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GEL: Group Experiential Learning programs help participants apply skills learned in sailboat racing directly to the corporate environment.

Experiential Learning Adventures

Adding Substance to Incentives
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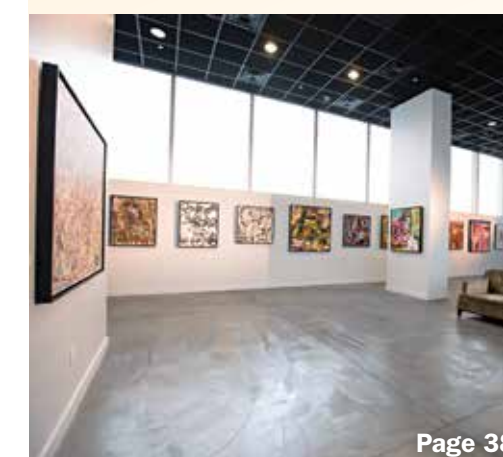
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An insurance group became farmers for a day at The Simple Farm where they harvested vegetables, milked goats and made goat cheese.

Credit: Lorshi Photography



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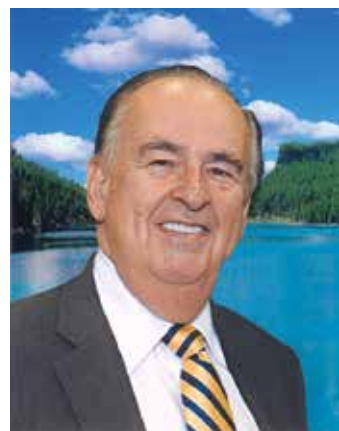
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Publisher's Message

Learning by Doing

Experiential. Is it a hot, new buzzword describing a method of learning? Often defined as learning by doing, experienced-based learning or even trial-and-error learning, the concept is hardly a new one. Confucius declared *I hear and I forget, I see and I remember, I do and I understand*.



In this month's cover story, "Experiential Learning Adventures — Adding Substance to Incentives" on page 18, we learn that experiential learning is an increasingly important component to meetings and incentives as the total, often immersive experience helps make participants better employees and ultimately better people as well.

For example, Kevin Shannon, managing director for Odyssey International Incentives & Meetings, arranged a hands-on experience for a client that highlighted Irish farms and food within the context of local and healthy. The program, held at the Ballyknocken House and Farm in Ireland, included a tour of the farm, preparation of lunch and meeting with local

artisans. Shannon said it was the hands-on part that resonated with the attendees. "Many times during incentive programs, guests are visiting somewhere, looking at something, admiring a landscape," Shannon says. "Here they were asked to roll up their sleeves, actually learn and then create something; this was the surprise and the challenge."

Shannon notes that these types of memorable programs truly benefit the company "because they make employees feel good." Furthermore, the attendees recognize that the company has gone that extra mile for them by creating a special event, which in turn, Shannon says, "creates loyalty and greater production."

Stuart J. Gardner, president and owner of Florida Meeting Services, certainly agrees. His company recently helped coordinate an award-winning program for corporate volunteers to revive and restore the unique ecosystem at Virginia Key, Florida. The 170-person group created butterfly gardens, removed invasive and exotic plant species, propagated native plants in Virginia Key's native plant nursery, participated in a cleanup of the coastline, and planted native plants in the coastal hammock and dune areas. More learning by doing examples can be found in "Building Teams" on page 32.

Harvey Grotsky

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PUBLISHER/EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

Harvey Grotsky

harvey.grotsky@themeetingmagazines.com

CREATIVE DIRECTOR

Mitch D. Miller

mitch.miller@themeetingmagazines.com

MANAGING EDITORS

Susan W. Fell

susan.fell@themeetingmagazines.com

Susan S. Gregg

sue.gregg@themeetingmagazines.com

CONTRIBUTING EDITORS

Karen Brost

John Buchanan

Sara Churchville

Christine Loomis

Derek Reveron

Patrick Simms

PRESIDENT & CEO

Harvey Grotsky

VICE PRESIDENT OF OPERATIONS

David A. Middlebrook

david.middlebrook@themeetingmagazines.com

ADVERTISING SALES OFFICES

2700 N. Military Trail, Suite 120

Boca Raton, FL 33431-6394

561-989-0600 Fax: 561-989-9509

advertising@themeetingmagazines.com

CT, DC, DE, MA, MD, ME

NH, NJ, NY, PA, RI, VA, VT

David Middlebrook

561-989-0600, ext. 109 • Fax: 561-989-9509

david.middlebrook@themeetingmagazines.com

FLORIDA/CARIBBEAN/BAHAMAS

David Middlebrook

561-989-0600, ext. 109 • Fax: 561-989-9509

david.middlebrook@themeetingmagazines.com

AL, GA, MS, NC, OK, SC

David Middlebrook

561-989-0600, ext. 114 • Fax: 561-989-9509

david.middlebrook@themeetingmagazines.com

AR, IA, IL, IN, KS, KY, MI, MN, MO

ND, NE, OH, SD, WI, WV

David Middlebrook

561-989-0600, ext. 114 • Fax: 561-989-9509

david.middlebrook@themeetingmagazines.com

CO, LA, TN, TX

David Middlebrook

561-989-0600, ext. 114 • Fax: 561-989-9509

david.middlebrook@themeetingmagazines.com

AZ, CA, HI, ID, MT, NM, NV, OR, UT, WA, WY

Marshall Rubin

818-888-2407 • Fax: 818-888-4907

marshall.rubin@themeetingmagazines.com

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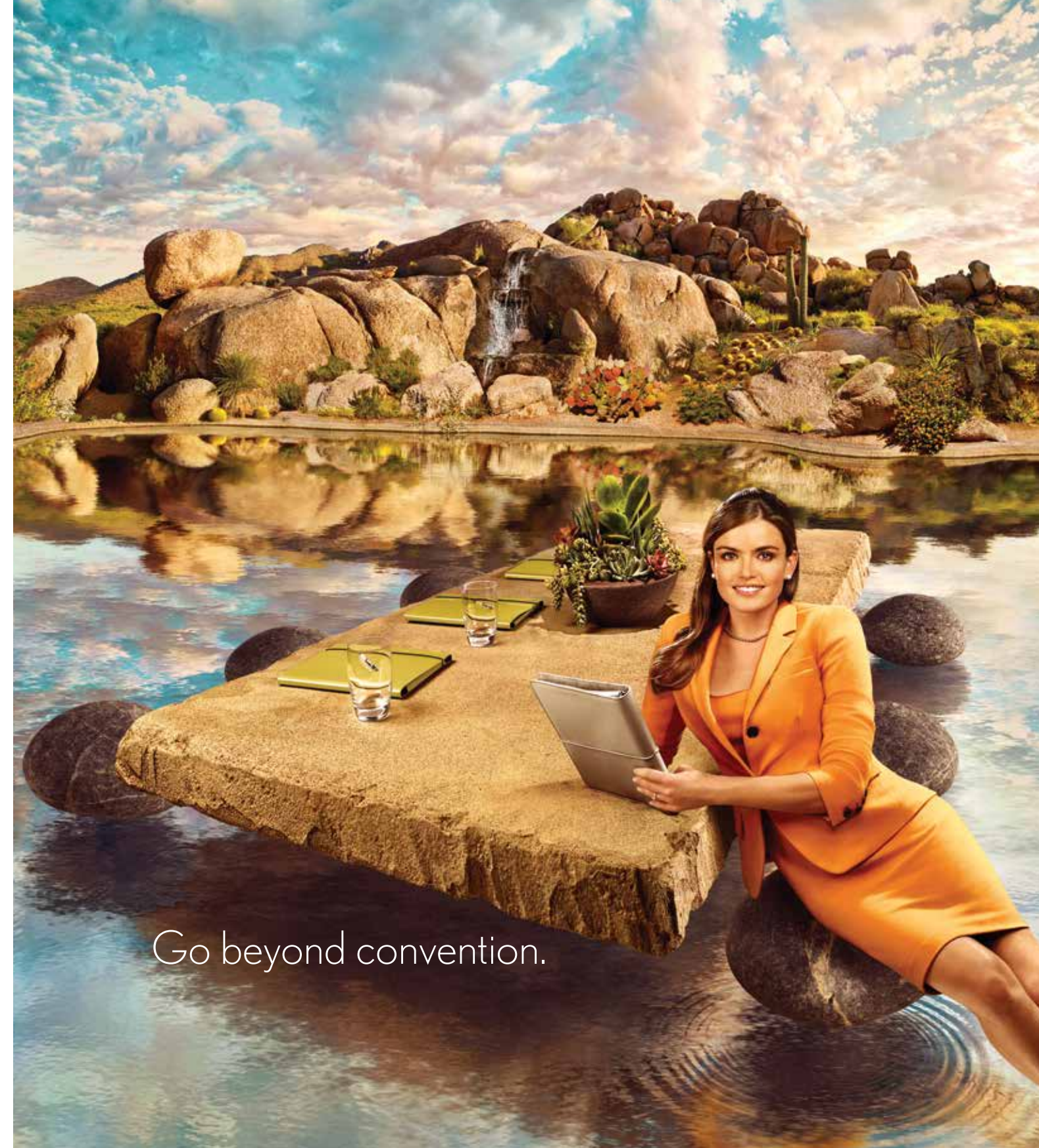
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Scottsdale Resort Renovates and Rebrands

SCOTTSDALE, AZ — Scottsdale Resort & Conference Center will begin renovating July 1.

In September, the property will be unveiled as The Scottsdale Resort at McCormick Ranch, A Destination Hotel. The first phase of the renovation will inject \$9 million into the property, introducing a new restaurant and bar, transforming the main pool, adding significant outdoor meeting and event space, and enhancing guest rooms.

The main lawn will offer more than 10,000 sf of event space, and the Alameda event space is ideal for groups of up to 600 people. The resort features 326 guest rooms, casitas and suites. www.thescottsdaleresort.com



A rendering of the Alameda event space, which is undergoing a facelift at The Scottsdale Resort at McCormick Ranch, A Destination Hotel.

Hawks Cay Resort Adds New Meeting Space



Hawks Cay Resort Tranquility Pool.

DUCK KEY, FL — Hawks Cay Resort in the Florida Keys believes it has found the solution for creating the perfect meeting destination. Hawks Cay's magnificent ocean surroundings are now the centerpiece of every meeting on its property.

"We already have the largest meeting and conference space in

the Florida Keys," said Hawks Cay Managing Director Sheldon Suga. "While we have added additional square footage to bring our conference footprint to 20,000 sf, the renovation we just completed is more about removing the barriers, both emotional and physical. We're merging the beautiful Instagram

moments of waterfront life and activity and the formerly traditional meeting space to create an inspiring space that is as beautiful as it is intriguing."

For the first time, the resort can accommodate large groups of up to 600 people and provide the flexibility of the entire group being able to meet in one room and dine in another. Technology also has been upgraded.

Upgrades to the Marina Walk and new restaurant are scheduled to debut in 2015.

The 60-acre resort boasts 177 guest rooms and 225 two- and three-bedroom villas, a full-service marina, four restaurants, saltwater lagoon, five swimming pools, kid and teen clubs, and the award-winning Calm Waters Spa.

To learn more about meetings and group packages, email meetings@hawkscay.com or visit www.hawkscay.com

JW Marriott L.A. Live to Add 755-room Tower

LOS ANGELES, CA — Just five years since the grand opening of the JW Marriott L.A. Live, Los Angeles, plans were announced to develop a 755-room expansion of the hotel. The new project together with the existing JW Marriott L.A. Live and The Ritz-Carlton, Los Angeles will contain 1,756 rooms and more than 200,000 sf of function space, making it the second largest hotel in California.

Taking advantage of the proposed connecting links to the Los Angeles Convention Center, Staples Center and Nokia Theatre L.A. Live, convention and hotel guests will have convenient access to the full range of amenities offered at L.A. Live including 19 world-class restaurants, Regal Cinemas, Lucky Strike Lanes & Lounge, the Grammy Museum and its popular live sports and music venues.

The new hotel tower will be directly connected via a bridge to the existing 878-room JW Marriott L.A. Live and 123-room Ritz-Carlton Los Angeles hotels.

Additional meeting space totaling more than 75,000 sf would be directly linked via two short bridges to the existing approximately 100,000 sf of function space immediately to the north of the Event Deck. Combined with the project's additional outdoor entertainment deck the development will deliver more than 200,000 sf of total convention and meeting space.

Construction is expected to begin in late 2015 or early 2016, with the new hotel rooms and facilities scheduled to open in 2018. www.discoverlosangeles.com

Florida Meeting Services Awarded Best Teambuilding Activity for Restoration Project



Virginia Key Restoration volunteers pose in Virginia Key, Florida, near Miami.

FORT LAUDERDALE, FL — Stuart J. Gardner, president and owner of Florida Meeting Services, a Global DMC Partner with offices in Fort Lauderdale and Orlando, announced that his company received a 2015 Achievement Award for Best Creative Event — Best Teambuilding Activity at the ADMEI Awards Gala in February at the Fiesta Americana Grand in Los Cabos, Mexico. The Association of Destination Management Executives International (ADMEI) is the global voice of the destination management industry and the premier resource for education, standards and practices within the DMC industry/profession.

Florida Meeting Services collaborated with Las Vegas-based R&D Events, a premier provider of teambuilding events. The winning event, the Virginia Key Restoration, took place in Virginia Key, Florida, which is an 863-acre barrier island located a few miles east of Miami. With a strong project plan in place, more than 170 corporate volunteers helped to revive and restore this unique ecosystem. They created butterfly gardens, removed invasive and exotic plant species, propagated native plants in Virginia Key's native plant nursery, participated in a cleanup of the coastline, and planted native plants in the coastal hammock and dune areas. www.floridameetingservices.com

Dubai's Hotel Establishments Welcome More Than 11.6 Million Guests in 2014

DUBAI, UNITED ARAB EMIRATES — Dubai's hotel establishments welcomed 11,629,578 guests in 2014, registering a 5.6 percent increase on 2013's total.

Dubai's hotels and hotel apartment establishments recorded an increase in guest nights in 2014, increasing by 7.4 percent. The average length of stay increased from 3.78 days to 3.84 days.

Revenues for hoteliers and hotel apartment operators saw significant growth. Room revenues increased by 12 percent year-on-year and F&B and other revenues increased by 6.1 percent year-on-year. www.dubaitourism.ae

Nemacolin Woodlands Resort Unveils \$30 Million Renovation

FARMINGTON, PA — Nemacolin Woodlands Resort completed a \$30 million renovation. The property-wide transformation features dramatic floor-to-ceiling upgrades, including four of the resort's six lodging options, the 32,000-sf Executive Conference Center and public spaces. The 2,000-acre luxury resort located southeast of Pittsburgh opened a Holistic Healing Center, Holistic Garden and a dueling zip line.

Baccarat chandeliers, retractable wall systems, refurbished wood, velvet drapery and lux wool carpeting imported from Great Britain have transformed the resort's 4,080-sf Grand Ballroom space.

The resort rebuilt the 200-seat Lecture Hall. The Nemacolin and Sequoia spaces, the Club Room, Hardy



The newly renovated Lecture Hall at Nemacolin Woodlands Resort.

Boardroom and Joseph's all received new upgrades, while outdoor spaces such as the Lafayette Gardens and Plaza Deck also were enhanced.

Nemacolin offers 32,000 sf of meeting and banquet facilities in-

cluding three ballrooms, a 200-seat lecture hall and 25 meeting rooms.

For guests arriving by air, there is an on-property private airfield with a 3,900-foot airstrip.

www.nemacolin.com

Hard Rock Hotel Riviera Cancun Will Debut in 2017



Hard Rock International officials announce Hard Rock Hotel Riviera Cancun, an all-inclusive resort set to debut in late 2017.

ORLANDO, FL — The Hard Rock Hotel Riviera Cancun, an all-inclusive resort situated along the shores of the Caribbean Sea in Mexico, is set to open in late 2017. The property will be the third Yucatan Peninsula

property in the Hard Rock International portfolio and will feature 1,800 oceanfront guest rooms.

Plans call for six world-class restaurants, five bars and lounges, and multiple entertainment venues.

The Hard Rock Hotel Riviera Cancun includes plans for an 8-million-gallon, multi-acre, lagoon-style swimming pool, complemented by white-sand beaches. The property will offer a variety of excursions, such as snorkeling and kayaking. Additionally, the resort will feature more than 90,000 sf of meeting and event space.

Guests will enjoy Hard Rock brand-wide amenities, such as a Rock Spa and a Rock Shop featuring the brand's iconic merchandise. Guests also will enjoy music-infused offerings, such as The Sound of Your Stay amenity program.

Active guests can choose from an array of all-inclusive amenities, including a Hard Rock golf course, a fully equipped Body Rock fitness center, sporting games and nightly entertainment at the multiple indoor and outdoor venues.

www.hardrockhotels.com



1 More than 170 corporate volunteers helped revive and restore Virginia Key, Florida, by removing invasive and exotic plant species, and planting native plants (see story on page 7). **2** Guests enjoy the opening cocktail reception in February at Central Pier in Melbourne Australia's Docklands at the inaugural 2015 Asia Pacific Incentives & Meetings Expo (AIME) Gala Dinner. **3, 4** Attendees at the Financial & Insurance Conference Planners 2015 Winter Symposium in January discovered fun ways to enjoy the conference despite the raging blizzard outside Boston's Langham Hotel. **5** Jolanta Beniulien, director of the Vilnius Convention Bureau, welcomes one of hundreds of guest at Convene in Vilnius, Lithuania, which boasted 157 hosted buyers from 29 countries and 3,525 pre-scheduled appointments. **6** Participants enjoy networking at Questex Travel Group's Incentive Travel Exchange (ITE) event in March at The Delano Las Vegas, which brought together incentive buyers and global travel suppliers such as hotels, resorts, spas, cruise lines, tour operators and DMCs.

Incentive Programs

By Mary MacGregor



The Power of Choice — Designing Effective Individual Travel Rewards

As demands on their top performers' time continue to escalate, many organizations are turning to individual travel as an extremely effective way to recognize and reward achievement. While group travel programs are still an outstanding strategy for bringing people together, they don't always fit the needs of the award-winners, program sponsors and even the end-user customers.

Individual Travel Can Be Good for Everyone

The most obvious benefit of individual travel for the award-winners is choice...of destinations, accommodations, transportation, activities, experiences and travel dates. Individual travel can frequently offer highly appealing destinations and properties that can't accommodate groups. Choice can be a powerful motivator.

For program sponsors, individual travel can offer financial and customer service strategies. Packages can be created with guaranteed pricing for up to a year to fix expenses. Out-of-office time for top performers can be spread out over several months to ensure that key people are always available to handle sudden opportunities, instantly react to any problems and serve end-user customers.

With the use of social media sites, individual winners can be publicly recognized over several months — not just once at an awards dinner. Winners' names can be posted and co-workers can be invited to send messages of congratulations. Trip updates and photos can be shared by winners after the trip. Look for a travel partner who can customize an announcement website to excite and motivate your audience to reach their goal by showcasing all the exciting travel experiences the program offers.

On the surface, individual travel sounds like the perfect choice! And it can be, but only when it is carefully crafted using the behavioral economic principles of idiosyncratic fit and choice architecture.

Choice Can Be Invigorating and Exhausting.

If you've ever tried to navigate a self-serve travel website to book your hotel, resort, airline, cruise, car rental, tours, activities or special adventure, you've likely experienced what Barry

Schwartz, noted psychology professor at Swarthmore College, calls the "paradox of choice."

We claim to love unlimited choice. Choice is liberating. We all believe we know exactly what we want to satisfy our individual needs, desires and circumstances. Behavioral economists call this "idiosyncratic fit" or the belief that our situation is unique and that the perfect solution is out there just for us when given unlimited choice. Thus the appeal travel booking websites offer: go anywhere, stay anywhere and do anything!

Yet Too Much Choice Can Be Overwhelming.

With the entire world at your fingertips, where do you even start? Professor Schwartz explains that as the number of choices grow, problems arise as we become "overloaded, choice no longer liberates, but debilitates. It might even be said to tyrannize."

With too many choices, we can quickly become the proverbial deer in the headlights — not wanting to experience regret or buyer's remorse by making the wrong decision. We start second-guessing ourselves. We may even over-research the choices trying to confirm our decisions. In many cases our default choice is to make no choice at all.

This is where the behavioral economics principle of choice architecture comes into play.

Creating "the right" set of choices is the name of the game for individual travel award-winners.

Choice architecture is the process of helping people make the best decisions by offering carefully crafted and often limited options. Drilling down into the details of trip planning requires lots of time and insider insight that goes well beyond what social media website user posted reviews have to offer. It takes an experienced professional well-versed not only in the travel industry, but also one with a deep appreciation for what it takes to achieve goals to create a trip that becomes a valuable, impactful reward.

Architecting the Choices

Creating the right selection of individual travel reward choices requires evaluating both personal and business demographics:

Personal Demographics. This seems obvious, but it's more than age, gender and income. Good individual travel choice architects look deeper at program participants.

- What is their level of travel experience? Have they traveled all over the world? Only taken one or two trips? Do they have the time, interest and/or knowledge to plan logistics and activities at their destination?
- Are they looking for adventures? Experiences? Cultural exposure? Social causes to impact? Ways to broaden their education? A place to veg out for a few days?
- What cultural diversity exists in the group? Are religious holidays a factor? Must certain belief systems around food or interpersonal customs be respected?
- What generational diversity exists in the group?
- What obstacles or challenges do they deal with that could get in the way of enjoying a trip? Do they have children at home? Do they care for elderly parents? Do they have ready-resources or backups when they are away? Does their spouse work? Will it be challenging to coordinate time off to travel?
- Would a family trip be appealing? What does family time mean to the winners?
- Will the inevitable additional costs of a trip be affordable?

Business Demographics. In addition to budget parameters, seasoned individual travel choice architects want to know:

- What is required of the participant to earn the trip? Is it a tremendous effort that only a few can attain?
- Is the trip considered within the organization as a highly prestigious honor? Or is it more of a thank-you reward for meeting tight deadlines or going above and beyond to meet short-term sales goals?
- How long is it appropriate for winners to be "out of office" on their holiday?
- Where are most anticipated winners residing now?
- Is it preferred that travelers not leave their home country? Are certain countries to be avoided for business security reasons? Will needing passports or visas be an issue?

Knowledge Is Power

With this data in hand, the experienced individual travel choice architect creates a selection of packages that gives the winner choices that are appealing, but not overwhelming. Although there is no steadfast rule, a choice of five to seven packages is often all that's needed to give winners the variety they want without being overwhelming.

Using choice architecture also helps avoid the common pit-

falls of making broad-based assumptions. For example, when people think "family packages," theme parks often come to mind. But by studying personal demographics, the experienced planner may discover that "hassle-free, no decisions required, quiet time together" is what is really important — not attributes usually associated with crowded, sensory-overloaded theme parks. Packages on cruises or at all-inclusive resorts can turn out to be very popular family awards. And at the very same time, cruises and all-inclusive resorts can have an equally powerful appeal to couples looking to escape their hectic lifestyles.

Personalized Service Required

Individual reward travel should never be considered do-it-yourself travel. Having an experienced travel concierge help with all aspects of the trip planning is critical to maximizing the investment. Every interaction with the travel concierge must be celebratory and special. It's important to remember that the individual travelers have done significant work to achieve this travel award. As such, they should receive the same level of service a group trip winner receives: accommodations and transportation booked and confirmed; activities and tours arranged; special requests investigated; and recommendations for restaurants, sightseeing and destination do's and don'ts proactively communicated. If travel problems come up, the individual traveler needs a go-to pro who can get flights re-booked, rooms upgraded, tours exchanged or emergencies handled.

Choose Wisely

When individual reward travel is the right choice for your organization, be sure to choose an experienced travel partner who knows how to develop the right packages that will motivate your specific program participants. With more than 60 years of experience and locations throughout the world, BI Worldwide has the expertise to architect and deliver highly effective individual reward travel programs. Contact us at BIWorldwide.com or info@biworldwide.com. **I&FMM**

Mary MacGregor, Corporate Vice President – Event Solutions at BI WORLDWIDE (BIW), is responsible for all operating areas of the BIW Event Solutions Group including purchasing, design, delivery, group air, individual incentive travel, onsite operations, technology, communications and merchandise. She leads a team of more than 175 industry professionals who deliver memorable experiences and measurable results for their customers. Visit www.BIWORLDWIDE.com or email info@BIWORLDWIDE.com.

Site Selection

By Susan Adams, CPIM, CEP



Inspiring Global Destinations — From Emerging to Tried-and-True

Every planner knows that the destination is critical to a travel program's success. The location must inspire top performance for incentives and top participation for meetings, but it also must provide an adequate infrastructure to minimize risk and deliver a flawless event. This can make finding a new destination a challenge.

Emerging Destinations

Emerging destinations often generate the greatest interest on the part of participants, but can be problematic when it comes to reliable security, transportation and other services we have come to expect from hotels and experienced destination management companies.

CUBA is sure to top everyone's list of interesting potential destinations. The sights and sounds of Havana inspire even the most seasoned traveler. Long elusive, its closeness to the United States and ties with the Cuban community in the U.S. make it an exciting prospect. As of now, however, Cuba is a long way from ready to receive business travel programs. Firstly, the rules have relaxed, but permission to travel to Cuba still requires a license and proof that the visitors are in the country for one of 12 approved reasons (see www.treasury.gov for FAQs and www.commerce.gov for a Cuba sanctions fact sheet). Secondly, even if a program qualifies, Cuban hotel, restaurant and transportation services are not yet ready for an American audience used to predictable meeting and event planning. As the regulations evolve and the country gears up for rapid growth of the tourism economy, Cuba is certainly a destination to watch but is years away from being an appropriate destination for insurance or financial meetings.

An emerging alternative, however, is **PANAMA**. A quick five-hour flight from New York, this is likely to be a new destination for most travelers and yet its reputation as a Latin American hotspot is secure. With exciting new hotel options, including the Hard Rock Hotel Panama Megapolis and a Waldorf Astoria, the destination now offers the service levels needed for a well-executed event, along with the support of solid destination management companies

and transportation services. Excursion and activity possibilities include the famed Panama Canal, as well as eco-tours.

For a destination that's equally exotic and easily reached from many major U.S. cities, but with a more established infrastructure, **COSTA RICA** should be on the list. Hotels such as the Los Suenos Marriott Ocean & Golf Resort can make program and meeting planning a breeze. It's a destination that's hard to beat, with convention services you can count on and bucket-list activities including zip-line canopy tours and volcano hikes. Costa Rica has been emergent for quite some time and is a familiar destination to many planners. It's important, however, to keep in mind that for program participants it remains a wish-list destination, renowned for its unique natural environment, and is still off the beaten path. Beware, however, of the "green season." The rain from May to mid-November can really have an impact on any program, so it is best to stay with high-season dates and enjoy all that Costa Rica has to offer.

Renewed Interest in Old Favorites

Europe has long held fascination for American travelers. In fact, for many program participants, a trip to Europe is a personal aspiration. Linking individual drives to organization goals will generate greater interest in any meeting or incentive program, and a trip to Europe can be a powerful motivator.

Many organizations choose tried-and-true European destinations for the exceptional cultural possibilities, as well as the reliably solid service and security they can offer. In looking for a new destination, however, there are many lesser-traveled options that ignite interest in the program but also will make planning easy.

Spain's capital city, **MADRID**, offers a world-class experience for program participants and planners alike. Hotels such as The Westin Palace, Madrid feature uniquely European style and Old World charm but have a clear understanding of the needs and expectations of international business events, from menus designed to appeal to an American palate, to Starwood's renowned focus on sustainable meeting practices. And just outside the door, the city offers a world

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of options for excursions and unforgettable offsite events, from the Prado Museum to the Santiago Bernabéu Stadium, home of Real Madrid.

Another great city to consider — although not in the dark winter months — is **STOCKHOLM**, Sweden. Swedish precision and ingenuity are well-established in the business world, and the scenic capital wins rave reviews from travelers. Spread over 14 islands, Stockholm is a walker's paradise and home to a vibrant café culture. The city is known for a dynamic music and art scene, as well as for easy access to the dramatic countryside. Centrally located hotels, such as the Sheraton and the Hilton Stockholm Slussen, are solid partners for any incentive program or business meeting.

Cuba is certainly a destination to watch but is years away from being an appropriate destination for insurance or financial meetings.

Stockholm is likely to be a new destination for many guests, but one that quickly becomes a favorite.

For smaller, more adventuresome programs, **ICELAND** offers some of the world's most astounding scenery. From a home base at an international hotel such as the Hilton Reykjavik Nordica, guests can set out to explore the icebergs in the glacial lagoon at Jökulsárlón, float blissfully in the thermal pool at the Blue Lagoon, or head out into the interior in a jeep rally that will never be forgotten. The landscape is extreme, but an economy centered on banking and international politics makes this a destination known for security and professional services in line with the expectations of financial and insurance program decision-makers and guests.

Closer to Home

Since the recent recession, many organizations have

elected to keep their meeting and incentive programs closer to home. Sometimes, developments in nearby destinations can breathe new life into a location or venue and make it worth a second look.

The **DOMINICAN REPUBLIC** has been a popular getaway for several years, particularly for vacationing travelers from the East Coast. Setting their sights on being a Caribbean frontrunner, the government invested in a highway to make airport access from Punta Cana much easier. The addition of some great hotels on spectacular beaches, such as the group-friendly and all-inclusive Hard Rock Hotel & Casino Punta Cana, has made the Dominican Republic a strong contender for financial and insurance programs.

THE BAHAMAS also will be the scene of some great new possibilities. Billed as a mega-resort, Baha Mar will soon debut on Nassau's Cable Beach. This extraordinary complex will include four luxury hotels, 200,000 sf of meeting space, a casino, golf course, spa and 50 restaurants. Like the nearby Atlantis, Paradise Island, Baha Mar will become a destination unto itself, just a short flight from many U.S. origin cities. For meeting and incentive planners, Baha Mar will offer an opportunity to reinvent a program in a popular, accessible destination, with experienced destination management and event partners.

The selection of a destination and a hotel partner is a critical first step in designing a successful program. In every case, however, the safety and comfort of the guests is absolutely tantamount, and the importance of the infrastructure, capabilities and service levels of the destination cannot be overstated. An emerging destination can take some time to be a reliable partner, particularly for a program where professionalism, minimized risk and ease of access are important elements. By broadening the definition of new and emerging destinations, it is possible to find some great options that offer the security and quality required, while still inspiring interest and effort on the part of the participants.

I&FMM

Susan Adams, CPIM, CEP, joined Dittman Incentive Marketing in 2005. As Director of Engagement, Susan contributes to industry thought leadership on recognition and rewards. She is on the board of the Incentive Marketing Association (IMA); a past president of the Recognition Council; and on the board of the Performance Improvement Council (PIC). She also oversees Dittman's Air and Great Escapes divisions, and spearheads CSR initiatives. www.dittmanincentives.com

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Business Travel Safety for Women

Today, many professionals have come to understand the rewarding benefits of business travel and now more than ever, women are traveling the globe in pursuit of professional growth.

Few activities build an individual's reputation, create career opportunities, offer connections to new contacts and help build professional relationships in the same way as meeting potential clients and business partners face-to-face where they operate. In addition to this, business travel also offers the opportunity to expand personal horizons, fuel professional passion and inspire creativity.

However, it also can be dangerous.

Female travelers now make up nearly 50 percent of all business travelers but face a higher risk than their male counterparts of becoming targets of crimes such as sexual harassment or assault. And in some locations, women may not receive sufficient attention from police or health care professionals — to some extent because they are female.

Regardless, with the proper precautions and necessary information, women can minimize the majority of these risks.

Crime

Crime data indicate that criminals perceive single women as easier targets than men, putting female business travelers at higher risk of being victims of opportunistic crime. Foreigners traveling in less wealthy parts of the world may already attract unwanted attention, but women displaying accessories that criminals can easily resell — expensive clothes, watches, jewelry, even a purse or shoes — are particularly attractive targets. Furthermore, the conception of “expensive” varies by location: What is not considered expensive in a home country may be perceived differently abroad.

It's easy to minimize the threat: Keep a low profile and travel light without readily visible signs of affluence. This won't eliminate the threat entirely, but thieves may pay less attention.

Sexual Harassment

Female travelers often report that sexual harassment — an umbrella phrase meant to encompass anything from irritating catcalls to unwanted advances, touching or even assault — is

their primary concern. There are two vectors to the threat: uncomfortable and awkward social and professional situations; and threats to security and personal safety.

Social behavior towards professional women varies wildly depending on the location. Studies indicate that in some formal business settings, high-ranking businesswomen still routinely deal with open sexual discrimination or sexual harassment. These locations are often difficult for foreign women to adjust to and may require managerial interference. At the



lesser end of the spectrum are countries where discussions about marital status, age and children are considered common business office conversation. Legally, women are not obliged to reveal such details, but understanding the culture regarding these conversations can help to ease the tension. Additionally, understanding the cultural context (office chit-chat vs. sexual interest) of such questions can help avoid difficult or compromising situations.

Extending beyond the cultural interaction is the very real threat of sexual assault or other dangers to personal security. Blanket statements fail to capture the variance in threat from place to place, as each country, and often each city or neighborhood, is different. The best standard advice is that all female travelers should be educated on the threat of sexual assault in their upcoming destination, be aware of

location-appropriate security precautions and be prepared to respond if necessary.

Health Concerns

Standards of medical services vary drastically across the world, and some countries or regions may not meet the health needs of some women. As with all business travelers, women need to ensure that they are up to date on routine medical and dental checkups and that they have travel health insurance and the appropriate medications. Beyond this, women travelers should understand the female-specific concerns that could affect them in any location. Knowing is the first step to protecting yourself.

Country Examples

Each of the three major business traveler destinations addressed below is an annual destination for thousands of female travelers. Together, they illustrate the wide range of potential situations women may experience when traveling for business:

Bahrain: Bahrain is a conservative and religious Muslim country. It also is one of the most female-friendly business traveler locations in the region, or even internationally. Bahraini businessmen generally treat foreign women with courtesy and respect and, at least in business contexts, as equals. However, revealing clothing is highly inappropriate and is strongly frowned upon.

In addition, Thursdays and Fridays are high-incident times for verbal sexual harassment. Women usually can stop the harassment by ignoring it, but police officers also can intervene if the situation is brought to their attention.

China: The vast majority of women who visit China report no trouble on their trips, and traveling alone is considered safe. Chinese women today share relative equality with their male counterparts, and this translates to most female foreign business traveler interactions.

However, the accepted behavior of prolonged staring by locals in rural China has made some women uncomfortable and confused. Many female travelers fail to realize that the staring is likely due to their general non-Chinese appearance rather than gender. Staring is not considered a rude gesture and carries no connotation of harassment. While uncomfortable by Western standards, the staring is not indicative of an increased threat.

Colombia: Verbal sexual harassment in Colombia is widely accepted. Generally, the catcalls and rude comments of a

sexual nature do not escalate to threats to personal security; women are expected to ignore the comments. However, the situation is confusing because such actions can indicate increased threat, particularly for women walking alone. Sexual assaults do occur, but are much less likely than petty crime, which should be the primary concern to all travelers, male and female. Petty thieves, including pickpockets and purse-snatchers, are active day and night, searching for easy or vulnerable targets. Armed assailants make venturing out after dark on foot or by car hazardous in many locations, and these criminals do not hesitate to use violence, especially if resisted.

Advance Planning

Security issues affecting businesswomen are not going away anytime soon, but by planning ahead and being resourceful, women can overcome them. Learning about local

Social behavior towards professional women varies wildly depending on the location.

customs and business protocols in the destination is a great start in developing a greater awareness of potential risks to safety and personal security. This can help women feel and be safe in the countries profiled above, or anywhere in the world.

I&FMM

***Yelena Kashina** is passionate about exploring the world and different cultures. Yelena joined iJET in 2011 as an Intelligence Analyst after conducting research on humanitarian and security issues for global NGOs such as the Clinton Health Access Initiative (CHAI) and at the U.S. Department of State's Mission to the United Nations. She earned a graduate degree from Georgetown's School of Foreign Service in 2010, and Bachelor's degrees in German and Psychology in 2007 from the University of Rhode Island. Proficient in six languages, Yelena has studied and traveled extensively in Eastern and Western Europe. In her spare time, she is a portrait artist and mentors students and young professionals in international relations. www.ijet.com*

Experiential Learning Adventures

Adding Substance to Incentives

By Christine Loomis

It's not often that Aristotle is quoted in a meetings industry publication, but here he is:

"For the things we have to learn before we can do them, we learn by doing them."

Aristotle wrote that around 350 BC in a series of books devoted to the weighty topic of ethics and how human beings should live. That single thought — that we learn by doing — is considered by many to be the origins of the concept of experiential learning.

Today, experiential learning has become an important component of many meetings and incentives, especially incentive programs for which the elusive wow factor and reach for something entirely new each year is critical.

Often, it's not the actual skills acquired in a program that matter; it's the tangential results of an activity that make the difference. Goals, values, insight, reflection, understanding people and problems from a new perspective, self-assurance, a feeling of being val-

ued, new ways of facing challenges — all of these can be part of learning something new, and all can ultimately help make a participant a better employee and, if we extrapolate from Aristotle, maybe even a better person.

Experiential learning is an idea with many outlets, many possibilities. Learning from experience or by *doing* can cover just about everything, from face-to-face cultural programs to physically challenging adventures.

In Scottsdale, Arizona, it covers goat farming.

Udder to Table

Melissa Thornton, a business-systems analyst with an Arizona-based insurance group, helped arrange an October 2014 meeting for 11 participants at a local suburban goat farm. The theme of the Udder to Table Retreat was "back to basics," which meshed perfectly with the company's desire to focus on the basics in its work. The retreat turned insurance workers into farmers for a day, with some surprising results.

The Simple Farm is owned by Lylah

and Michael Ledner, who invite participants to learn about organic and sustainable farming, goats and, in the end, themselves. Over the course of five hours, Thornton and her colleagues tried a variety of farm duties, including gardening, milking goats, and making and sampling goat cheese. How do these seriously non-office tasks translate into positives in the office?

"This kind of hands-on learning got us out of the comfort zone that we tend to settle into in the office environment," Thornton says. "I think that putting us

into a new situation that is out of our comfort zone helps us to be able to do the same thing in the office: to trust coworkers and be able to step out and try new things that are different or that we might be afraid of."

Among the highlights of the day for many of the participants was creating the salad they ate for lunch. "We picked everything from the garden — carrots, spinach, kale, radishes, pomegranates, tangelos and even flowers — then rinsed everything right outside and cut it all up into a beautiful sal-

ad," Thornton says. "Then we ate our lunch together."

Deepening Connections

Thornton believes that one result of that part of the experience was that it fostered deeper connections, and the company has benefited from that. "We feel more connected and know each other better after an experience like this," she says. "Once you work together on something outside of the office, it really helps the working relationships within the office. Since our time at the

Credit: Group Experiential Learning



GEL: Group Experiential Learning offers customized, challenging sailing programs designed to transform organizations and their teams.



An Arizona-based insurance group learned something about themselves as they learned about sustainable farming at The Simple Farm, where they worked together milking goats and harvesting produce for their lunch.



Credits: Lorki Photography

farm, we seem to be closer as a team, and communication has improved within the group that participated.”

Additionally, The Simple Farm also aligned with the insurance company’s core values, which include supporting community volunteerism, a component of the farm’s own program.

When it came time for participants to reflect on their challenges and achievements, the words were all positive. “The group had only good things to say,” Thornton notes. “During our lunch at the farm, we all discussed our favorite part of the day and what we learned and would take away from the experience. Everyone thought it brought us closer. Some participants flew in from other locations, which

also gave us the opportunity to spend time with coworkers we normally only talk to over the phone. Working and learning together made it a great team experience.”

Months later, reflections continue to produce benefits because the group still thinks back on the memories and the fun of that day, which continues to reinforce the connections.

Of course, the primary goal of company outings like this is to improve a workplace by increasing productivity, building leadership, ramping up skills and/or bonding employees, and ultimately to positively affect the bottom line. But exactly how that happens is not necessarily straightforward. For Thornton, as well as some of her col-

leagues, reflections centered not just on business goals but on personal goals and values as well.

“Many of us stated that we would love to start gardening at our homes, and we didn’t realize how simple it could actually be. Many also learned the benefits of eating organic and helping to support local farms and farmers in our area, putting money back into our community through buying locally instead of buying commercially.”

Taking Lessons Home

Thornton took the lessons directly into her home. “As we were learning about gardening and Lylah was sharing her passion for cooking and family, it really made me think about trying to

cook more for my family and designating a time for us to all eat together. I actually visited the farm a week later and took my 8-year-old daughter with me to see the farm and meet the goats. I also plan on joining the farm’s CSA (community-supported agriculture) program in the future.”

At first glance these more personal results don’t seem related to bottom-line improvements, nor do they seem quantifiable in terms of meeting ROI or justifying use of resources for the experience. But that’s linear thinking. Thornton offers a different analysis.

“I think that when we make the time to spend quality time with our family, whether it be a visit to somewhere like this farm or sitting down more often for a family dinner, it helps the work-life balance and that can only improve how we are as employees at work.”

Cultural Exchange

Another program perfect for smaller groups is offered by IDNZ, one of New Zealand’s top DMCs. It puts attendees into the homes of Auckland residents for an evening of face-to-face cultural exchange and a traditional New Zealand dinner.

Celeste Jones, director of incentives for IDNZ, notes that this is one

The Basics

While specifics of experiential learning programs vary widely, the core elements are largely the same. Good programs offer some or all of the following (adapted from the University of Colorado Denver’s Experiential Learning Center):

- Opportunities for participants to engage intellectually, creatively, emotionally, socially or physically.
- Opportunities for participants to take initiative, make decisions and be accountable for results.
- Reflection and analysis of the experience.
- The possibility for participants to learn from natural consequences, mistakes and successes.

— CL

of her organization’s most successful experiential offerings. She used it with incentive qualifiers from two insurance groups and found that both hosts and visitors benefited. The hosts came from varied backgrounds; they were doctors, teachers, self-employed, farmers, retirees, attorneys and salespeople, among others. The meal was set up as a three-course affair with traditional New Zealand lamb as the entrée.

Through spending time in a local home with local hosts, participants learned about New Zealand and New Zealanders in a very intimate and organic way. They were able to relax, converse, ask and answer questions and experience a traditional meal — in other words, to become immersed in

local culture in a way rarely possible for a visitor on his or her own. As an added benefit, all of the proceeds of the event went to a local hospice, further bonding guests and hosts in the shared experience of giving to the community.

IDNZ has a range of experiential options for groups, including working as crew on former Americas Cup boats and cultural programs in which participants meet the local Maori, see traditional performances and learn about this important indigenous culture.

While some experiential learning programs are geared for small groups, others can accommodate thousands.

Dubai In-depth

In Dubai, a program put together

Experiential Sampler

High above Park Avenue on the roof of the **Waldorf Astoria** in New York City, bees are busy making honey and small groups are invited to don bee suits and learn all about the hives and honey from the hotel’s trained beekeepers, who are members of the culinary team. Down in the kitchens, the group can then taste some of the rooftop honey as well as honey-infused dishes, and also learn about the high-tech kitchen composters that are helping keep the Waldorf super-sustainable. www.waldorfnyc.com

At **The Westin La Paloma Resort & Spa** in Tucson, Arizona, groups can venture into the Sonoran Desert on four-wheelers with Trail Dust Adventures, whose guides offer desert ecology tours and experiential group rally tours. www.westinlapaloma.com

In January, **Visit Baltimore**, the city’s CVB, launched a collection of experiential programs for meeting and convention groups. Among them: A behind-the-scenes tour with veterinarians or joining aquarium staff to learn to



Credit: Visit Baltimore

Visit Baltimore’s new hands-on interactive group activities include authentic Neapolitan pizza-making at Verde restaurant.

teach dolphins at the National Aquarium; a hands-on flag talk with park rangers at Fort McHenry National Monument and Historic Shrine; learning the science of wine production at the Maryland Science Center; and hands-on pizza making at a local restaurant. www.baltimore.org

Salamander Resort & Spa in Middleburg, Virginia, has engaged participants from across the globe with its Equi-Spective experience, which fosters self-discovery through participants’ hands-on interaction with horses. Understanding how horses relate to humans and other horses helps humans better understand the path to leadership. www.salamanderresort.com

DMCs are often the go-to resource for experiential travel ideas. **Kuoni DM USA** offers plenty of choice in its brite spokes program, focused on experiential learning. Possibilities include rally racing in New England with a professional driver riding shotgun in a customized race-enthusiast program, flying to the bottom of the Grand Canyon for a private yoga class at sunrise as part of a health-and-fitness week, and gathering for a private dinner and salsa lessons in one of Miami’s hottest art galleries. www.kuoni-dmusa.com

GEL: Group Experiential Learning is known for its sailing programs aimed at helping executives and others transform their organizations and their teams. GEL



Credit: Visit Baltimore

A staff veterinarian at Baltimore’s National Aquarium instructs a group during a behind-the-scenes experiential tour.

has put together custom BoatWorks programs for World Bank, the IFC and US Trust, among others. They also conduct mountain-based leadership development programs. www.gelcorp.com

— CL



IDNZ, a New Zealand DMC, offers face-to-face cultural exchanges with Auckland residents who host small groups in their homes for traditional New Zealand meals.

for an incentive group of more than 14,000 attendees won Dubai Business Events, the official convention bureau of Dubai, a 2014 Crystal Award from SITE. The Crystal Awards honor those top-tier organizations from across the globe that excel in designing memorable experiences that also deliver measurable results for clients. Dubai Business Events won for the Best Destination-based Experiential Incentive Travel Program. A major component of that program was giving attendees the opportunity to learn about conservation efforts underway in Dubai aimed at protecting and preserving the natural desert environment and its inhabitants in the face of extensive building and human impact.

Attendees learned about the problem of desertification, a significant ecological challenge caused by dry areas becoming increasingly less arid and losing their natural vegetation and wildlife. They met with stakeholders and learned how Dubai is using innovation to conserve resources while still building its architectural marvels, and they spent time at the Dubai Desert Conservation Reserve where much of the region's conservation work is being done. The program allowed these visitors to see beyond the soaring skyscrapers and glam hotels and deeper into the area's fragile desert ecosystem.

Bucolic Ballyknocken

Ireland, with its bucolic farms,

castles, historic golf courses and mega-popular stouts and whiskeys, is a popular destination for incentive travel. Until recently, it had not made much of a name for itself in the culinary sector. That's changing, which gave Kevin Shannon, managing director for Odyssey International Incentives & Meetings, an idea during dinner with a client. The client, a global events leader for a Virginia-based financial company, wanted a hands-on experience for her incentive qualifiers that highlighted Irish farms and food within the context of local and healthy. Shannon thought of 350-acre Ballyknocken House and Farm in County Wicklow, owned by well-known Irish chef Catherine Fulvio whose family has farmed there for more than 100 years.

That conversation evolved into three successful programs for the company at Ballyknocken, where attend-



Guests roll up their sleeves and learn how to prepare Irish fare at Ballyknocken House & Farm in County Wicklow where all ingredients are sourced locally.

ees walked the farm to learn what is grown there and prepared lunch under Fulvio's watchful eye. All ingredients for the meal came from the farm or local vendors. While waiting for lunch to cook, the group met with local artisan food producers who showcased their cheeses, jams, meats, smoked salmon, craft brews and chocolate, providing samples and lots of fascinating insights.

Shannon, like Thornton, believes that one value of this type of experience is that it takes attendees out of their comfort zone, builds better rela-

tionships and thus fosters better working relationships in the office. But it's the hands-on part, the doing that really defines the experience. "Many times during incentive programs, guests are visiting somewhere, looking at something, admiring a landscape," Shannon says. "Here they were asked to roll up their sleeves, actually learn and then create something; this was the surprise and the challenge. I don't think they could have learned to make Irish scones and Irish stew in this kind of convivial atmosphere anywhere else."

The way the day is set up also makes it easy for attendees to learn about Ireland and Irish culture in an engaging way. "There is a constant flow of conversation and comment as the day and the experiences progress," Shannon says. "In addition to the Ballyknocken staff, the Odyssey staff and our guides are also in the kitchen. This allows people time to think about what is being said, and that prompts further questions and lively debate. Information is being shared in a more informal manner."

These kinds of memorable programs also benefit the client company "because they make employees feel good and that the company has gone that extra mile for them, organizing something special rather than just the regular tourist attractions. I think this creates loyalty and greater production."

And as Shannon notes, Ireland wins, too. "This is the essence of incentive programs and experiential learning — the connections and the memories — that make Ireland stand out as a destination. People may not remember what beach they were on during a resort-based program, but they'll always remember where they were when the V.P. of marketing put sugar in the stew instead of salt!"

Experiential learning has become increasingly popular in the meetings industry of late. Of course, when an idea has been around for more than 2,300 years, chances are it's a pretty good one.

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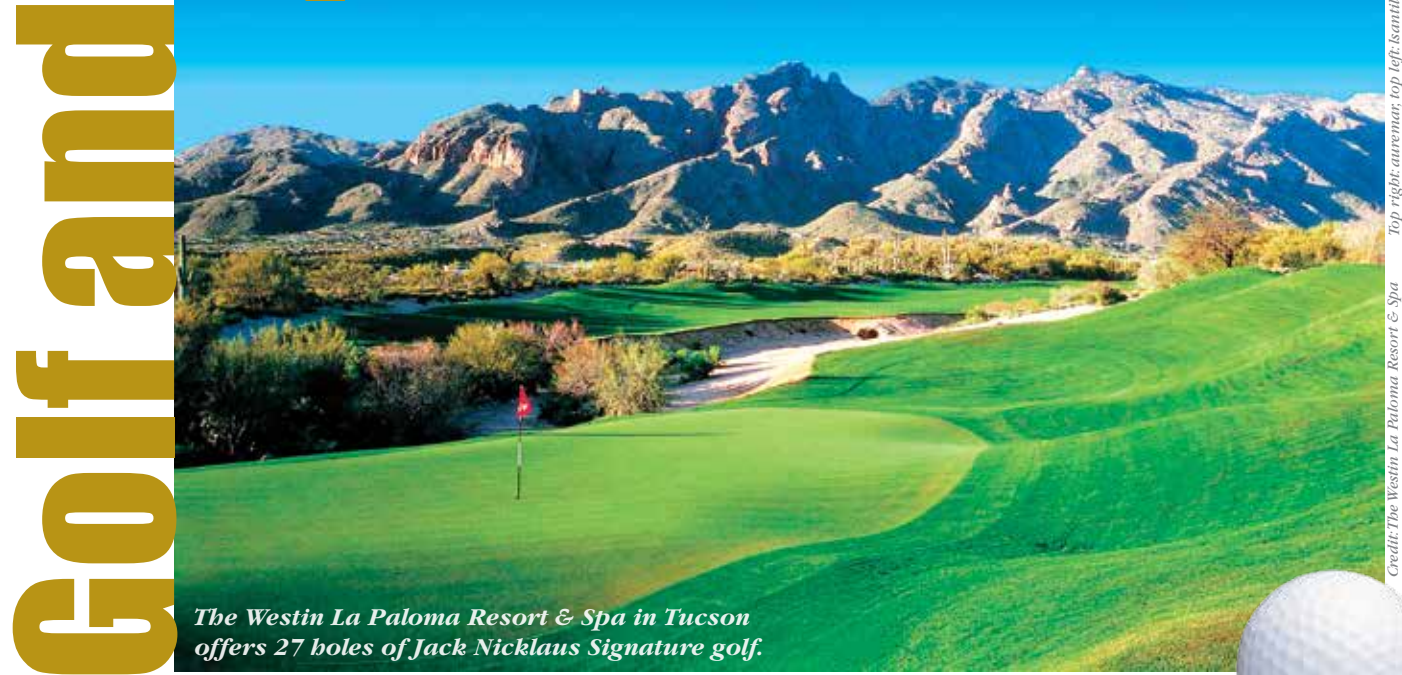


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Golf and Spa Resorts



The Westin La Paloma Resort & Spa in Tucson offers 27 holes of Jack Nicklaus Signature golf.

The Right Combo for Incentive Travel Programs

By John Buchanan

Golf and spa resorts, virtually banned as public relations anathema during the “AIG effect” era, are back with a vengeance. Their unique benefits, especially for incentive travel programs, far out-

weigh their risk in terms of perception. And in fact, the all-important perception today is that companies are once again pampering their most important people with high-profile recognition and rewards.

“Golf and spa resorts are an important part of our property mix, because especially for our incentive programs, we try to create a unique, one-of-a-kind experience that our qualifiers could not really produce on their own,” says Dan Young, CMP, director of event planning and recognition at Minneapolis-based Thrivent Financial. “And in a way that can be harder at a golf and spa resort, because every guest there is experiencing those same things just because they’re there. So we have to make sure to put elements into the program that are unique and exciting.”

For example, Young says, the

company used The Fairmont Tremblant in Quebec, Canada, for an incentive group. “But we did it during the Tremblant International Blues Festival, which is a world-famous music event. And it was just an incredible time to be there. We bought out the entire hotel.”

Fairmont Tremblant resort is nestled in the heart of a European-style village at the foot of the legendary Mont Tremblant.

“Before we went, people had no idea what we were getting into,” Young says. “But after they experienced something that special, during an amazing musical event, they felt it was the best incentive conference they’d ever been to.”

Last year, Thrivent used The Phoenician in Scottsdale, Arizona, for two programs. “Those were events that were definitely focused on golf and spa amenities,” says Young, who plans about two dozen meetings a year, including four major incentive

programs. “But our goal is to mix golf and spa resorts with urban resorts like the Four Seasons Sydney in Australia. We don’t go to a golf and spa resort every year, because we like to have variety in our programs. But when we do go to a golf and spa resort, they are incredibly popular. And that’s why I’d estimate that we use them about 50 percent of the time for our various conferences and incentive programs.”

Young, like many planners, often uses fabled properties such as The Broadmoor in Colorado or The Greenbrier in West Virginia to create the biggest possible buzz for the trip from day one. “Resorts like The Broadmoor and The Greenbrier are places that people get really excited about,” he says. “Places like that automatically get people excited as soon as they hear about the trip because everybody has heard of them and knows their tremendous reputations. They want to go just based on those reputations. But sometimes we’ll go to equally fantastic places, like The Fairmont Tremblant, that most people have never heard of.”

And, Young says, there are other truly fantastic but little-known golf and spa resorts, such as the Grand Del Mar Resort in San Diego, that he has used with great success. “That’s just an amazing property,” Young says. “But until we announced it, most of our people had never heard anything about it.”

The Right Fit

Not only is there a long list of good options for golf and spa resorts throughout the U.S., Canada and the Caribbean, but there is a range of choices in terms of size and scope that means every planner can find a property that fits his or her group, says Jennifer Meyer, meeting planner at RWAM Insurance Administrators Inc. in London, Ontario, Canada. She plans four or five incentive programs each year and often uses golf and spa resorts in the U.S.

Her different programs cater to

both internal salespeople and outside brokers. Golf and spa resorts are particularly important to the third-party programs. “That’s because independent brokers can take their business anywhere they want to,” Meyer says, “so we want to treat them well to keep them loyal.”

Partially for that reason and partially to consistently create a wow factor with her selection of proper-

ties, a key element of RWAM’s incentive programs is tradition. And part of that tradition translates to...pampering attendees in a way that creates lasting memories. “A lot of our brokers were part of our very first trip 25 years ago,” Meyer says. “And they have been on every one since then. And that’s important to us because it’s a way to build and maintain long-term relationships.”

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The participants of NewGen Worldwide's Investment Summit recently held in Scottsdale gathered on a lush lawn for a commemorative photograph.

Her current list of go-to properties include FireSky Resort & Spa, a Kimpton hotel in Scottsdale. She likes FireSky so much that she has used it for three programs for about 100 attendees.

The cozy 204-room hotel promotes rejuvenation, but is also near historic Old Town Scottsdale, as well as dining and art galleries. FireSky's signature restaurant is Taggia, which serves coastal Italian food and features an outdoor patio under the Sonoran desert sky.

"One of the things we like best about FireSky is its size," Meyer says. "It's a good fit for our groups. We don't really like (huge) properties where everyone is going to get lost. The whole point of our programs is to build relationships and have a shared experience. But FireSky is also just a really nice property, and everyone on the staff is very friendly. We also get very good value

there for the money we spend. And I also just love Scottsdale."

Another popular golf resort in

"I went on a site visit and just fell in love with the property (Mokara Hotel & Spa) and the town of San Antonio. ...It's a good fit for the size of our program. And you can walk along River Walk in downtown San Antonio."

**Jennifer Meyer, Meeting Planner
RWAM Insurance Administrators Inc.
London, Ontario, Canada**

Arizona The Westin La Paloma Golf Resort & Spa in Tucson recently rejuvenated the bunkers and greens

on the award-winning Jack Nicklaus Signature course. To coincide with the desert's natural beauty, the 250-acre property is transforming a number of outdoor walkways into an Art Walk with rotating works of sellable art consisting of metal, steel, stone and glass from locally run Metal Arts Village. The iconic resort also is in the process of converting its cold plunge pool into a therapeutic mineral "bath" with imported salt from the Dead Sea.

The resort partnered with the Arizona Sonoran Desert Museum to create a Sonoran Desert Walkway, which showcases the exotic plants and native animals of the Sonoran Desert including flowering cacti, century-old Palo Verde, succulents and yucca.

Also, the resort's Running Concierge leads beginning to intermediate morning runs around the desert oasis while providing advice on af-



NewGen Worldwide attendees enjoyed brunch at the clubhouse as others tackled the golf course or went on a VIP shopping experience in Scottsdale.

ternoon intermediate routes through neighboring Sabino Canyon.

There is an impressive 64,000 sf of indoor function space featuring one of the largest ballrooms in the state, the Arizona Ballroom, outdoor function space including an imaginative patio, covered deck and other options, state-of-the-art telecommunications, 25 separate meeting rooms, and four certified Conference Meeting Planners on staff.

Another of Meyer's favorite properties is the Mokara Hotel & Spa in San Antonio, Texas, which is part of the Omni Hotels & Resorts family. She used the intimate 99-room resort for the first time last year.

"I went on a site visit and just fell in love with the property and the town of San Antonio," Meyer says. "Again, one reason I liked it is that it's a good fit for the size of our program. And you can walk along River Walk in downtown San Antonio. It's also convenient to the airport, so that makes it easy for our attendees."

Situated along a quiet stretch of River Walk, Mokara Hotel & Spa is three blocks from the historic Alamo and six blocks from the Henry B. Gonzalez Convention Center. Within one mile of the luxury boutique hotel are the King William Historic District and the Alamodome.

Mokara's ambience is focused on relaxation. Its lobby features a limestone fireplace and luxurious leather seating. A candlelit foyer leads to a 17,000-sf spa with 19 private treatment rooms. Signature treatments include Spanish Rosemary massage, Lime Blossom Scalp and Body Treatment and Purple Sage Salt Glow. Adjacent to a 24-hour fitness center is a Mind & Body Center, which offers complimentary weekend yoga classes. The hotel's flagship restaurant, Ostra, serves innovatively prepared sustainable seafood complemented by an extensive wine list, an oyster bar and a dining terrace along the River Walk.

Another of Meyer's most successful resort choices is Grotto Bay Beach Resort in Bermuda.

Located just one mile from Bermuda International Airport, the 201-room property is located near many of Bermuda's most popular attractions, including Crystal Caves; Devil's Hole Aquarium; the Bermuda Aquarium, Museum and Zoo; Bermuda Underwater Exploration Institute; and the historic town of St. George.

The laidback resort features 21 acres of manicured lawns and brilliantly hued flower gardens, as well



Golf was the order of the day at Talking Stick Golf Course for (l to r) Ryan Bodine, business development manager, NewGen Worldwide; John Bissell, V.P. of development for Hansji Corp., the developer for Luhrs City Center; Terry O'Neill, director of development, NewGen Worldwide; and John Lindgren, Arizona's first EB-5 investor.

as forest. Along the resort's shoreline, two theatrically lighted limestone caves provide a dramatic alternative to swimming in the ocean. Guests also can enjoy the seclusion of the garden's spa tub. A beautiful pink-sand beach stretches along the calm waters of Grotto Bay.

Accommodations are in a trio of 11-story lodges painted in pas-

"We also loved the golf courses at Talking Stick. But the thing that made the first meeting so successful and the reason we went back last year is because of the level of the service we got."



Terry O'Neill
Director of Development
NewGen Worldwide
Phoenix, AZ

tel Caribbean colors that complement white tile floors. All rooms have ocean views.

"We had done a program at Grotto Bay about 20 years ago, long before



The Talking Stick Resort as seen from the Talking Stick Golf Course in Scottsdale, Arizona, which features two challenging golf courses — the North and South courses.

I ever started with the company, so our CEO had already been there and liked it,” Meyer says. “He wanted to go back. It’s very close to the airport and has a very nice beach. And once again, it’s just a property that is ideal for our group size. Another thing that was nice is that the manager has been there for something like 40 years, and he remembered our group from 20 years ago. That was very nice.”

Going Native

Terry O’Neill, director of development at Phoenix-based NewGen Worldwide, which matches foreign investors to U.S. development projects such as hotels and hospitals, has used the AAA Four Diamond Talking Stick Resort in nearby Scottsdale for the last two years for one of his company’s major conferences, the Green Card Fund Annual Investment Summit, which includes about 150 participants such as current investors, project developers and local partners.

A Native American-owned property located in the sprawling Talking Stick Cultural and Entertainment Destination on the Salt River-Pima Maricopa Indian Reservation, the 496-room Talking Stick Resort features The Spa at Talking Stick and

is adjacent to the Talking Stick Golf Club. Dining options include the upscale flagship Orange Sky Restaurant for aged beef and fresh seafood and the casual Blue Coyote Cafe for distinctive American cuisine.

Because a number of the investment summit’s attendees at the last

socially for a couple of days before getting down to business.

Talking Stick Resort provides the perfect environment for meeting that requirement, O’Neill says. “So the first two days of the conferences were devoted to getting to know the resort and fellow participants. Attendees



The heated rooftop pool at the Mokara Hotel & Spa features spectacular city views of San Antonio.

two conferences came from China, O’Neill paid careful attention to a cultural tradition. Chinese meeting attendees want to relax and get to know their hosts and other attendees

went to the spa. Others went shopping. But everybody just relaxed and had a good time, which set the tone for the conference.”

Many of the attendees chose a

golf outing, and foursomes were formed with attendees matched with company leaders.

Given the many options O’Neill had for a golf and spa resort in the Southwest, why Talking Stick?

“We knew we wanted a high-end resort that had a casino,” O’Neill says. “We wanted attendees to have a high-quality experience. We also loved the golf courses at Talking Stick. But the thing that made the first meeting so successful and the reason we went back last year is because of the level of the service we got. The staff was just excellent in every respect.”

Exceptional service is a trademark characteristic of Native American-owned casino resorts across the country, O’Neill notes.

The casino and spa at Talking Stick were especially popular amenities.

“Our attendees like a luxury experience,” O’Neill says. “They like to be pampered. So having a property where we had a quality golf course and a quality spa, as well as quality food and beverage and a great casino, meant we had the complete package. And it was also important to us that people didn’t have to leave the Talking Stick property for anything. Everything they wanted was right there.”

Because the conference represented the first time many of the attendees had visited the U.S., O’Neill also wanted them to get what he calls “a taste of Arizona.” As a result, he worked with Talking Stick’s staff to arrange a performance of Native American music and dance. “That was a very special experience,” O’Neill says. “Our attendees really got a sense of what Arizona is all about culturally and historically.”

Ryan Bodine, NewGen Worldwide’s business development manager and the hands-on coordinator of the conferences, had extremely high praise for the service Talking Stick delivered. “The entire staff did a great job for us,” Bodine says. “And that’s especially true of Debra Mizrahi, who is the catering manager

and our group coordinator. We had early mornings and late nights, and Debra was there for everything the entire time. She made sure that everything we needed was provided for our guests. She’s really the reason we like Talking Stick so much and want to keep coming back.”

Due to the exceptional experiences they and their attendees had there over the last two years, O’Neill and

Bodine say they are certain NewGen Worldwide will go back to Talking Stick in the future.

Dates and Rates

Now that demand for golf and spa resorts is high again, finding dates and getting good rates is becoming more difficult.

“Things are getting a little tougher at top properties,” Young says. “We



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The clubhouse at Streamsong Resort, which is home to two award-winning golf courses. A third course, Streamsong Black, will open in 2017 on the 16,000-acre property in Central Florida.

Credit: Streamsong Resort

just booked a five-night program for 2017 at Loews Miami Beach. And we knew we wanted to go to Florida. But we had a very difficult time finding space for the dates we wanted. And in fact, in Florida, for major resorts we had a very hard time finding dates for an entire week in all of 2017. We

finally ended up getting the dates at the Loews Miami Beach and the rates were within our budget. But we were lucky, because we always do that particular program during high season, in the spring, and we're competing with spring break and the strongest demand of the year for Florida."

Meyer says she sees virtually no difference now between dates and rates at a golf and spa resort and a downtown meeting hotel in a top destination.

In terms of negotiating deal terms such as rates, concessions and amenities such as golf and spa privileges, there is no significant difference, in bottom-line business terms, between a resort and a downtown meeting hotel in a major city, Young says.

Meyer, however, finds negotiation easier with golf and tennis resorts, because group business typically is not as big a part of their day-to-day business as it is at a ma-

jor flag hotel in a top city destination. In the current seller's market, mainstream meeting properties are increasingly discriminating about the types of meetings they will take and at what price, Meyer observes.

And the most important considerations in the use of golf and spa resorts remain the wow factor and a well-demonstrated commitment to taking good care of qualifiers for incentive programs.

Those are the twin engines that drive ROI, Young says.

"Our events are at the level where the quality of our programs is really what drives the business results that are achieved by a lot of our people," he says. "When they get out of bed in the morning, they're not only going to work to provide for their families, they're also highly motivated to qualify for our incentive programs. So the properties we choose and the programs we create are a big part of the business lives of our people and also a big part of the performance of the company."

I&FMM

"The entire staff did a great job for us. And that's especially true of Debra Mizrahi, catering manager. ...She's really the reason we like Talking Stick so much and want to keep coming back."



Ryan Bodine
Business Development Manager
NewGen Worldwide
Phoenix, AZ



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Building Teams



"Beach to Bay" is a teambuilding exercise to challenge crossing new barriers with limited tools.

Credit: CRE8/ID8 Events



(Center) The Bowlmor teambuilding special is two hours of bowling, food and drink, a signable bowling pin and a teambuilding guide. (Right) Teams helped revive and restore Virginia Key, a barrier island near Miami.

Credit: RED Events

Find the Best Blueprint to Engage, Energize and Encourage Your Group

It's one thing to plan meeting and incentive activities that are fun for attendees. But it's an entirely different thing to plan fun activities that also motivate, build camaraderie and develop attitudes and skills that benefit a company's business goals.

That's the purpose of teambuilding, and it continues to be as popular as ever. Companies use an ever-growing variety of teambuilding activities to give workers a common sense of purpose and inspire creativity.

The U.S. division of Netherlands-based Wolters Kluwer, a global firm that provides products and services for industries that include financial services, accounting and tax-

es, used teambuilding at its two-day annual sales meeting in Tampa earlier this year, according to Lori Sullivan, director of learning solutions. The two-hour session involved building bicycles for members of a local Boys & Girls Club.

The activity was designed to reinforce themes of accountability, being an agent of change and creating products with customers in mind.



Lori Sullivan, Director of Learning Solutions
Wolters Kluwer, Chicago, IL

By **Derek Reveron**

The 100 attendees who gathered in the hotel ballroom were not told who they were building bikes for until the end of the session. "They were divided into five teams and each team built a complete bike," says Sullivan. "Each team got a box of tools. However, we purposely left out some tools, like a screwdriver, for some teams so they would have to borrow it from another team and learn how to share it and

"We purposely left out some tools, like a screwdriver...so they would have to borrow it from another team and learn how to share it and work together."

work together in a way that allowed both groups to finish."

At the end of the session, one person from each group gave a short presentation describing the experience. Later, Sullivan says they surprised the group by introducing members of the Boys & Girls Clubs who were on hand to accept the bikes.

The experience was emotional says Sullivan. "There were people crying and completely overwhelmed. They became even more concerned about the bikes working correctly. The product they were engaged in producing instantly became more personal because they felt a deep connection with the 'customers.'" That was precisely the desired impact, adds Sullivan.

Attendees met with the children

"Teambuilding is more about people coming together and interacting and building a bond and taking it back to the workplace."

Zorianna Smith, CMP, DMCP, Director of Marketing & Product Development
AlliedPRA Northern California & Hawaii, San Francisco, CA

for about 10 minutes. When the kids took their bikes to a different room to have them checked out by mechanics, the employees gathered to "have a discussion about what the message was and how it was relevant to their jobs."

Budget Factors

Wolters Kluwer includes a teambuilding event every year for the annual sales meeting despite budget constraints. "Budget is always a factor, but not so much that we would

not do teambuilding," says Sullivan. "Our senior leadership has a commitment to learning. Our work force is spread across the country so there is a commitment to make the time and spend the money for them to travel and be together."

As teambuilding programs, especially Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) programs, are becoming more popular, savvy planners are discovering ways to stretch tight budgets.

For instance, they are creating shorter teambuilding activities (some

are one hour or less) and holding them onsite at hotels or in-house at corporate facilities to avoid paying venue and transportation costs.

In addition, off-the-shelf teambuilding activities are popular because many companies lack the budget for customized programs. Meanwhile, some companies are designing their own programs.

Shorter Sessions Can Be Effective

"I've noticed over the past few years that when people say teambuilding it doesn't always mean the traditional teambuilding," says Zorianna Smith, CMP, DMCP, director of marketing and product development for AlliedPRA Northern California and Hawaii. "A lot of times it's an activity that they think of as teambuilding. It can be something relatively simple. It's not as facilitated but it is more free-form and includes networking."

Such teambuilding activities include cooking classes, shoe-decorating, wine-blending, sushi-rolling, cupcake-decorating and chocolate-making, and even organized recreational activities such as bowling.

However, some planners use the term teambuilding simply to describe an activity that attendees enjoy together, says Smith. "Many times they say they want a teambuilding activity and we suggest traditional teambuilding activities. Then they want something recreational like group biking, kayaking, hiking or horseback riding."

But is it really teambuilding? "Yes, it is," says Smith. "It's just a different way of doing it. It's more about people coming together and interacting and building a bond and taking it back to the workplace. Maybe it's not as measurable in terms of what was learned, but it's effective in a teambuilding way because they connect and learn a little about each other."

Fun and Different Ideas

Last October, a major credit card company held a brief teambuilding session during a meeting in a hotel for 160 technology employees. "They did a series of small competitions led by a facilitator," says the planner of the event. "After a demonstration by the facilitator and practice session, the group was split up into groups of eight to 10 people at round tables."

The games included cup-stacking, putting playing cards in a specific sequence, and tossing and catching pencils over your back. "One of the challenges involved having one person from each team learn a song in a different language and sing it on stage. Each group was scored and the winning team received ribbons in an awards ceremony."

The teambuilding event had a specific purpose. "We wanted to allow people to have fun after a day of meetings and enjoy their colleagues in a different setting," says the planner. "It was definitely loud and there was a lot of energy in the room with laughing and cheering. People were engaged and focused."

A departure from the typical teambuilding endeavor is sporting clay competitions such as the one offered at Streamsong Resort where



"Interaction is always the key with teambuilding. The more hands-on you are, the better results you'll see. Couple these with incentive trips and you've got a winner."

Greg Palomino, CMP, CDMP, CWP, CSEP, CTA
CEO at CRE8AD8, San Antonio, TX

groups enjoy a fresh and exhilarating out-of-doors opportunity to compete and build camaraderie among



The TOMS One for One program provides shoes and more to children in more than 60 countries. For every one pair of TOMS shoes purchased, one pair is donated through the program. Attendees are provided with supplies to decorate the shoes.

colleagues. "Sporting clay activities instill skills such as teamwork, self-confidence, discipline, safety and other workplace values, says Tyler Ramsdell, sports and recreation manager at Streamsong Resort. "Having the discipline to hit a moving target requires a high level of preparation, concentration and frequent adjustments. Men and women alike find the sporting clay experience exciting, empowering and something they are eager to do again," Tyler says.

Teams of four to eight participants advance through a series of stands and are presented with a wide variety of targets that duplicate flight patterns. Every player

gets six attempts at each stand and their individual score contributes to the team total. Team scores are tallied and a champion is crowned. The entire event takes about two hours and creates a lifetime of memories.

Streamsong Resort is home to two award-winning golf courses, and has announced plans to build a third course in 2017.

Another two-hour teambuilding program is available at Bowlmor AMF's 18 locations around the U.S. Their Super-bowl special includes two hours of bowling and shoes, a selection of food and drink items, a signable bowling pin and a teambuilding guide.

Teambuilding With a Purpose

Some companies are committed to making their teambuilding programs better every year. That's why 500 sales executives for a large financial firm assembled prosthetic hands for third-world children during a five-day incentive trip last summer. "We always have to beat last year's program," says the planner of the incentive. "That factor goes into creating a program that meets business objectives. If you can create such a program then you have a winner. Doing teambuilding for the sake of teambuilding without purpose is a waste of time."

The teambuilding activity started with attendees watching a video to relate the purpose of the activity.

Having attendees understand the purpose of a teambuilding program, especially one that involves CSR, is crucial. "It is a real key in programs like this," says the planner. "They understood that the purpose was to give more mobility to kids in third-world countries who can't get prosthetics. Also, kids outgrow their prosthetics every six months and they have to be replaced."

The group was divided into teams of 10 people who used specially designed kits to build the hands. "They used magic markers to decorate the cases with drawings and write mes-

Historic Banning Mills near Atlanta boasts the world's longest continuous zip-line course and offers many teambuilding programs.



The Right Stuff

Matching the right teambuilding program to the right group can be a tricky process. Use the following tips from planners and other experts to choose the right teambuilding experience for your group.

- **Know the attendees.** Are the employees familiar with each other or are most of them unacquainted? Have attendees experienced teambuilding before or is this their first time? Consider the demographics of the group including age, education, gender and interests. Every teambuilding activity, no matter how fantastic, will not work with every group.
- **Tailor objectives specifically to the group.** Is the purpose simply to have fun or network? Or does the goal involve learning or reinforcing certain skills, attitudes and behaviors?
- **Schedule the teambuilding for maximum convenience and impact.** Don't squeeze the activity between two sessions or schedule it at the end of a meeting or incentive. A planner once scheduled teambuilding between a beach event and lunch. The result: Attendees arrived late to the teambuilding because they returned to rooms to clean up and were hungry during the activity.
- **Consider using a professional facilitator.** Find a company that has the expertise to manage and host the activity in a way that communicates the company message, inspires attendees and keeps the event running smoothly.
- **Make teambuilding interesting and challenging.** Don't offer long presentations, introductions and lectures. Make it interactive right from the start. Offer group and individual prizes to ignite competition.
- **Hold debriefing sessions afterwards.** Allowing attendees to share their experiences immediately after teambuilding further bonds them. Post-teambuilding discussions also give participants a chance to discuss what they learned, how they can apply it on the job and how they can improve as a team. — DR



The Stranded Island exercise — too little space, too little time and only one way off the island!



COO and co-founder of Odyssey Teams Lain Hensley (above left) with a Helping Hands recipient. (Right) Helping Hands program participants hard at work. Odyssey Teams, founded in 1991, is a leader in the teambuilding industry.

sages of encouragement,” says the planner. “It was complicated, but they read and followed the instructions.”

The program was the talk of the group throughout the meeting. “It was emotional, powerful, engaging and energizing,” says the planner. “In the financial industry, top performers are sophisticated people who look for a sophisticated experience that evokes emotion, is creative and has a purpose. That’s exactly what they got.”

Technology and CSR

Some companies are employing technology to allow employees to

experience CSR-like activities that stoke similar emotions. For example, EA Loans, a lending company based in Walnut Creek, California, uses software called YouEarnedIt. Last Thanksgiving, employees nationwide redeemed points they earned through YouEarnedIt to buy turkey dinners that they then delivered to local communities. Employees shared their stories with each other through the website.

“The trends in teambuilding will involve innovation and technology,” says Greg Palomino, CMP, CDM, CWP, CSEP, CTA, the CEO at CRE8AD8, an international award-winning event

and travel management firm based in San Antonio. “You just can’t continue to do the same (teambuilding activities). The challenge is that many companies are using activities that have been set in stone for years and are used to doing things the same way every year. This means you don’t receive new, innovative and cool ideas for teambuilding.”

Palomino adds, “These trends will also incorporate ideas that may not be 100 percent tested, but those companies that are willing to explore that will find themselves at an advantage. Interaction is always the key with teambuilding. The more hands-on you are, the better results you’ll see. Couple these with incentive trips and you’ve got a winner.”

Planners can choose from an ever-growing variety of teambuilding programs to foster teamwork, leadership development and employee engagement. Teambuilding exercises help employees improve their abilities to take beneficial risks, identify their roles within a team and allocate resources.

At their best, teambuilding programs connect activities to an organization’s business goals and culture; or seek simply to build camaraderie or treasured memories. No matter the ultimate goal, planners can find the appropriate blueprint to achieve success.

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Attendees find sporting clay competitions such as this one at Central Florida's Streamsong Resort an exciting alternative to the same-old teambuilding exercises.

Credit: Odyssey Teams



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Credit: M Resort Spa Casino

M Resort's 5,000-sf wine cellar and tasting room, Hostile Grape, is an intriguing space for an incentive group event.

By Christine Loomis

Nevada is one of the top meeting destinations in the world, home, of course, to bigger-than-life Las Vegas, which is probably best known for its ability to accommodate some of the largest meetings on the planet. Reno, in the northern region of the state and up against the California border and dramatic Sierra Nevada Mountains, also is a stellar meeting destination for very different reasons. Casinos, of course, are common to both, but beyond that the two cities offer very different but equally enticing experiences for the relatively smaller insurance and financial company group meetings.

A Perfect Fit in Las Vegas & Reno

How Mega-hotels Are Making Room for Smaller Meetings

Las Vegas

It would be a mistake to think that Las Vegas is not a serious business destination. Although the city has made a name for itself with its elaborate shows, over-the-top clubs, alcohol-infused festivities and hint that naughty is to be expected, that's the Mr. Hyde side of Las Vegas, if you will.

The split-personality city has another side that is all about supporting and sustaining business — its Dr. Jekyll self, which is in every way a meeting planner's dream. You may not see splashy TV ads claiming that Las Vegas has a finely tuned conservative focus for business groups and is easily capable of helping those groups prove meeting ROI, but that's exactly the case.

Las Vegas hosts approximately 22,000 meetings, conventions and trade shows, and brings in a total of about 5.2 million business travelers each year. The city has deep experience meeting these travelers' needs. It offers thousands of hotel rooms and a competitive 12 percent room tax; flights from more than 130 U.S. and international cities, meaning that moderately priced flights are almost always available; an airport located just a short — and inexpensive — taxi ride from the core business area; and millions of square feet of meeting and exhibition space, giving planners plenty of options to hone in on their

"Everything that makes Las Vegas ideal for large groups works for smaller groups as well."

**Chris Meyer, Vice President
Global Business Sales
Las Vegas CVA**

required price point. But the best attribute may be that a meeting set in Las Vegas typically increases attendance by 8 percent. All of that translates to a bottom-line bonus especially welcomed by fiscally conservative financial and insurance companies.

And though it's common knowledge that Las Vegas easily accommodates the mega meetings with thousands of attendees, is it also a desirable destination for small meetings? In fact, it is.

"Las Vegas hosts more meetings and conventions than any other destination on the planet, and roughly half of those events consist of 500 attendees or less," says Chris Meyer, vice president of global business sales for the Las Vegas Convention and Visitors Authority. "Everything that makes Las Vegas ideal for large groups works for smaller groups as well. We've got an abundance of space throughout the destination with nearly 11 million sf, more than 150,000 hotel rooms provid-

ing the best group value proposition in the world, convenient accessibility with more than 900 inbound and outbound flights per day, plus the entertainment and dining options that can help make the event memorable."

Many of the city's best-known hotels also cater to small groups, providing not only the right-sized meeting space but also programs, events and à la carte options that work perfectly for small groups but do not accommodate larger ones.

Make It a Wynn-Win

At Wynn Las Vegas and Encore Las Vegas, for example, which offer 200,000 and 60,000 sf of meeting space, respectively, there are a combined total of five boardrooms specifically designed for smaller groups. And for gatherings of 10 or fewer — not uncommon with VIP and executive groups — Wynn offers 10 salon conference suites in the tower. Small groups don't have to forego the "wow" venues, either. Wynn's South Show Terrace, for example, overlooks the Lake of Dreams but accommodates only up to 75 guests.

Other venues at Wynn that are ideal for smaller groups or individual attendees include programs and events in the spa or Claude Baruk Salons, the golf course and several of the brand's exceptional restaurants, all spaces unable to accommodate mega groups but exactly the type of venues incentive qualifiers expect. Of course, Wynn's meeting facilities also include the best in tech infrastructure, support and capabilities, whether the meeting is for 20 or 2,000. Moreover, Wynn has dedicated members of its sales, catering and convention teams who specialize only in small groups, giving planners access to staff that fully understands and appreciates the needs and requirements of small groups, ensuring that they don't get lost in the bright-lights-big-city experience that Las Vegas can be.

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Colombian artist Fernando Botero's "The Seated Lady" sculpture is the centerpiece for dining in-the-round at Encore's Botero steak house, which accommodates groups of up to 50.

Credit: Wynn Las Vegas



The new Omnia Nightclub at Caesars Palace is available for corporate group buyout for 200-4,000 people.

Credit: Caesars Entertainment

groups within its National Meetings and Events, called Caesars Direct. The goal was to provide the brand's small-business customers with faster service and quality responses from salespeople who thoroughly know and understand the small-business market. The company notes that small meetings are a vital piece of Caesars own business and that these groups deserve the same attention and service as large-business customers.

Through Caesars Direct, smaller groups get the agility and flexibility they require, but they also can book the same Las Vegas full-entertainment experience if they want it. They can also qualify for the same concessions as larger groups, such as having one food and beverage minimum, plus they work with a compressed template for contracts, making that portion of the planning process more streamlined and easier.

All of that flexibility goes a long way in Las Vegas, where the Caesars group includes Bally's, Caesars Palace, Flamingo, Harrah's, Paris Las Vegas, Planet Hollywood, Rio and both Linq Hotel & Casino and The Linq Promenade.

Small Groups Expert

At M Resort Spa Casino, small to mid-size meetings are the focus, so there's never an issue of smaller groups feeling lost among the mega-meeting groups, and the resort's entire convention and meeting team is well versed in what makes smaller meetings shine.

Two of the resort's main meeting venues accommodate only up to 363 at full capacity and when broken down a maximum of 114-121 in each section. Two larger venues accommodate up to 595 each, with a maximum capacity of 114-121 in each section when broken down. Of course, depending on the setup, these rooms also nicely accommodate intimate groups of just 25 as well.

Among M Resort's creative spaces for smaller groups are three Villagio del Sole outdoor terraces, which range from 4,975-6,550 sf. The terraces accommodate 270 to 370 attendees for a banquet or 400 to 500 for a reception. And there's the resort's 5,000-sf wine cellar and tasting room, Hostile Grape, an intriguing space for an incentive



Although Reno's Grand Sierra Resort and Casino is large — more than 2,000 guest rooms and suites and more than 200,000 sf of meeting and convention space — it also provides plenty of intimate venues.

Credit: Grand Sierra Resort and Casino

space features a full bar, Enomatic wine dispensing machines, a gourmet kitchen, floor-to-ceiling windows and private elevators.

Reno

The city of Reno is often jointly marketed with the Lake Tahoe area, making it another city with a bit of a split personality. While Reno offers the many attributes of a mid-sized urban environment, it's only a stone's throw from the wildly scenic landscapes surrounding Lake Tahoe in the Sierra Nevada, and all of the many outdoor activities and options that area presents winter and summer. It's an area where business and pleasure are easily combined.

Most important, perhaps, for smaller groups with a focus on meeting ROI, Reno and its surrounding area offer tremendous value to both attendees and meeting planners.

Incredible Value

"The most important thing for meeting planners to keep in mind is the incredible value that Reno Tahoe USA represents," says Christopher Baum, president and CEO of the Reno-Sparks Convention and Visitors Authority. "Not only do we have first-class hotel rooms at rates that average under \$150 per night, but our production and food costs are very low as well, with a gallon

of coffee averaging \$40 throughout the region. The great team members at our partner resorts handle every attendee with the same friendly level of service, whether you're part of a citywide convention or one of a dozen people in for a quick committee meeting. And with

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Adds Baum, “And with JetBlue’s new daily nonstop service to and from New York’s John F. Kennedy International Airport starting in late May, Reno Tahoe USA just got a whole lot more convenient for meeting attendees from the Northeast.”

Dee Souter, market coordinator with Aflac, the well-known insurance group, planned the State Aflac Quarterly Meeting for 115 attendees at Grand Sierra Resort and Casino in Reno in July 2014. She says it was not the first or last time the group will meet there for several reasons. “We can combine business with pleasure. Grand Sierra Resort is updated, clean and the staff is amazing.”

Souter also says that the city’s con-

“The most important thing for meeting planners to keep in mind is the incredible value that Reno Tahoe USA represents.”

Christopher Baum
President and CEO
Reno-Sparks CVA

for small groups and attentive, personalized service. “Carina Taylor, executive director of sales, helped us get started,” Souter says, “and worked with us for the whole event. And the AV staff and banquet staff were fantastic.”

Multiple upgrades at Grand Sierra recently have been completed or are scheduled for the near future, with the goal of bringing the resort to an entirely new level. Over the past three

toric Grand Theatre, which will reopen to the public this summer with a stellar entertainment lineup and an updated, modern look and feel.

Among the resort’s most notable features now is the \$15 million, 25,000-sf nightlife venue Lex Nightclub, which opened in July 2014. For those who thought that only Las Vegas or Miami could deliver this type of nightclub experience, the resort puts that view to rest. Lex features an indoor water feature with a dance floor that extends over it, creating the illusion of dancing on water. There also are 33 VIP tables, three full bars, a multimillion-dollar lighting and sound system and some of the hottest names in nightlife entertainment — with different options for enjoying it all available to groups of any size.

The Aflac group held its meetings in Grand Sierra’s conference space and used public venues as well. “I love having adequate space to use; the facility has something for everyone,” Souter says. “Some of the attendees went to the nightclub and had a fantastic time,” she adds.

Souter notes that her group has had several meetings at Grand Sierra Resort and that they’ll continue to use GSR as a meeting base whenever they are in the Reno area. As for her best advice for planners considering Reno and the Grand Sierra Resort and Casino, Souter says, “Work with Carina. She has a grasp of exactly what you may need and anticipates your every need.”

One Size Fits All

Another meeting resort option in Reno is Peppermill Resort Spa Casino, which offers 106,000 sf of meeting and convention space in its Tuscan Tower, the \$400 million expansion the resort completed in 2007. Peppermill has ample space for meetings of all sizes across its three ballrooms and two flexible meeting rooms, with several ideal for smaller groups, such as a private dining and reception room, penthouse suites and an luxury executive boardroom.

The White Orchid Private Dining



Peppermill Resort Spa Casino's two-story luxury executive boardroom features a separate function area just below with bar and banquet station, and AV that is integrated with the displays in the boardroom.

vention and visitors authority has been very helpful, particularly in assisting with availability.

A Grand Choice

It’s not surprising that Grand Sierra Resort and Casino is a popular choice for meeting planners. Although it’s large — more than 2,000 guest rooms and suites and more than 200,000 sf of meeting and convention space — it also provides plenty of intimate venues

years, GSR has invested more than \$50 million with the goal of creating a premier resort destination. Updates have included newly renovated hotel rooms, an all-new William Hill Race and Sports Book (a sports bar), a brand new spa and more.

This year, upgrades will include a new main porte cochère and a newly appointed Grand Ballroom, with completion scheduled for spring. Additionally, GSR is home to the his-

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Room was created to dazzle. It features Swarovski Crystal chandeliers, custom-etched glass doors and fine china and linens, all of which make it an excellent choice for VIP events and receptions set up to reward an organization's top incentive qualifiers. Planners looking for versatility and a "wow" venue should consider the 17th-floor penthouse suites, each one featuring a spiral staircase, elegant décor and sweeping views of the mountains and surrounding city.

The 4,000-sf executive boardroom rises two stories and offers a slew of amenities including sophisticated technology that makes it a good choice for C-suite executives, whether for a very private reception or a high-level business meeting. Décor includes custom walnut inlaid panels, imported textiles, original artwork and high-end lighting. There also are six flat screens along with a 160-inch digital, cinema-grade screen and a state-of-the-art digital sound system with 7.1 surround sound. Executives also can video-conference with others in the company via the room's technology, which includes the capability to set up a 1,000-person webinar.

The AAA Four Diamond Peppermill offers 1,635 rooms and suites, two pools and 10 restaurants, as well as 16 themed bars and lounges and a 43,000-sf spa, salon and fitness center. And, of course, there's the casino, with all the gaming entertainment options attendees might want.

Like other resorts that cater to



"Graceland Presents Elvis: The Exhibition, The Show, The Experience" debuts in April at Westgate Las Vegas Resort & Casino.

Credit: Westgate Las Vegas Resort

business groups, Peppermill has personnel — a sales manager and a coordinator — dedicated to facilitating smaller meetings. These specialists work with groups in the planning process. Once the group is on property, the resort's convention services department handles everything regardless of the group's size. What Peppermill staff also say they offer is attention to detail and outstanding quality and service, all at great value.

It's fair to say that part of that value comes from the resort's location in Reno, a city that may be "second-tier" in terms of size and facilities but definitely not in terms of value delivered for the price.

Together, Las Vegas and Reno present two enticing and, in some ways, very different options for small meeting groups. Both are well worth considering depending on a planner's specific needs.

New & Noteworthy

The **Omnia Nightclub** — the former Pure Nightclub — opened in March at Caesars Palace after a top-to-bottom makeover. The completely redeveloped 75,000-sf venue houses three distinct nightlife spaces: the Main Club including the Balcony level, Heart of Omnia; the sleek ultra-lounge; and the Terrace offering sweeping views of the Las Vegas Strip. Omnia is available for corporate event buyouts for groups of 200–4,000 people.

The **Westgate Las Vegas Resort & Casino**, located one block off The Las Vegas Strip and adjacent to the Las Vegas Convention Center, is currently undergoing a property-wide \$100 million renovation. Upgrades to 1,200 signature guest rooms and the pool area have been completed. The ongoing renovation project will include enhancements to the convention areas and sports book. Two new restaurant concepts, including Sid's Café, are expected to open in April.

Also debuting in April at Westgate is "Graceland Presents Elvis: The Exhibition, The Show, The Experience," a new, permanent exhibition and live entertainment shows "that celebrate the life and legacy of Elvis Presley."

Westgate Las Vegas Resort & Casino features a 95,000-sf casino, 200,000 sf of meeting and convention space, restaurants, entertainment, a spa and fitness center, pool with luxurious cabanas, access to golf at the exclusive Las Vegas Country Club, and the world's largest race and sports SuperBook.



The outdoor deck at Tropicana Las Vegas Beach Café treats diners to views of the resort's pool and lush gardens.

Credit: Tropicana Las Vegas - a DoubleTree by Hilton



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The **Tropicana Las Vegas** — a **DoubleTree by Hilton** now provides one of the fastest Internet services available in a Las Vegas hotel, thanks to a newly deployed Wi-Fi technology, including wired and wireless Internet access. The Internet access will be available throughout the property's newly expanded convention space —

which will total 100,000 sf, including the new Trinidad Pavilion when completed this spring — as well as in the resort's 1,467 guest rooms and suites.

With the rollout of Tropicana's significantly upgraded infrastructure, meeting organizers and attendees will enjoy increased mobility and a substantial leap in bandwidth availability in the conference center and hotel rooms. This allows for streaming of high-definition video without jitter or latency, downloading large business presentations, using cloud applications and sending/receiving large files or photos and other digital data without delay.

Delano Las Vegas opened last fall in the Mandalay Bay complex, bringing the chic style of its iconic sister property in South Beach to the Las Vegas Strip. The new smoke-free, luxury hotel features 1,100 suites, the Delano Beach Club, which debuts in April, the Bathhouse Spa and Delia's



Bardot Brasserie at Aria Resort & Casino, which opened in January, is available for private events.

Credit: MGM Resorts International

Kitchen, a restaurant specializing in sustainable foods.

Award-winning chef Michael Mina opened Bardot Brasserie at **Aria Resort & Casino** in January. Offering a modern and sexy take on the traditional French brasserie experience, Bardot will present an exquisite array of Parisian cuisine, transporting guests on a culinary journey through The City of Light. Located on the second floor of Aria, Bardot is open from 5 p.m. to 11 p.m. daily and offers group options.

Among MGM Grand's 5,044 guest rooms is the 14th floor comprised of 171 **Stay Well rooms**, completed in January. The Stay Well guest rooms feature vitamin C-infused shower water, advanced room lighting tailored to sleep/wake cycles, air purification systems, EMF protection and more.

The companion **Stay Well Meetings** incorporates healthful environments in meeting rooms and spaces, such as

ergonomic seating, air purification, circadian lighting, virtual window lights, aromatherapy, healthful menu items and much more.

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.

The Blackstone Group has announced that it will commence a \$200 million makeover of **The Cosmopolitan Las Vegas**, which it acquired for \$1.73 billion from Deutsche Bank last May.

The Las Vegas Convention and Visitors Authority purchased the historic Riviera Hotel & Casino, which will be demolished in August to make room for the \$2.3 billion **Las Vegas Global Business District** project, which includes the expansion and renovation of the Las Vegas Convention Center.

Mandarin Oriental, Las Vegas, has introduced a new event space known as The Gallery, a loft-style venue offering 1,900 sf of space and featuring frosted floor-to-ceiling windows, a painted cement floor, white walls and 16-foot ceilings. This distinctive venue is ideal for an 80-person seated dinner or a cocktail reception for up to 200 guests.

The Mob Museum, the National Museum of Organized Crime and Law Enforcement, recently announced new special offerings for groups. The museum's Speakers Bureau features members of the museum's board of directors who include professionals from local and state government, law enforcement, the judicial system, media and the business community, such as former Mayor of the City of Las Vegas Oscar B. Goodman. For groups seeking teambuilding activities or simply to be active and entertained as part of the company gathering, Museum Scavenger Hunts provide an intriguing solution. The Mob Museum offers flexible space and can accommodate groups of from 10 to 400 people.

I&FMM

The Mob Museum now offers Museum Scavenger Hunts in which groups answer questions about the history of organized crime.

Credit: The Mob Museum



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BRANSTROM

Barry Brown was named vice president of sales and marketing for The Broadmoor, Colorado Springs, Colorado. A 30-year veteran of the hospitality industry, Brown most recently was regional director of sales and marketing for KSL Resorts.

Suzette Deveau was named vice president of sales and marketing, the Americas, for Mandarin Oriental Hotel Group. She was director of sales and marketing for Mandarin Oriental, Geneva.

Montauk Yacht Club Resort & Marina in Montauk, New York, has named **Lynne Lulfs** as director of sales and marketing. She was regional director of catering and special events for six national restaurants within the Rosa Mexicano brand.

La Quinta Resort & Club, a Waldorf Astoria Resort in La Quinta, California, has appointed **Justin Ely** as director of sales. He formerly served as director of group sales for The Fairmont Newport Beach in California.

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

Julie Branstrom was named director of sales and marketing for Gateway Canyons Resort & Spa, Gateway, Colorado. She was executive director of sales and travel agencies at Devil's Thumb Ranch Resort & Spa, Tabernash, Colorado. *I&FMM*

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