's not as much demand, and those are top places for safaris."

According to Keywood, "Whilst Ebola remains a concern in parts of West Africa, there are signs that slowly but surely the health workers and government agencies involved are winning the battle. Nigeria, Congo DRC and Senegal have been declared Ebola-free, and infection rates are slowing."

Keywood further observes that the understanding of the state of the outbreak has improved among travelers. "Although there were some cancellations to Southern Africa, we have seen bookings and enquiries increase now that travelers better understand the situation. Many are realizing that they

"Kenya right now is really hurting as far as trying to draw groups because it is close to some of (the Ebola-affected) countries."



Adam Lawhorne, CITE, CIS CEO
Meeting Incentive Experts
Oakbrook Terrace, IL

Using Independent Security Firms

For economic reasons, some companies do not hire security professionals as part of their full-time staff, but rather outsource that function for specific meetings and events. Kevin Mellott, president of Dallas, Texas-based Erase Enterprises and former assistant chief in the Department of Public Safety for the city of Pittsburgh, has some advice for companies interested in hiring a third party:

- **Insurance.** "To operate in Texas, where we're based, it only takes a couple hundred dollars of liability insurance. But that does not even cover the lawyers' fees, so I tell planners to look for a company with at least \$1 million-\$2 million in coverage."
- **Field experience.** "There are professionals with a variety of designations, but many of them don't have any field experience, and that's where the big difference is. So make sure whomever you hire has actual emergency service experience."

• **Breadth of resources.** "The company should have access to a variety of resources, such as private jets, full-size cargo jets, satellite systems, generators, extra personnel and so on, as well as connections on the ground in the destination to obtain these resources."

Mellott, a member of the Overseas Security Advisory Council for the Department of State, put his resources to good use during an incident faced by an American-based incentive group in Africa last year. "All of a sudden the transportation broke down at nighttime, when predatory animals are out. So I needed to get transportation out in the African bush for 75 people. We had two backup systems. I had already put together a deal with two helicopter pilots where if I needed them, I could bring them out 24/7, and they were on standby. I also had a group of small motorcoaches, and that's what we used. And at about 11 p.m. I was able to get 14 coaches to come out in the middle of nowhere to get us." — PS

have had more infections in their own country, e.g., the U.S., than, for example, Southern and East Africa, where there have been no cases whatsoever. We are confident that tourism to the non-affected countries is slowly returning to pre-Ebola outbreak levels."

Intelligence-gathering

Gathering such in-depth intelligence on a potential meeting destination from reputable sources is the foundation for effective risk assessment. One of Lawhorne's clients, a multinational, U.S.-based software company, routinely conducts risk assessment for group travel and "they need numbers, they need

data," he says. "For example, they did a program for 900 people in Los Cabos in May, and needed data from the Mexico Tourism Board on safety, including crime ratio per capita. That's the kind of information that security looks for, which is now part of procurement's buying habits."

Apart from hard data, perception of the risk level also can factor into site selection. If attendees think the company is taking them to a destination where they will be at risk, the company will seem irresponsible to them and "they also might not see it as an incentive," Lawhorne says. Partly due to the perception of the risk involved with travel to the Middle East, another software client

of Meeting Incentive Experts recently moved the program to Riviera Maya in Mexico, he relates.

Even when a country, region or city is deemed to be generally safe, the operative word is "generally." "Maybe a country or city as a whole doesn't have a problem, but there are some pockets that do," notes Lawhorne, who last year contributed to the SITE Foundation study "Incentives Move Business: Risk Assessment/Management for Incentive Events." "There are certain places in Chicago I wouldn't go to, for example, but that doesn't mean I wouldn't do a program on Michigan Avenue."

Assigning Levels of Risk

Depth of investigation into a locale is key, but so is addressing the breadth of potential problems. Anne Daniel, senior manager of travel, meetings and events with Newport News, Virginia-based Ferguson Enterprises, notes that "Political unrest, economic instability and crime rate are all taken into consideration when selecting an international destination." That adds to health threats such as Ebola, SARs, swine flu, etc., extreme

Airport staff check for fever in travelers arriving from West African countries affected by the Ebola outbreak.



weather forecasts, and air/ground transportation disruptions. “From the assessment, we label the destination low, medium or high. Low risk level is usually given a green light. We evaluate the ‘potentials’ for medium risk and make a subjective decision. High risk is removed from consideration,” Daniel explains, adding, “Should a risk level elevate to high, we would work toward relocating the meeting before an outright cancellation.” To make the determination, the company uses “a multitude of information sources,” including the Department of State’s travel warnings, and security and safety firms iJet, NC4 Inc. and International SOS.

In the SITE Foundation study, global event strategist John Hooker, managing director of JHCP, suggests a simple quantitative way to make the risk-level determination for a given contingency: “Allocate between 1 and 3 to the harm/severity involved and between 1 and 3 to the probability of it happening. Multiply these two values to produce a figure between 1 and 9 — the risk factor. The range runs from low risk (1 to 3) to high risk (6 to 9). For low risk, no action may be necessary. For medium



Younger, more thrill-seeking incentive program participants may prefer riskier activities such as this bungee jump off the Kawarau Bridge in New Zealand. Credit: Tourism New Zealand

Incentive Travel Risks

Medium- to high-risk scenarios are perhaps more prevalent in incentive travel today due to the adventurousness of many groups, who sometimes heighten the risk of crisis — particularly medical emergencies — with activities designed to create an “out of the box” experience.

“We have younger, more energetic, more adventure-seeking clients now that go overseas and bungee jump off a bridge over a river, where there may be no emergency medical services available within three hours,” observes Kevin Mellott, president of Dallas, Texas-based Erase Enterprises, a safety and security provider that works with corporate clients. “Our job is to give them the best information possible so they can make a good decision on the risk.”

As Hooker suggests, groups that are considering medium- or high-risk destinations or activities should be aware of the controls they will need to have in place to minimize risk. “Every solution has a different financial commitment,” says Mellott. For those extreme physical activities in remote areas, “We make sure that our travelers have top-quality travel insurance, where we’ve got at least \$1 million to extract them with. People don’t realize how much it costs to do a removal of

an injured person in a faraway place in the middle of nowhere. If you don’t have any EMS in the area, we need extra equipment, vehicles and medics.”

Once the planner is made aware of the risk level and costs involved in the contingency plan, there are “three possibilities,” he explains. “The client says, ‘Forget it, we’re not doing that.’ Or they say, ‘OK, we’ll do that but we’re telling our employees and our attendees it’s not an officially sponsored event, you’re on your own.’ The third version is that they sponsor it and pay to bring in the additional personnel or whatever we need to be able to properly cover a crisis that could occur.”

When the Show Must Go on

If the potential crisis entails the complete disruption of the meeting, the overall value of the meeting to the host organization must be considered. If “the show must go on” due to the value of the event, then a higher budget for contingency planning is often justified. “If the meeting doesn’t take place, if they have to evacuate the area or cancel, or if the area loses power, what’s the financial damage to them?” Mellott asks.

“For example, one of my clients does an annual meeting that has to go on because after the meeting they have a spike in the hundreds of millions of dollars in sales for the next couple of months. So because that meeting is so critical, there is a large

Crisis Management ‘App-titude’

“In Case of Crisis” is a crisis management app launched by RockDove Solutions in 2012 and first distributed to U.S. athletes at the Olympics in London that year. While many crisis apps focus on security/safety alerts and incident reporting, In Case of Crisis is also a customizable “knowledge bank” of contingency plan information that each meeting attendee can have a click away. Icons are keyed to Safety Instructions, Situational Procedures, Incident Reporting, Push Notification, Interactive Maps, Medical Instructions, Roll Calls, Institutional Compliance, Situational Contacts, Web Content, Travel Guidelines and Evacuation Routes. That’s in lieu of distributing the information in pamphlets or folders that attendees might leave in their hotel rooms.



Case Study

Among the many corporations that currently subscribe to the app is Oklahoma City-based Kimray Inc., a manufacturer of oil and gas production control equipment. “We began using In Case of Crisis about a year ago,” says Jeremy Biggs, loss prevention manager. “We had a distributors’ meeting in Texas last year where the Houston Expo was the primary location, but we also took them to some other areas where our product could be shown. So I worked with our event coordinator here and figured out where all of locations were going to be, and we developed an emergency plan for those sites, including the nearest emergency facility, contacts to local law enforcement, EMS and fire department. We upload maps to the app as well.” For the company’s local employee recognition events, which are closely supervised by Kimray security personnel, the app is more selectively distributed. “It’s sent only to the event coordinator and whatever personnel working the event so they have all the information with them; they’re not having to carry around a binder or a lot of paper, and should something happen, they immediately have it to reference,” Biggs adds.

— PS

budget for hiring companies like ours, or buying generators to have on standby and fly in from another city. But if the meeting is not that critical, let’s say it’s an incentive trip, then if something bad happened, we can reschedule a trip for 50 people. So it may not be worth spending all that money to have resources ready for a ‘what if.’”

Meetings with very high, proven ROI can thus be considered part of a company’s assets that must be protected. Its human capital is another kind of asset that can be put at risk during meetings-related travel, and not only by safety/security threats at the destination. “I have some clients who do risk management for flights,” says Lawhorne, “where only a certain number of people from the company can be on each flight.”

Information Security

A third kind of capital is information, and while companies have become more savvy about information security, Mellott has not seen employees generally getting better about data protection during offsite meetings.

According to a study conducted a few

years ago by the Ponemon Institute, 78 percent of the 709 IT and IT security professionals surveyed indicated that their organizations have experienced a data breach as a result of negligent or malicious employees or other insiders. The study identified losing laptops and mobile devices as being among the root causes of data breaches.

“Everybody today wants to click a button and make it happen right now, and if security takes an extra step, they think it’s inconvenient. We try to make it as convenient as possible,” Mellott says. “For example, at a social event after a presentation, we’ll have a room with our security personnel where someone can drop off their laptop bag. Our guys can check it in and hold it while they’re at the social event, so it’s not sitting on the floor in a bag where someone walking through the convention area can pick up that bag and walk out with it. We also do a lot of education by sending out bulletins, and we’ll even have signs on easels reminding attendees that they’re dealing with sensitive data.”

Attendee Education

The attendee education component

must not be left out of any contingency plan. The host company can do its best to select low-risk destinations and recreational activities, and to supplement medium-risk scenarios with spending on security/safety resources. But contingency plans work best if attendees themselves understand what to do in an emergency and how to avoid risk in the first place, whether that means safeguarding a laptop, staying hydrated during physical exertion, avoiding certain areas of a city during free time, and so on.

And if attendees do not have contact information for all local authorities that can assist during a crisis, then they should at least be able to easily reach event support staff who do have those contacts.

Daniel notes that Ferguson Enterprises has increased staff training on risks and contingency plans: “The onsite staff receives a full country briefing from our Security and Risk Management group, along with contact information for various assistance groups, such as medical, police and local embassies.” That briefing may turn out to be the most important pre-con meeting of all. **C&IT**

“People don’t realize how much it costs to do a removal of an injured person in a faraway place in the middle of nowhere.”



Kevin Mellott
President
Erase Enterprises
Frisco, TX

risk, look at methods to reduce the risk of the activity, if possible, and implement controls to minimize the chance for it to occur. For high risk, consider methods to reduce the risk or, if that is not possible, consider eliminating the activity from the program. If you cannot do so, tell the client and participants about the risk, in writing, and implement significant controls to minimize it.”

At the Walt Disney World Resort, keynote speaker Bobby Flay explored the design decisions made in the cooking process while preparing delicious dishes on stage at Learning 2014.



Credits: Ed Burke

Food

By Christine Loomis

'The New Interactive Experience'



This may or may not be good news. Kale salad is out. So are beets, caviar, Asian fusion and the appletini (was that even still in?).

For 2015, the trending foods, flavors and drinks are cauliflower, sea urchin, umami (a word borrowed from the Japanese meaning a pleasant, savory taste) and cocktails made with 15, yes 15, ingredients. French cuisine is apparently returning to favor and salad lovers will be munching on cabbage.

Just when you thought nothing could make coffee trendier, along comes nitro, which has already ignited the craft-beer world. Aficionados swear that the gas improves coffee, too, reducing acidity, increasing creaminess and making a cuppa joe naturally sweeter.

Not to worry if your favorite foods have dropped off the trending list. It will all change again, at least that's the word from Andrew Freeman & Co. (AF&Co.), a San Francisco-based restaurant and hospitality consulting, marketing and public relations group that publishes a much-anticipated annual F&B trend report.

AF&Co.'s Food Trends Index reveals that instant gratification, education and participation will be recurrent themes throughout restaurants and hotels in 2015.

Millennials rule nowadays. Thus, the economic upturn, coupled with the desire to attract millennials, has led to a surge of hip new concepts, personalized service and customized experiences

geared towards satisfying this "demand" generation, according to AF&Co.

Chefs, restaurateurs and hoteliers are providing experiences that are less formal yet high in quality, more interactive and rooted in catering to the pleasure-seeker, says Freeman. (See box on opposite page.)

The one thing unlikely to change is that food is no longer just about filling stomachs.

Brain Food

One dominant meal concept involves foods that help boost or maintain cognitive power, of particular importance for attendees at all-day conferences. Over the past few years the meetings industry has begun to embrace the science behind healthful, low-sugar meals and snacks

that help keep attendees focused rather than launching them into a sugar high followed by an energy low.

Brain-boosting foods include blueberries, nuts and seeds, wild salmon and broccoli.

No hotel company has done more work in this area than Radisson Blu, which offers nutritionist-developed Brain Food menus specifically for groups. Brain Food is the culinary component of the brand's Experience Meetings concept, which launched in 2013 in North America at IMEX America in Las Vegas and a year earlier in Europe.

Menus are built around six brain-food principles:

- Lots of fish, whole-grain products, fruits and vegetables.
- A focus on fresh, locally sourced ingredients.
- Pure ingredients with minimal industrial processing.
- Less meat and a maximum of 10 percent fat content.
- Natural sweeteners and never more than 10 percent added sugar.
- A focus on good taste as well as satisfying diners' senses.

According to Christer Larsson, vice president of Food and Beverage, Americas, for Carlson Rezidor Hotel Group, parent company of the Radisson Blu brand, the brain-food concept is particularly popular for morning and afternoon meeting breaks as well as breakfast

and lunch. "This is a trend that's here to stay," Larsson says.

Anne Madden, CMP, president of the Philadelphia Area Chapter MPI, held the chapter's 2014 spring board retreat at the Radisson Blu Warwick Hotel, Philadelphia and found the brain-food menu a plus. "Our goal was to keep the attendees fed, satisfied and energy levels up. We wanted to avoid any crashes, which happens so often with high-carbohydrate and high-sugar foods."

She says the menu's breakfast options, including turkey sausage and egg whites, allowed attendees to indulge in favorites without feeling weighed down or guilty. "And those individuals who were not egg-eaters had a nice alternative option with the yogurt parfaits; there was something for everyone." There also was a lot of variety in snacks from one break to the next, she adds, so attendees felt they had many choices.

For Madden and her group, Radisson Blu's brain-food menus were a success. "The menus offered were consistent with meeting goals that included keeping attendees fed without inducing a food coma after lunch," she says, particularly important because the meeting was a very intensive two-day retreat with heavy financial discussions. "The food kept our energy levels up and was (healthful). It was not your typical empty-calorie, high-sugar menu that so many attendees experience."

Madden believes healthful foods are increasingly important for hotels to provide to groups. "The brain-food concept is great," she says. "We all know food can make or break your meeting. In addition, everyone is doing more with less. Management expects to get the most out of employees' time out of their office while attending conferences. Supplying healthier alternatives to attendees will help keep their physical and mental capacities to the optimum level. With so much emphasis on health consciousness and food allergies being so prevalent, venues cannot afford to fall behind on what is requested for our convention attendees today."

Food as Fun

Food also can be fun, and for that reason it's a natural ingredient in programs seeking to bond attendees and provide a forum in which networking takes place organically. Case in point: MGM Resort's wine vs. beer pairing, during which attendees sample beer and wine pairings and vote on favorites. It's an event that highlights the ongoing craft brewing movement in this country, which has elevated beer into a sophisticated beverage with nuances similar to those in wine, its tastes and aromas varying with regional ingredients and techniques such as barrel aging.

Typical of the selections is Bigeye Tuna Tartare paired with Easy Jack, Session

The Pleasure Principle

This year's annual F&B trend report — *The Pleasure Principle: The "I Want What I Want When I Want It" Year in Food, Beverage and Hospitality*, was developed by Andrew Freeman and his team.

Here are a few trends to watch:

Taco Mania. We've seen modern Mexican food sweep the nation, and now chefs are honing in on traditional tacos.

Scrambled Soft. First it was poached then deviled, now the new "it" egg is scrambled. And we're talking way beyond breakfast. Scrambled eggs are what's for dinner.

The Candy Man Can. Retro, artisanal and newfangled, candy is coming on strong.

Muy Caliente. Tapas and tapas-style menus have be-

come the standard for our new sharing culture, and we're having a love affair with the cuisine of Spain.

Pucker Up. From pickles to vinegary shrub-based cocktails, we're into sour flavors. It's an easy way to add dimension to dishes and by refreshing the taste buds, it literally makes your mouth water.

Flipping Out. With the addition of savory pancakes to dinner menus, chefs are proving batter is a versatile canvas for a variety of flavors.

The Original Hybrid. It doesn't get much better than buttery toasted rye, melty cheese and a juicy beef patty. That's the beauty of a patty melt — part grilled cheese, part cheeseburger, the whole is greater than the sum of its parts.

For the complete report, go to: www.afandco.com/whats-trending/trend-report

— CL

IPA from Firestone Walker Brewery and a 2009 Herman Story Tomboy Southern Rhone White Blend from Santa Barbara County, California.

During the 2014 IBM Insight Conference at Mandalay Bay in Las Vegas, Nevada, conference manager Martha Moreau used the pairing event as a new way for attendees to experience the expo and to connect attendees with sponsors and partners. “We had tasting stations set up throughout the exhibit hall,” she says. “We paired one food item with a beer and a wine (chosen by the certified cicerone and sommelier) and had all three on a station. We had one large station in the center of the exhibit hall with all of the food and drink pairings, and the cicerone and sommelier were walking around talking to attendees and telling them why each beer or wine worked with each food selection.

“Stations were placed near sponsors so sponsors could take advantage of the attendees being close to their booths, giving them the opportunity to meet new prospects and continue conversations with existing clients. The reception-style food and atmosphere allowed for the attendees to be more relaxed and to walk around and talk to people throughout the event. The food and drink pairings provided an instant talking point.”

Moreau says the event was successful on all levels. “We strive to deliver an exceptional attendee experience. We know this fun, hands-on activity helped us deliver exactly that.”

After a packed day of general sessions, keynotes, breakouts and meetings, Moreau says attendees want the opportunity to continue networking albeit in a more relaxed and entertaining atmosphere, which is what the pairing event provides. “By the end of the evening,” she adds, “there was a nice vibe in the Expo, and we heard from

MGM Resorts’ wine vs. beer pairing event was a “win-win” for the IBM Insight Conference at Mandalay Bay in Las Vegas and is already on the itinerary for 2015.

several partners that they were pleased with the turnout.”

Moreau sees the experience as one that demonstrates IBM’s commitment to both its attendees and sponsors. “We know the No. 1 reason people attend Insight is to take advantage of networking opportunities. The pairings event allowed us to capitalize on that in a different and fun way. The experience allowed new relationships to be forged in a way that may not have happened otherwise.”

The event was so successful it’s already on the schedule for Insight 2015. “We will absolutely do the beer vs. wine pairing again,” she says. “The experience helped us deliver an exceptional attendee experience in a fun, low-pressure atmosphere while ensuring our partners and sponsors saw strong booth traffic.”

Although some groups actually vote for beer or wine, Moreau says her group didn’t take a formal vote. “In my mind,” she says, “both options were winners.” And regardless of favorites, everyone learned something during the event. It was win-win.

Stay Well Meetings

Like Radisson Blu, MGM Resorts also has developed a program focusing on healthful eating as part of its overall Stay Well Meetings initiative, which was launched at the MGM Grand in Las Vegas in August with the help of Dr. Deepak Chopra, world-renowned health and wellness expert. MGM Resorts is responding to what it sees as a comprehensive trend in which wellness is penetrating the hospital-

ity industry and work environments in a significant way.

The program includes everything from air purification and new cleaning protocols to lighting, acoustics, ergonomics and aromatherapy. More attention to hydration for attendees and healthful menu options are important components. The menus, which have the designated Go! Healthy seal from nutritionists at Cleveland Clinic’s Wellness Institute, are available for all meals and snack breaks.

The break menu includes such options as honey-chia muesli bars; a farmer’s basket with raw, roasted and pickled vegetable dips and spreads; baked and dehydrated fruit and vegetable chips; and nuts as well as infused waters and tropical-fruit nectar.

Sharing the Joy of Food

At Walt Disney World Resort in Orlando, food impacts meetings in a variety of creative ways, including team-building programs and events. “We’ve put a lot of emphasis and energy behind coming up with these unique event concepts,” says Robert Gilbert, executive chef with catering operations at the resort. “Regardless of the size of the group, it’s all about creating a sense of camaraderie between guests,” he says. “Nothing does that like learning about and sharing the joy of food.”

The newest culinary experience, avail-

able at Disneyland Resort in California and Walt Disney World Resort in Florida, is a Create Your Own Lunch program in which participants cook together and engage all senses. Attendees work in small teams to create a four-course meal. The program is perfect for all group sizes, even up to 1,000 attendees, thanks to the use of satellite kitchens.

Elliott Masie, chair and CEO of the Learning Conference, sees F&B as an increasingly important aspect of meetings on multiple levels. The 2014 conference was held at Walt Disney World Resort, and food played an important role during the event.

“I believe food is the new interactive experience,” says Masie of The Masie Center in Saratoga Springs, New York. “When we go to a restaurant, we’re not only interested in what’s on the plate, we’re interested in what went into the food and how it was cooked.

“I thrive on going to restaurants when I can sit at a chef’s table and see the food being prepared. We believe that’s a form of interaction and engagement, and that it responds in a very modern sense to things that stimulate and arouse curiosity in our participants. That’s exactly what any meeting planner wants to do.”

Masie used food in a couple of different ways during Learning Conference 2014.

“We decided to build a multilevel food experience for people from an activity point of view. In our general session, 1,671 people spent an hour seeing Bobby Flay interviewed by me around things such as how he learns, what his background is and how he follows recipes. But he also actually cooked them a delicious Thanksgiving turkey dinner that was done in a fry pan interestingly and with a lot of humor.”

Masie says that part of the program was an intriguing way to stimulate thinking about corporate learning, which is what’s at the core of the conference. He then added another component to move the learning from a gigantic classroom to something more intimate.

“We wanted to create a smaller and more intimate experience, even though in each case we had 120–150 people,” he says. “So we reached out to our contacts

at Disney and asked them to construct a one-hour experience, which we ran with some variations twice that day.”

The program, put together by the chef at Disney’s Coronado Springs Resort, included a cooking demonstration and interaction from conference participants. “People were able to see what the chefs were doing and how they were doing it,” Masie says. “Attendees were able to ask questions and...actually taste some of the experience.”

Another nice component was that



Martha Moreau
Insight 2014 Conference Manager
IBM Corporation | IBM Global
Conferences
Concord, MA

“The reception-style food and atmosphere allowed for the attendees to be more relaxed and to walk around and talk to people throughout the event.”

a teaching experience as well as a bonding experience?”

Food as the Learning Experience

Masie sees a variety of ways in which food experiences translate to corporate learning.

He offers the example of competitions involving food, which have become so popular on TV. That same type of gamification, he says, also has become an important element of meetings in one form or another, including food competitions with attendees. Masie points out that celebrity chef Bobby Flay has been in competitions and hasn’t always come out on top. Flay’s view about that, however, rather than the specific results, is what has valuable application in the workplace.

“It’s not that I lose,” the chef Flay said, “it’s that other people win!”

It’s easy to see how that perspective can eliminate negative aspects of competition in the workplace, turning them instead to something more collaborative, supportive and productive.

For planners wanting to test those waters and make food a learning component of meetings, Masie has this advice: “I think we have to make a shift of moving away from seeing food as a break or as a dietary requirement and view it as an interactive experience. ...I think what meeting planners need to do is view themselves as meeting architects. As a meeting architect, you are there to design an experience that has great content, great context and great intensity and collaboration. I think that food can play that role significantly more than just feeding people. I think it can be used as engaging and highlighting.”

The biggest trend in food may be that it is far more than sustenance in the traditional sense. It’s also a cognitive-boosting, interactive, learning, relationship-building, experiential element that meets the needs of meeting attendees and planners on multiple levels — some of them, thankfully, quite delicious. **C&IT**



Credit: Visually Attractive



All Aboard Orlando

‘Everything You Could Ever Ask for in a Destination’

By John Buchanan

Although Orlando has been among the country’s top 10 meeting destinations for years, in 2013 it achieved the lofty status of being named the No. 1 destination in the U.S. by Cvent.

That distinction comes as no surprise to the many loyal corporate meeting planners who have considered the Magic City a go-to choice for about as long as they can remember.

“First of all, it offers sunshine in February,” says Judy Smith, CEM, director of dealer markets at Memphis, Tennessee-based Orgill, Inc., a wholesale hardware supplier to the U.S., Canada

and 62 other countries. For the last eight years, Smith has used Orlando for the company’s citywide Spring Dealer Market, which uses 1 million sf of total space at the Orange County Convention Center and draws 28,000 attendees from across the country and the world. The event is booked in Orlando for every year except two through 2026.

“It also offers attendees the opportunity to both work and play well,” Smith says. “And with the variety of hotels to choose from at every price point and the theme parks, Orlando continues to be the best destination for our show.”

At Universal Orlando Resort, travel between the two different lands of The Wizarding World of Harry Potter via the Hogwarts Express.

Brent Sutton, senior event director at San Francisco-based business-to-business media enterprise 1105 Media, has used Orlando for seven of the last 10 years — the last four consecutively for a five-day information technology and developers conference that attracts more than 1,000 attendees. The company will return for a fifth year this fall for Live! 360. “The reason I keep going back to Orlando is that they continue to offer so much not only for our conference attendees, but also their families,” Sutton says. “The majority of my attendees have their attendance paid for by their companies. So that makes it easy for



“It’s exciting to host a meeting in Orlando. If you were here last year, we have something new for you this year.”

Jane Scaletta, General Manager
AlliedPRA Orlando, Orlando, FL

them to decide to also bring their families and make it a vacation as well, which more than half of our attendees do each year. But for me as a planner, Orlando also delivers all of the other things I typically look for in a destination.”

Such loyal testimonials come as no surprise to Jane Scaletta, general manager of local destination management company AlliedPRA Orlando.

“The most important thing to know about Orlando right now is that we are on the move as a major meeting destination,” Scaletta says. “We are growing. It’s exciting to host a meeting in Orlando. If you were here last year, we have something new for you this year. If you come this year, we’ll have something new for you next year. And it’s because of that, primarily, that Orlando is and remains an exciting destination.”



Airlift

In addition to excitement, Orlando also offers formidable airlift and what is arguably one of the nicest and easiest to navigate major airports in the world — Orlando International Airport.

Airlift is particularly important to Smith for her citywide meeting that draws attendees from all over the world.

“The airlift into and out of Orlando and the quality of the airport, in terms of being easy to get into and out of and offering a lot of good restaurants, is very important to us and our attendees,” she says. “And we also get good value on airfares, no matter where someone is coming from.”

Hattie Hill, CMM, CEO of Women’s Foodservice Forum (WFF), a private leadership development entity supported by a consortium of food-service companies to help women reach senior management positions in the industry, cites airlift as one of the key reasons why she has brought WFF’s 3,000-attendee annual meeting, which also attracts international attendees, to Orlando every other year since 2000.

“The airlift is important, because the people that attend our meeting are busy businesspeople,” Hill says. “And they want to be out of the office for the shortest amount of time possible. Because Orlando has great airlift from around the country, that means that many of our attendees can catch a flight after their office hours and still get to the meeting.”



Credit: AlliedPRA Orlando



The Orlando Harley-Davidson Historic Factory (top) and Paradise Cove (l) at Buena Vista Watersports are unique venues for corporate events.

Sutton also praises both Orlando's airport and airlift. "The airport is easy to get into and out of, and it's easy to get flights to and from," he says. "We have attendees from all over the country, as well as internationally, and all of our attendees can either get direct flights or get there with just one connecting flight."

Hotel Inventory

It comes as a big surprise to many meeting planners who visit Orlando for the first time that the city offers 450 hotels and a whopping 118,600 rooms, Scaletta says. And as the destination continues to evolve and increase in sophistication, its hotel product is leading the way, she says.

Most recently, Orlando has benefitted from the conversion of the landmark Peabody Orlando, perennially cited as one

The new Four Seasons Resort Orlando at Walt Disney World Resort, which opened last August, further burnishes Orlando's growing reputation, Scaletta says, especially for high-end meetings and incentive groups. "Four Seasons is a great luxury hotel brand," she says. "And they have really outdone themselves in Orlando. And because it's an 'at Walt Disney World Resort' property, you also get all

of those incredible benefits, such as the venues within the Disney complex." Smith likes the city's hotel inventory because of the wide range of options and price points it offers. "All of our attendees pay their own way, and a lot of them are mom-and-pop hardware dealers, even though we also have large dealer attendees," she says. "But we treat them all the same, whether they're a \$3 million a year dealer or a small one. So one thing we like about Orlando is that you can find a hotel room anywhere from luxury to economy."

Her hotel room roster includes the Hilton Orlando and Hyatt Regency Orlando, as well as more properties conveniently located near the convention center.

For the more than 1,000 internal employees who attend the meeting, Smith uses the Marriott Village Orlando in Lake Buena Vista. This campus of hotels can accommodate her entire team and also offers good value. "We also like the fact it is convenient for people because it's centrally located to things like dining and shopping," Smith says.

Hill has remained loyal to the Marriott Village Orlando since 2000, primarily because of the quality of its staff and the relationship she has developed with them. "You can find rooms and meeting space anywhere," she says. "But you can't always find a good partner. And we have a great partnership with Marriott World Center, and one that truly values the fact that we keep coming back every other year. We are in the food business, so the food and beverage we get at a hotel is a very important part of the expectations of our attendees. And again, Marriott World Center does a great job for us every time."

And the third factor in her longtime use of the hotel is that its size perfectly fits her meeting. "We like to have everything under one roof," she says. "So when you combine the staff, the service we get, the great relationship we have and the quality

of the food and the ability to do everything under one roof, that makes the Marriott World Center ideal for us."

Sutton is an equally loyal user of Universal properties, most notable the Loews Royal Pacific Resort.

"I'm an absolute fan of all the Universal Orlando hotel properties, but especially the Loews Royal Pacific," he says. "It's a magical place as far as a venue for conferences. It not only has all the amenities I need for a large group program, but the hotel itself, from the décor to the South Pacific feel it creates, really transports our attendees and makes them feel like they're on a very special tropical vacation. It's also very family-friendly. For us, it delivers the total package we're looking for. And then you have the fact it's very close to the Universal theme parks."

For its F&B, Sutton gives the Loews Royal Pacific a nine out of 10. "Not only do they have good conference (catering) food," he says. "But year after year, we also get high marks from our attendees for the food they receive in the various restaurants."

And in a budget-conscious, post-recession marketplace,



The keynote at Live! 360 in Orlando at Loews Royal Pacific Resort in 2014.

he says, especially now that hotels have regained their pricing power as a seller's market, the other key benefit he gets with Universal is a strong value proposition. "They have been our true partners, especially ever since the recession," he says. "They work with us to make sure that we have a package to offer attendees that is affordable to their companies. And that means it has to work on every level, from the room rate to the F&B and all the other costs associated with people being there. And Universal does a great job on every aspect of all that."

Dining Scene

Yet another factor in Orlando's popularity as a meeting destination is its diverse and constantly evolving dining scene, which features everything from restaurants operated by top celebrity chefs to budget options and everything in between.

"The dining options and the food in Orlando are amazing," Sutton says. "It really does offer something for every taste and budget, from upscale gourmet restaurants to budget choices. My attendees and I like the fact that it has such a range of options from high-end to low-cost, as well as midmarket options. That's very important to us, because we have quite a few attendees that are on a strict per-diem budget from their companies.



"It's been unbelievable how the dining scene in Orlando has evolved. It's the best thing that ever happened."

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

But we also have attendees that are looking for high-end dining options like celebrity chef restaurants you hear about on the food channels, and others that are looking for chain restaurants where they can eat inexpensively."

The ever-growing roster of good restaurants also is a major factor in Smith's ongoing annual use of the destination. "It's been unbelievable how the dining scene in Orlando has evolved over the last few years," she says. "It's the best thing that ever happened, as far as we're concerned. And as we continue to expand our dealer markets and enhance the experiences of our attendees, we give them a lot of information about the local restaurants before the show."

She and her attendees are particularly fond of "Restaurant Row," which is centrally and conveniently located along bustling Sand Lake Road. "You have a lot of dining choices and they're all good," Smith says. "And it's easy to get there inexpensively by taxi."

Even though Sand Lake Road and the spectacular CityWalk dining and entertainment complex at Universal Orlando continue to reign as the most popular restaurant locations of choice for meeting planners and attendees, International Drive and the area formerly known as Downtown Disney — now transitioning to Disney Springs — are coming on strong, Scaletta says.

For example, International Drive offers Pointe Orlando, a dining and entertainment complex near the convention center that offers an array of popular venues including a Capital

"We like to have everything under one roof. ...That makes the Marriott World Center ideal for us."

Hattie Hill, CMM
CEO, WFF, Dallas TX



of the top meeting hotels in the country, to a Hyatt Regency. And its importance is enhanced by its location in the center of International Drive. The Hyatt Regency Orlando is connected to the Orange County Convention Center and offers 315,000 sf of flexible meeting space. Just up the street is the AAA Four Diamond Hilton Orlando, another major property connected to the convention center.



Meeting planners say the dining scene in Orlando offers many diverse options such as the new Antojitos on Universal's CityWalk.

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EXPANDED MEETING SPACE BY FALL 2015
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SUMMER 2016: LOEWS SAPPHIRE FALLS RESORT
LOEWS ROYAL PACIFIC RESORT | HARD ROCK HOTEL®
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LOEWS SAPPHIRE FALLS RESORT
OPENING SUMMER 2016

Universal Orlando's newest hotel will feature 1,000 guest rooms and suites, plus 131,000 sq. ft. of meeting space, including a walkway connecting to Loews Royal Pacific Resort's meeting facilities creating more meeting options than ever before.

LOEWS ROYAL PACIFIC RESORT
EXPANDING 2015

By Fall 2015 the hotel's meeting space will expand to over 141,000 sq. ft., including 15 meeting rooms and 64,000 sq. ft. of outdoor meeting space. This exotic, South Seas themed hotel features 1,000 guest rooms and suites, which will all be renovated by mid-2016.

HARD ROCK HOTEL®
NEWLY REVITALIZED

The stylish California mission-themed Hard Rock Hotel® features meeting space renovated in 2014, along with renovations to the lobby and all 650 guest rooms and suites which will be complete by early 2015.

LOEWS PORTOFINO BAY HOTEL
RECENTLY REMODELED

Universal Orlando's premier luxury hotel, themed to the Italian Riviera, offers 750 guest rooms and suites all newly renovated in 2014. The hotel also offers elegant ballrooms, meeting rooms, breathtaking outdoor function areas and more.

UNIVERSAL'S CABANA BAY BEACH RESORT
NEW IN 2014

The resort's largest hotel recently opened its doors with 1,800 guest rooms and suites. Attendees will enjoy the resort's colorful 1950's & 60's beach hotel theme.



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Grille steak house, B.B. King's Blues Club and Cuba Libre Restaurant and Rum Bar.

Meanwhile, a number of new restaurants have debuted at Universal's CityWalk, including Vivo Italian Kitchen, Hot Dog Hall of Fame and Antojitos Authentic Mexican Food.

"We recently did an event at Antojitos and it was fantastic," Scaletta says, adding that the new Disney Springs will feature an upscale restaurant from Food Network's Iron Chef Masaharu Morimoto.

Convention Center

For larger meetings, the Orange County Convention Center, which now ranks as the second largest in the country, with 2.1 million sf of exhibit space plus meeting rooms and breakout spaces, continues to play a major role in Orlando's success. To remain competitive, the facility has launched the next phase of a five-year capital improvements plan with the renovation of West Halls E & F and meeting rooms. Hall WF will be converted into a 50,000-sf ballroom and four boardrooms. Meeting rooms in W340 will become signature rooms with wood flooring, bamboo ceilings and a scenic outdoor mezzanine deck for entertaining. The latest phase of the facility's makeover will be completed in 2017.

Smith, as a major user of the convention center, gives it high marks. "First and foremost for us is the quality of the people we work with," she says. "They know us. We've built a good relationship that is now a real partnership. They're there for us, no matter what we need. But in addition to that, in terms of cleanliness and service, Orange County Convention Center is just an excellent facility."

The exceptional quality of the facility's technology is also very important to her.

"They have made some major changes with regard to wireless technology that really help us, because everybody has a wireless device or tablet now," she says. "And our show is a buying show, so technology is very important to the success of the meeting."



Reunion Resort, home of Annika Academy, also boasts three Signature golf courses designed by legends Palmer, Nicklaus and Watson.

A Top-notch CVB

The final factor in the city's phenomenal recent success is its CVB, Visit Orlando, with former Disney senior executive George Aguel as its passionate and visionary chairman.

"They are one of the top CVBs I've ever worked with," Smith says. "In fact, I would rate them No. 1. The people I work with are the best I've ever worked with. They know us, and they work with us very well because they know the things we need, and they deliver those things. They stay on top of everything, and



"The reason I keep going back to Orlando is they offer so much not only for our...attendees, but also their families."

Brent Sutton, Senior Event Director
1105 Media Inc., San Francisco, CA

they keep me posted on things like new hotels or restaurants. We source our own rooms and negotiate our own deals, but they help me find more rooms when I need them, and they help me find and manage the temp service we use for registration."

Hill also has high praise for Visit Orlando, with whom she has worked since 2000. "One key reason we continue to come back to Orlando is that we have a great relationship with the CVB," she says. "But the other reason is that Orlando is the most visited family travel destination in the world. And our excellent relationship with the CVB makes it easy for us to keep coming back."

In her experience, Orlando is second to none as a destination, Hill says. "The most important thing for us and our attendees is that in Orlando, we have a destination where our staff and attendees get to work hard and then, when the conference is over, they can bring their families in and enjoy the city," she says. "That's why Orlando works so well for us."

Smith agrees that Orlando lacks nothing as a meeting destination. "It has great hotels, great restaurants and it's easy to get to," she says. "It also has everything you need right around the convention center, and it's a 'walking' city. And it has great shopping. So for a meeting of our size, it's everything you could ever ask for in a destination."



The Orlando Eye will officially open on May 4 along with Madame Tussauds Orlando and Sea Life Orlando Aquarium.

New and Notable

According to Visit Orlando, there is great news for groups meeting in Orlando starting with the May 4 opening of **The Orlando Eye at I-Drive 360** — the new entertainment complex on International Drive. Groups of up to 15 attendees can reserve their own fully enclosed, air-conditioned glass capsule for an intimate cocktail party on the 400-foot-tall observation wheel.

Madame Tussauds also will find a home this spring at I-Drive 360, providing groups with the ultimate celebrity experience. Groups of 15 or more are eligible for a special discount.

The **Sea Life Orlando Aquarium**, coming to I-Drive 360, will provide groups with interactive options such as a hands-on touchpool experience, face-to-face encounters with sharks, a 360-degree Ocean Tunnel and more than 5,000 creatures.

The Boathouse is an upscale, waterfront dining restaurant coming to Disney Springs. Guests can listen to live music or take a romantic captain's guided tour aboard *The Venezia*, a 40-foot wooden Italian water taxi.

STK Orlando blends two concepts into one — the modern steak house and a chic lounge. STK Orlando will boast the only rooftop dining venue in Disney Springs. STK has outposts in London, Los Angeles, Las Vegas, Washington DC, Atlanta, and three in New York City.

For an adrenaline-raising experience, groups can consider the **I-Drive NASCAR**, a new indoor high-performance kart-racing facility. Three meeting rooms totaling 4,400 sf are available for groups.

Universal Orlando Resort debuts its newly renovated guest rooms at **Hard Rock Hotel**. The hotel offers 6,000 sf of flexible meeting space, as well as 140,000 sf of additional function space at the nearby Hard Rock Cafe and Hard Rock Live venues at Universal CityWalk.

By fall 2015, **Loews Royal Pacific Resort** — 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. The new space will feature a nearly 36,000-sf ballroom, divisible by 12, along with four additional breakout rooms and prefunction space. **The Loews Sapphire Falls Resort at Universal Orlando** will open in the summer of 2016 and will have

131,000 sf of meeting space. Together, the Loews Royal Pacific and Loews Sapphire Falls will have 272,000 sf of combined meeting space.

Polynesian Villas & Bungalows at Disney's Polynesian Village Resort will feature 20 bungalows on Seven Seas Lagoon and 360 deluxe studios.

The Walt Disney World Swan and Dolphin Hotel is getting the largest makeover in its history. The hotel has launched a multiphase, multiyear, \$125 million redesign project that will transform every guest room in the 758-room Swan Hotel and the 1,509-room Dolphin Hotel. **C&IT**

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The Shreveport-Bossier Convention and Tourist Bureau in Louisiana has named **David Bradley** as vice president of sales and services. He most recently served as director of convention sales for the Valley Forge Convention and Visitors Bureau in Pennsylvania.

The Outrigger Konotta Maldives Resort, located in the Gaafu Dhaalu Atoll and scheduled to open in the third quarter of 2015, has named **Apple Woo** as director of sales and marketing, based in the Outrigger Asia Pacific office in Phuket, Thailand. She previously served as Jumeirah group director of global sales for Southeast Asia and Hong Kong.

Scottsdale Resort & Conference Center, Scottsdale, Arizona, has named **Patrick Connors** as director

of sales and marketing. He most recently served as director of sales and marketing at The Wigwam in Phoenix, Arizona.

The Philadelphia Convention and Visitors Bureau has named **Tim Haggerty** as vice president of sales. He most recently was director of sales and marketing for the Philadelphia Marriott Downtown.

Bradley Douglas Doell was named director of sales and marketing for Turtle Bay Resort located on Oahu's North Shore. He was most recently director of sales and marketing for the Hilton Orange County in Costa Mesa, California.

The Marriott Hartford Downtown, Hartford, Connecticut,

has appointed **Randall Rovelto** as corporate sales manager. He was market sales manager at Marriott Courtyard and Residence Inn in Worcester, Massachusetts.

Discover The Palm Beaches has named **Dori Jensen** as senior director of meetings and convention sales for the mid-Atlantic region. She formerly served as manager of meeting and convention sales at Tourism Vancouver in Vancouver, British Columbia.

Omni Bedford Springs Resort, Bedford Springs, Pennsylvania, has named **Pamela Wolff** as director of sales and marketing. She most recently served as regional director of sales and marketing for Prospera Hospitality. **C&IT**



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